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**THE MIDDLE CLASS IN
CONTEMPORARY URBAN CHINA:
CONSTRUCTION, PRACTICES AND
REPRESENTATIONS**

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Contents

Acknowledgments **1**

Tables and Figures **2**

Introduction **3**

Chapter I Locating class and habitus **9**

1.1 Locating class: The class narratives **10**

1.1.1 Definition **10**

1.1.2 The grand narratives of class: Marxian, Weberian, and the tripartite idea of class **13**

1.1.3 The class narrative dismantled **19**

1.1.4 New Narratives about class **22**

1.2 Locating habitus: Pierre Bourdieu's theory of class **30**

1.2.1 Locating the Bourdieusian narrative: Beyond the reconstruction of class **32**

1.2.2 Bourdieu and the class positions **35**

Chapter II The intellectual debate **64**

2.1 The re-configuration concept: The global significance of middle class's emergence in China studies **66**

2.1.1 The initial wave: from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s **68**

2.1.2 The construction wave: from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s **71**

2.1.3 The 're-configurational' wave: from the mid-2000s to the present **79**

2.2 Definitions and composition of the Chinese middle class **83**

2.2.1 Urbanization, economic and income growth **84**

2.2.2 Higher education **91**

2.3 A hidden agenda: The perspectives of the Chinese middle class **95**

Chapter III Class and discourse construction **102**

3.1 The significance of the official discourse of the middle class **104**

3.2 General ideological framework of class in Maoist China **106**

3.2.1 Historical background: The middle class before 1949 **107**

3.2.2 A middle class in Maoist China **110**

3.3 Class in post-Maoist China: The official discursive space of the middle class **116**

3.3.1 Discourse formulation, 1978-2000 **116**

3.3.2 Discourse presentation: The Three Represents Theory, 2000-2001 **129**

3.3.3 Discourse development: The *Xiaokang* Society and the new patriots, 2001-2004 **133**

3.3.4 Discourse aspiration: The Harmonious Society, 2004-2013 **141**

3.3.5 Discourse consolidation: The Chinese Dream, 2013- **147**

3.4 A discourse construction based on digital media report: *Renmin Wang* (RW) **151**

3.4.1 The pan-national narrative of double mobility: the rise of the Chinese Dream and the decline of the American Dream **152**

3.4.2 Anxiety, unspeakable pain, and populism **155**

3.4.3 What should be done? Problems, responsibilities and solutions **159**

Chapter IV Social practices and representations of urban middle class. A case study of Beijing 163

4.1 The social space of mobility **164**

4.1.1 The concept of the “new middle class” in the social space of the PRC **165**

4.1.2 Class reproduction: Converting capitals in post-Maoist China **167**

4.1.3 Geographic mobility: Exploring trajectories in Beijing **176**

4.2 The social space of lifestyles **178**

4.2.1 Consumption practices **179**

4.2.2 Friendship patterns **187**

4.2.3 Family relationships **195**

4.2.4 Representations from the centre: the subjective social status and the narratives about inequality **205**

4.2.5 Happiness and social success **223**

4.2.6 Celebrities: the new prophets of capital **237**

4.3 The social space of gender **247**

4.3.1 Domestic household and ‘*haoyong* femininity’ **250**

4.3.2 Loving relationships: romantic love and marketization **258**

4.4 The social space of the community **269**

4.4.1 Spatializing the concept of middle class **272**

4.4.2 Middle-class participation in the community **278**

4.4.3 Homeowner activism **286**

Conclusions 295

Appendix I 310

Appendix II 312

Bibliography 349

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Tables and Figures

Figures

- 2.1 GDP and family income in the PRC, 1978-2017 **85**
- 2.2 Urbanization of the PRC, 1978-2017 **88**
- 2.3 Poverty population and Gini coefficient of the PRC, 1978-2017 **89**
- 2.4 Number of college students in the PRC, 1978-2017 **91**
- 3.1 Distribution of news reporting on middle class (MC) in *RW* by year, 2000-2015 **155**
- 3.2 *Xinyongka touzhi xiaofei* [Credit cards use overdraft to consume] **158**

Tables

- 2.1 Size, wealth and definition of the PRC's middle class, 2008-2018 **99**
- 3.1 Presence of middle classes' (MC) nationality in news reporting, 2000-2015 **153**
- 3.2 The dominant policy position in articles on the Chinese middle class **156**
- 3.3 Actors quoted and actors mentioned **157**
- 3.4 Reported problems of China's middle class (MC) in pro-public and balanced articles **159**
- 3.5 Reported solutions of middle class's (MC) problems in pro-public and balanced articles **160**
- 4.1 Social origin and occupational activity **169**
- 4.2 PRC Class composition of workforce (percentage), 1952-2006 **169**
- 4.3 Occupational activity **171**
- 4.4 Inequality adjusted Human Development Indicator (HDI rank) **206**

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, class has been an ongoing process of re-configuration of the unequal distribution of material, cultural, social and symbolic rewards in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The transformation of material, cultural and symbolic stratification and their empirical interconnections have their origins in China's marketization reform since the 1990s, a shift that "is captured by the move" (Western and Baxter 2001: 1) from a modern industrial society to a post-industrial society that is currently being transformed. A higher standard of living, the dramatic economic growth, globalization, a fast-growing consumption and the first manifestations of new social representations have led to significant social change that provides a unique opportunity to investigate and discuss the emergence and development of cultural, social and economic stratification in contemporary China.

This study examines the formation of the urban middle class, with a particular focus on the social construction of identity by analysing social practices and representations in contemporary urban China. Through case studies of middle-class professionals residing in Beijing, this thesis consists of an empirical analysis of the PRC's emerging middle-class lifestyle and the social distinctions upon which it is built within urban middle incomers within a theoretical context associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Here, lifestyle is understood as a set of social practices and/or representations specific to a social group (Mauger, in Rocca 2017: 118). It is through social practices and representations that social distinctions are performed and the way in which individuals have become connected and thus integrated into social groupings as much as through their capacity for production.

Class identity and lifestyle within the middle class can be considered to relate both to experiences associated with cultural consumption and leisure (culture) and to experiences related to productive activity (economy) in the post-industrial societies. The renewed interest in the lifestyle of the middle classes may be attributable in part to the increasing influence of the work of Pierre Bourdieu in Anglo-American sociology and cultural anthropology as well as burgeoning literature on consumers and consumption in recent decades (Hanser 2012: 293). For Bourdieu, class is a social group defined relationally in a multidimensionally "system of coordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent variables" based on the "greatest possible homogeneity" in terms of possession, utilization of various capitals such as economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital, "dispositions and interests, and thus of producing practices and representations of a similar kind," including those principles "imposed by the ordinary experience of occupational, communal and local divisions and rivalries" that organize and create a self-recognized, mobilized social group (Bourdieu 1984: 4-5, 1987: 7).

Therefore, “classes can be characterize in a certain way as sets of agents who, by virtue of the fact that they occupy similar positions in social space (that is, in the distribution of powers), are subject to similar conditions of existence and conditioning factors, and as a result, are endowed with similar dispositions which prompt them to develop similar practices.” However, Bourdieu adds that class, “be it social, sexual, ethnic, or otherwise” only “exists when there are agents capable of imposing themselves, as authorized to speak and to act officially in its place and in its name, upon those who, by recognizing themselves in these plenipotentiaries, by recognizing them as endowed with full power to speak and act in their name, recognize themselves as members of the class, and in doing so, confer upon it the only form of existence a group can possess” (Bourdieu 1987: 6, 15). As “[t]he new logic of the economy rejects the ascetic ethic of production and accumulation ... in favour of a hedonistic morality of consumption, based on credit, spending and enjoyment,” this new logic “demands a social world which judges people by their capacity for consumption, their ‘standard of living’, their lifestyle, as much as by their capacity for production” (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]: 310-311). As a result, Bourdieu draws basic distinctions between social groups in terms of taste, lifestyle and consumption, and production. Therefore, this pattern of social stratification is based on both productive activity and lifestyle practices and representations.

In the case of post-Mao China, there has been a growing literature on various aspects of the emergence of the Chinese middle class over the past two decades. Despite many studies have looked at the definition of class in general, and the middle class, in particular, by using both objective and subjective criteria, disagreements and discussions have arose regarding the composition and identification of the Chinese middle class, the numbers and proportion of this group and what role it plays in shaping economic growth, social structure and political change (Chapter II, Chapter IV). While bearing this complexity in mind, this study contributes to the interpretation of this phenomenon by investigating the social construction of identity with a certain lifestyle of middle incomers in urban China within a theoretical context associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu and discourse construction.

The core argument of this research is that relations among middle incomer dwellers are understood and enacted through a framework of middle-class lifestyles distinctions—in the form of consumption practices most of the time—that serves to interpret and produce inequality in relation to low-status and low-income groups—what Pierre Bourdieu calls “distinction” (Hanser 2008: 3; Tang 2018a: 94). Therefore, the analysis presented in this doctoral thesis does not aim to provide a definition of the Chinese middle class, rather it attempts to indicate aspects that help understanding of, on the one hand, the dimensions in which middle-class lifestyles distinctions produce inequality and legitimate the transfer of privilege and disadvantage, and, on the other, “the role that the Chinese middle class plays in public debate” in the PRC (Rocca 2017: 3). Indeed, in line with Rocca’s (2017) perspective, the approach adopted here “is very different from that used by Western and Chinese scholars who rely on a normative framework—that is, they start by providing a more or less ‘objective’ definition of the term, which they establish a norm, then try to find manifestations of this concept in Chinese society” (Rocca 2017: 3). Instead, we consider class as a continual construction, as “a flame whose edges are in constant movement, oscillating around a line or surface” (Bourdieu 1987: 13). This “mobilized or ‘mobilizable’” construction is what we call *re-configurational process*—the deconstructive and reconstructive¹ dynamic of which is

¹ As Rocca (2017) suggests, the only way to avoid the contradiction based on the fact that “the boundaries of the middle class are impossible to delineate” despite “so many people claim or expect to

explained in Chapter II, Chapter III, Chapter IV and, by way of conclusion, in the last section of this thesis (Conclusions).

Following these assumptions and, in order to reach the aim of this study —that is, to understand the social construction of lifestyles within the middle-class groups in urban China today— the specific objectives formulated are as follows:

- a) To provide an overview of the literature on class.
- b) To do a critical review of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of class.
- c) To define the space in which the cluster of intellectual narratives about the Chinese middle class are generated in China studies.
- d) To review pertinent literature on the debate concerning the standard criteria for defining the Chinese middle class.
- e) To elucidate middle class as a *well-founded historical artefact*² before and after the establishment of the PRC in 1949.
- f) To examine in detail the construction and development of the official discourse of the Chinese middle class through the content of articles on middle class published on *Renmin Wang* during the period 2000-2015.
- g) To analyse in-depth the ethnographic work conducted in Beijing between 2017 and 2018.
- h) To formulate a critical synopsis of the main features on which the social construction of identity within the Chinese middle class is based within a theoretical context associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

The leading hypothesis proposed by this research project is that the conceptualization of the “Chinese middle class” as a social identity (theoretical class or “class on paper”) can be considered to relate both to a set of social practices and representations associated with leisure and cultural consumption, and to experiences related to productive activity. Furthermore, “a theoretical class, or a ‘class on paper’, might be considered as a probable real class, or as the probability of a real class, whose constituents are likely to be brought closer and mobilized (but are not actually mobilized) on the basis of their similarities (of interest and dispositions)” (Bourdieu 1987: 7). On that basis, the members of the Chinese middle class, therefore, would not only be inclined to develop a unitary lifestyle, a set of dispositions and a tacit sense of their place in the world —or “class unconsciousness” that Bourdieu calls “the sense of distinction”—, but also Chinese middle-class individuals would be “placed in homogeneous conditions of existence imposing homogeneous conditionings and producing homogeneous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices,” and consequently, “a class habitus (and, in particular, systems of classificatory schemes)” (Bourdieu 1984: 101).

Following these assumptions, eight complementary hypotheses can be derived:

be members of the middle class or refer to this notion of the middle class proves that the group does exist,” is “to acknowledge that the group exists but it is impossible to define” (Boltanski 1987 [1982]: 28, in Rocca 2017: 10).

² Thompson 1980 [1963]; Boltanski 1987 [1982], in Bourdieu 1987:8-9.

(h1) The importance of class analysis as a means of understanding social change and social inequalities in contemporary societies.

(h2) The work of Pierre Bourdieu has important implications for the comprehension of class and social life today.

(h3) The current academic categorization of the 'Chinese middle class' reflects the diversity of thought in China studies.

(h4) The socio-political context and contestation have added a complex ideological dimension to the description of social groupings and structures in the PRC (Guo 2008; Rocca 2017).

(h5) Class in China is best understood in terms of "the intergenerational transfer of privilege and disadvantage" since the early twentieth century (Goodman 2014).

(h6) The *Renmin Wang*, as the digital version of *Renmin Ribao* —the mouthpiece of Central Committee of the CCP— has become a categorical example of the construction and development of the official discourse of the Chinese middle class in the 21st century.

(h7) Using an ethnographic analysis of semi-structured interviews with Beijing's middle incomers in 2017-2018, we hypothesize that the conceptualization of the middle class in contemporary China can be considered to relate not only to experiences associated with productive activity, but also, increasingly, to experiences related to social practices and representations.

(h8) By formulating a critical synopsis of the main features on which the social construction of identity within the Chinese middle class is based we can demonstrate together the essential elements of Bourdieu's conceptualization of social class as well as profile its discursive spaces and social dynamics.

In line with our goals and hypotheses of approaching class location in general and specifically, and from an inter and transdisciplinary perspective —that is, bringing together of separate disciplines such as sociology, ethnography, historiography, and so on, a common theme to create a holistic approach—, our study will unfold: (1) within a theoretical context associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu in general and the concepts of social space, capital, *habitus*, field, social structure and symbolic power in his class theory in particular, and (2) following a quantitative and qualitative methodology made up of a theoretical and descriptive approach (Chapter I, II and III) on the one hand, and an empirical analysis of discourse construction (Chapter III) and of case studies in Beijing (Chapter IV) on the other.

I spent 16 months in Beijing where I used three main methods to build up a picture of middle-class individuals' social identity: conducting semi-structure interviews, participant observation, and collecting relevant media publications and articles. Research for this project has been undertaken supported by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, through the Confucius China Studies Program (*Kongzi xin hanxue jihua*) at Renmin University of China between September 2017 and December 2018. As my approach was primarily ethnographically framed, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter III and IV, I undertook 20 semi-structured interviews with different middle-class individuals (professional and technical staff, white collar workers, professors, professionals, managerial staff and entrepreneurs) (see Appendix 1), participant observation in before turning to analyse the official documents and media articles I gathered during my time in Beijing. Since the purpose of this investigation is not to provide a definition of the middle class, and in order to ensure comparability,

informants were considered middle class if they fulfilled three objective criteria: educational qualifications—including college, undergraduate, and above—and age range (between 25-65 years old). Finally occupation activity, according to Bourdieu's (1984) construction of occupational division of labour—namely the *class structure* or *system*—, and the model of identification of middle class will also be considered: the model of the ten-groups typology of contemporary China's class structure by occupation, developed by Lu Xueyi (2002: 44) and his colleagues at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Institute of Sociology, and which is drawn from the work of Giddens (1973) and Wright (1997).

Most of my participant observation and conversations with informants came from two major and very rich sources: working with colleagues in their thirties and forties as a visiting doctoral student at Renmin University of China, and spending leisure with friends in their twenties and thirties, and occasionally colleagues, shopping in malls of Haidian, eating out in traditional restaurants and in the increasing number of fashionable themed or 'ethnic' and international cuisine restaurants, working out in a well-appointed 'middle-class' gym in Sanlitun and outdoor tennis courts in Chaoyang. Further, I undertook other kind of participant observation by visiting 'middle-class' coffee shops in business districts, 798 Art Zone and Wangfujing, gated communities areas all over Beijing, art galleries, concert halls (European classical music, traditional Chinese operas) such as the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA), and alternative music venues in Gulou. In adopting this approach, I drew on Derek Hird's instructive ethnographic study of white collar men and masculinities in contemporary urban China, in which he contends that "such approach requires analysis both of 'discursive trends' and 'real life' experiences" (Hird 2009:11).

In addition, the investigation conducted on the amendments to the 1982 Constitution of the PRC and the speeches about the middle class of the leaders of the Party-state in Chapter III will be complemented with a journalistic and conceptual analysis of the Chinese middle class, a phenomenon that is receiving increasing attention, not only by the media and academics, but also by the main international economic actors. The data from the website of *Renmin Wang*, 2000-2015, are used to provide a final sample of 427 articles in Chinese in order to analyse discourse construction in digital media (see Appendix II). As for the media materials, I have taken them as discursive expressions of the CCP's conceptualization of middle class considering their ideological dimension, their journalistic representation and the voices or actors quoted.

Therefore, this project contributes new perspectives to the debate about class in the PRC and to explain the social construction of the Chinese middle class by examining the intellectual debate about class in the PRC, the state-sponsored discourse of the middle class, and individuals' perceptions of life trajectories—the voice of the protagonists—, complemented all this with participant and non-participant observation. As a result, the methodological combination employed in this investigation provides a rich account of the Chinese middle class as a social phenomenon being studied, shows the theoretical interests and concerns of the project, and reflects the Bourdieusian conceptualization of society, using both individuals' perceptions of life trajectories and the (discursive and non-discursive) structures on which their experiences were based as filters for understanding the 'logic of practice' of a complex "relationship between external constraints which leave a very variable margin for choice, and dispositions which are the product of economic and social processes" (Bourdieu 1990b: 50, in Costa and Murphy 2015: 5) between the Party and the urban population.

Framed by this theoretical and methodological design, our analysis of the construction of the Chinese middle class, divided into four chapters, unfolds, *grosso modo*, from the general to the specific. Chapter I —“Locating class and habitus”— provides an overview of the more pertinent work on the class narratives in contemporary social theory by delimiting the main debates concerning the definition of the concept of class, the “death of class”, the feminist critiques and the cultural turn; and describes Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of class, and comment upon its relevance to this thesis. Chapter II —“The intellectual debate”— analyses the literature on Chinese middle class, reviews contemporary work in this subject by commenting upon its relevance to this research, and identifies the origin and influence of the emerging narratives about the Chinese middle class in the public debate and the intellectual spheres in which they are trying to act. Chapter III —“Class and discourse construction”— investigates the Chinese middle class as a “historical artefact” before and after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, and examines the presence of a state-sponsored discourse of the middle class through the amendments to the current PRC Constitution adopted in 1982, the main texts and speeches of the Party-state leaders and the content of articles on middle class published between 2000-2015 on *Renmin Wang* (人民网), the digital version of the newspaper *Renmin Ribao* (人民日报), considered the mouthpiece of Central Committee of the CCP. Chapter IV, “Social practices and representations of urban middle class. A case study of Beijing,” as the final approach on the methodological plane, analyses in detail the content of semi-structured interviews with members of the Chinese middle-class groups conducted in Beijing during the years 2017 and 2018. The epilogue, beyond drawing certain general conclusions from this investigation in the form of observations, situates our study on the formation of the Chinese middle class in the context of the recent call for the construction of the “Chinese Dream” by the Chinese Party-state, and provides a synopsis of the material, cultural, symbolic and social features of the social construction of identity in contemporary China.

The Chinese middle class is moving, as “a flame whose edges are in constant movement,” beyond their domestic “line or surface” to engage globally for business, distinction and leisure in new and different ways, as this thesis demonstrates. The speed of change and the re-configuration of new practices and representations in the PRC remains rapid and, at times, sporadic, making change difficult to “capture by the move.” As such, the lifestyle of the Chinese middle class outlined is the lifestyle, sporadic or stable, by which these social groups assert, legitimize and attempt to make a clear distinction of their positions in social space, and they define the positions of these social groups in the global economy in constant movement.

CHAPTER I

LOCATING CLASS AND HABITUS

The purpose of the starting chapter of this thesis aims to fulfil the first two objectives of the investigation. That is, (a) to provide an overview of the literature on class; and (b) to describe Pierre Bourdieu's theory of class. Indeed, this chapter aims to provide a general intellectual framework of the more pertinent work on the class narratives in contemporary class analysis by delimiting the main debates concerning the definition of the concept of class, the "death of class", the feminist critiques and the cultural turn. This chapter can then confidently proceed to the development of these two research objectives by acting on the principles of the hypothesis (h1) and (h2), development that we stated in the Introduction. Thus, hypothesis (h1) highlights the importance of class analysis as a means of understanding social change and social inequalities today; and hypothesis (h2) states that the work of Pierre Bourdieu has important implications for the understanding of class and social life in contemporary societies. Here the intention is not to claim or provide this study as a contribution to those debates as such but rather to contextualize and review contemporary work in this field and comment upon its relevance to this thesis.

There exists a wide belief that all complex societies are characterized, to varying extents, by the unequal distribution of material, cultural and symbolic rewards (Crompton 1998). Today, our understanding of these customary inequalities in distribution, and the ideas which underpinned them is invariably ideological, but ideological meanings that we derive from them vary greatly, as Dworkin (2007) suggests. Clearly, one could not hope to offer a definitive examination of this considerable variety of insights and different theories and ideological perspectives along a trajectory of the changing nature of class structure. Recent authoritative work that reconsiders the many competing claims has been completed by a number of scholars, notably Crompton (2008), Wright (2015) and Holgersson (2017). By way of an introduction to our research project, this chapter follows the primary claims of the classical social and economic theories, in particular Marxian and Weberian, and focus on how Pierre Bourdieu's metaphorical *reconstruction* of the concept of class integrates both classical and intersectional claims—that is, past and future—, by looking at his reformulation of class differences and their social and cultural meanings. We believe this would not only provide us with an initial general approach to the foundations of Bourdieu's class theory, but also allow us to capture the transformations of the class structure in the PRC, from the Mao-dominated years of China's politics to the present, and in addition to the trends in class inequality, class consciousness and politics of the emerging urban middle class.

In recent times, there is hardly any review of the literature on class that does not in some way linked to the writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Max Weber (1864-1920). The importance of Karl Marx's theory of class is not only because it was one of the most important analysis of class in both theoretical and applied sociology, but also because his "intellectual influence on subsequent theories of class and to its political influence on the revolutionary direction" taken by certain groups and societies, such as the PRC, "inspired by his writing as a whole, and by his unfinished theory of class in particular" (Edgell 1993: 2). Furthermore, Marx, together with Max Weber, constitute the two towering influences on Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) conceptualization and theorization of class. Not surprisingly, García Canclini defined Bourdieu as a "Weberian Marxist" thinker (García Canclini 1990: 47). However, despite the influence of both Marx's and Weber's theoretical work, Bourdieu also borrowed, and later reconstructed, as needed from the (whole) sociological canon by questioning whether the grand narratives of class really can explain modern society. Therefore, in this chapter the intention is to review contemporary work on class analysis and comment upon its relevance to this project following the basic organisational structure developed by Ulrika Holgersson in *Class* (2017), which comprises three parts: a) Construction: the grand narrative of class, b) Deconstruction: the class narrative dismantled, and c) Reconstruction: new narratives about class such as Bourdieusian.

Having now set forth these brief considerations on the scope of class analysis, we will attempt further on to contextualize class contemporaneously, which necessarily implies discussing the general intellectual framework of class narratives in detail by showing the way in which the grand narratives of class were constructed and focusing on the fundamentals of Marx's and Weber's theories, and how they have since evolved. The result is a critical examination of the dual development of the class narrative since the end of the Second World War (1939-1945) by discussing the attempts to dismantle the class analysis (funeral narratives of class), the influence of the feminist criticism of the concept of class, the question of the cultural turn and the reconstruction narratives emerged after the "Golden Age" of welfare states class structures were changed by, as Esping-Andersen (1999: 25) notices, the de-industrializing economy under advanced capitalism to present. Finally, Chapter I also considers the theory of class of Bourdieu as both past and future, by looking at his reformulation and integration of class differences and their social and cultural meanings. Bourdieu's theory of class—in particular, his capital metaphor, theory of social space and notion of *habitus*—offers an extremely useful tool in studying how class is fashioned beyond the dual nature of class established by the grand narratives. While debates in social theory and revision of contemporary class narratives are addressed in the following sections, Bourdieu's theory of class is referred to further on in this chapter.

1.1 LOCATING CLASS: THE CLASS NARRATIVES

1.1.1 Definition

First, we must admit that it is not an easy task to evaluate the boundaries of a concept associated to the Latin word *classis* (pl. *classes*)³ that has accumulated polysemies and

³ The origin of the word "class" is multiple. Partly a borrowing from French (*classe*). Partly a borrowing from Latin (*classis*). According to *Oxford English Dictionary online* (2019), the meaning borrowed from

different interpretations from many diverse areas. However, in this research, class will be discussed as a peculiarly contemporary phenomenon. Given the diversity of descriptive and explanatory tasks within which the *word* class has appeared since Marx's theory of class, "there is a marked lack of precision or agreement as to the definition and meaning of class" (Crompton 1998: 9). In purely general terms, class can be understood as "a social relation constituted dialogically and relationally, cast within the shadow of structures and processes which create and reinforce inequalities" (Kirk 2007: 5).

In other words, class is a hierarchy which stratifies members on the basis of power, esteem and prestige (Nunlee 2017: 3). Class here is more than the unequal distribution of wealth, as Sayer insists, "class matters to us not only because of differences in material wealth and economic security, but also because it affects our access to things, relationships, experiences and practices which we have reason to value, and hence of chances of living a fulfilling life" (2005: 1). As a result, what is understood as class refers not only to fragmented hierarchies (beyond the workplace), but also to the understanding of heterogeneous realities; to occupational classifications, social identities, political ideologies, categorizations by income level, social behaviour, and so on.

In this respect, in *Class and Stratification* (1998; 2008 [1993]), Rosemary Crompton states that the term class "has not just been used to describe levels of material inequalities, social prestige, or legal or traditional rankings" (1998: 11). She attempts to explore potentially —not hierarchically— the contemporary "systematic structure of inequality" that the term class as a "major organizing concept" implies by summarizing all these meanings of class. In Chapter I, the generic notion of class is used in accordance with Crompton's (1998: 11) three different meanings, that is:

1. 'Class' as prestige, status, culture or 'lifestyles'
2. 'Class' as structured inequality (related to the possession of economic and power resources).
3. 'Classes' as actual or potential social and political actors.

Middle French, or French *classe* (class) is a "division of the Roman people on the basis of property (α1359 in a translation of Livy), group of students or pupils who are taught together (1549), naval force, fleet (1559), lesson (1611; compare the earlier sense 'classroom' (1584)) and its etymon classical Latin *classis* class or division of the Roman people on the basis of property, body of citizens summoned for military service, naval force, fleet, division or category, division of pupils, band, group, squad, in scientific Latin also taxonomic category (1758 (in Linnæus) or earlier), of unknown origin, perhaps an Etruscan loanword." In the sense of social distinction, supposedly Servius Tullius —(fourished 578-535 BC), traditionally the sixth king of Rome, who is credited with the Servian Constitution)— replaced "the old division into clans by introducing a new system based on property ownership, including the organization of military service, taxation, and voting rights" (Calvert 1982: 40). "The word 'class' entered the English language during the time of the Commonwealth and under the rule of Cromwell that it was first recorded by Thomas Blount (1618-79)" (Calvert 1982: 12). Class appeared in 1656 in the dictionary *Glossographia* compiled by Blount who gave the following definition: "'Classe' (*classis*) a ship, or Navy, an order or distribution of people according to their several Degrees. In Schools, (wherein this word is most used) a Form or Lecture restrained to a certain company of Scholars'" (Calvert 1982: 12). In short, the meaning of class in both Roman and the dictionary *Glossographia* served the eminently functional purpose of helping the rulers of the day categorize the population so as to determine their rights and obligations (Atkinson 2015: 4). Further, this is the conception of class recognizable today —class as a way to classify and "divide people, to put them into groups ranked by age, economic status, and the like" (Holgersson 2017: 22).

We will attempt further on to contextualize Crompton's conceptual trinity, which necessarily implies introducing the general discussions and the main intellectual frameworks on class analysis in Social Sciences. The first common use of the 'class' according to Crompton's conceptualization connotes class-differentiated lifestyles and tastes related to the social status, esteem and respect. In this sense, lifestyle can be understood as a "distinctive mode of existence that is accomplished by persons and groups through socially sanctioned and culturally intelligible patterns of action" (Lutzenhiser and Gossard 2000: 215). There is, however, another term mentioned here: 'status'. As such, status is the most important form of social division alongside class identified by Weber. This concept refers "to the possession of different levels of prestige, honour or social esteem by groups in society, and this also confers power and life chances" (Atkinson 2015: 45). And "when occupations are ranked according to their perceived levels of prestige or social standing, these are described as status scales" (Crompton 1998: 11). As Giddens (1973: 43-4) has distinguished, "whereas class expresses relationships involved in production, status groups express those involved in consumption, in the form of specific 'styles of life'," or by culture rather than economics.

However, although the technical use of status in modern sociology derives more specifically from the work of Max Weber, his definition of class is based on the economy and market conception —that is, Crompton's second definition. From this, the main criteria for distinguishing status groups, according to Atkinson, "are (1) the possession of a common lifestyle —i.e. monopolization of certain practices and symbolic goods, from types of clothes or food to specific musical instruments— and (2) a degree of social closure —i.e., mixing and marrying only with those with the same lifestyle" (2015: 45). Whereas Weber saw the feudal estates, "religious groups, occupational groups, ethnic groups and castes as the main examples of his own day," Pakulski and Waters (1996) have added that today's subcultures oriented around specific forms of music and ways of dressing" (punks, skaters, Goths, Traps, hipsters, cosplayers and so on) "can also be considered status groups." As a result, Atkinson also adds, "class and status distinctions do, however, interact and can even merge" causing that social classes can become status groups, "so that the members of the working class could be discriminated against simply because they are recognized as belonging to the working class" (2015: 45). This differentiation is key to understanding the 'cultural turn' and Bourdieu's theory of class, which are analysed in this chapter.

As we have seen, a second common criteria for classification in contemporary societies pointed out by Rosemary Crompton (1998) is occupation and income. This second use of the class concept, she argues, acts "as a general description of structures of material inequality, reflected in differential access to economic and power resources." These structures of material inequality "could be the ownership of capital or productive resources, skills and qualifications, networks of contacts, etc." Consequently, "unequally rewarded groups are often described as classes" (1998: 11). Thus, while the first and the second points categorize according to *descriptions* of society —status and finances—, in point 3 those parts or elements so described should also be considered *social forces* that alter and control the direction of history (Crompton 1998: 11, 2008: 15-16). Indeed, the term 'class' has also been identified "as actual or potential social forces, or social actors, which have the capacity to transform society ... thus, 'class' is also a term with significant political overtones" (Crompton 1998: 11-12). The political history of the PRC is given as an illustrative example of this (see Chapter III).

Although the work on class of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) might be mostly concerned with the first of Crompton's meanings of class, and partly consistent with the second criteria, he "re-floats the traditional split on class" (Inda and Duek 2005: 5) by deepening the distinction "between a class 'in itself' and a class 'for itself' —that is, between a class which existed as a historical reality, on the one hand, and a class which had acquired a consciousness of its identity and capacity to act, on the other" (Crompton 1998: 13). In other words, class in the objective sense or 'class in itself' —the economic description of class, or what Marx calls *Klasse an Sich*, and Crompton's second definition—, and subjective, sociological, consciousness-made class or 'class for itself'⁴ —Crompton's third point, or *Klasse für Sich* that are well-defined social groups which in a specific social context that, Lindensjö points, "act in a politically and ideologically uniform manner" (Marx and Engels 2004 [1848]; Marx 2008 [1847]: 189; Lindensjö 1968: 25). In so doing, Bourdieu approaches to a Marxian tendency "over politicizing" to which the social class exist effectively only on the political level —where it would have acquired an own class consciousness (Inda and Duek 2005: 5). Certainly, he understands class as a "transhistorical" phenomenon defined by all the meanings abovementioned and "by its place in a metatheoretical account of the full range of social life in any society" (Brubaker 2004: 46).

After having defined the concept of class and having established the theoretical concerns of this work, we shall now examine some of the chief narratives in the genesis and evolution of contemporary concept of class and analyse the fundamental contributions of their thinkers. In this section we shall look at the contributions of the grand narratives of class, the genesis and evolution of the tripartite idea of class (and middle class), the dismantling narratives, and a possible reconstruction of class through new narratives.

1.1.2 The grand narratives of class: Marxian, Weberian, and the tripartite idea of class

The central idea in Marxism tradition is defining the concept of class in terms of economic relations and processes of exploitation. In the course of his life Marx write of class frequently, but he does "not only failed to elucidate systematically his use of the concept of class and related concepts such as ruling class [or middle class], he used them inconsistently" (Edgell 1993: 2). This may be the reason why much of the rhetoric of class analysis, especially in the Marxist tradition characterizes class relations in fairly stark, simplified, polarized terms" (Wright 2005: 12). In the case of the middle classes, the maturation of capitalism, on the one hand, is portrayed as a process of "mechanical subsumption of all intermediate grouping into a growing and increasingly homogeneous and militant working class" (Bendix and Lipset 1966;

⁴ As Katz highlights, "among the less systematic statements on class, two have served to focus one of the central controversies regarding Marx's theory of class. The debate turns on whether Marx distinguished a "class-in-itself" from a "class-for-itself," establishing an austere structural definition of class as an objective relations to the means of production (in-itself) independent of any political or cultural expression of class identity (for-itself)" (Katz 1992: 50). Nowadays, however, as "changes in the structure of work as employment, as well as in the kinds of persons engaged in it," have produced that the economy and culture were gradually coming to be structure around consumption rather than production (Crompton 1998: 19-20; Saunders 1987; Waters 1996; Pakulski and Waters 1996) and "waged work was of dwindling importance" (Crompton 1998: 16) for class identity. For instance, in the view of Rocca (2017: 187), property is a central element of China's middle class identity, that is why he uses the notion of "the emergence of Homeowners' Identity" to refer to the homeowners' movements as a phenomenon that can contribute to a change in relations with power holders in contemporary China.

Dahrendorf 1972 [1957]; Aaron 1964: 46, in Wacquant 1991: 40). And class struggles, on the other, “are portrayed as battles between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between lords and serfs, between slave masters and slaves” (Wright 2005: 12)⁵.

For Marx, class is “a multifaceted term that he used in its existing senses” as a “part of a much broader and more ambitious account of nothing less than the history of all human societies, with special reference to the most recent stage of economic development, namely industrial capitalism” (Holgersson 2017: 30; Edgell 1993: 2). In the event, Marx’s starting point on the definition of class was so favoured by Turgot and a group of French economists called the Physiocrats who, at the dawn of capitalism, “had already begun to use the label ‘class’ (or the French equivalent, *classe*) to denote positions in the production process rather than simply social standing” (Calvert 1982 67-8) or legal status as in former times, when each social agent contributed in their own to the whole of society. Subsequently, this idea of the functional division of classes denoted by their sources of income was espoused by the political economists, Adam Smith (1723-1790) and David Ricardo (1772-1823). As Calvert (1982) noted, the tripartite division of social classes was not invented by Marx. In the Preface of *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, published in 1817, Ricardo states that “the produce of the earth” is divided among three class of the community: “namely, the proprietor of the land, the owner of the stock or capital necessary for its cultivation, and the labourers by whose industry is cultivated” (Ricardo 1895 [1817]: 1).

This tripartite conceptualization gave, according to Smith, three ‘orders’ (or classes), the proprietors of land, labourers, and the proprietors of stock, or “those who live by rent ... those who live by wages ... those who live by profit” (Smith 2007 [1776]: 217; Lindensjö 1968: 21). As a result, Marx, by finally accepting Ricardo and Smith’s categorization of classes, not only dismissed “by implication the Hegelian view both of the unity of agricultural and industrial spheres and of the distinct role of the bureaucracy” (Calvert 1982: 67), but also stated that not even “the stratification of classes ... appear in its pure form” (Marx and Engels 2011 [1894], vol. III: 2205). The “continual tendency” of the capitalist mode of production “is more and more to divorce the means of production from labour, and more and more to concentrate the scattered means of production into large groups, thereby transforming labour into wage-labour and the means of production into capital” (Marx 2011 [1894], vol. III: 2205-6).

Thus, “[t]he first question to be answered is this: What constitutes a class?”⁶ and, as Marx states, “the reply to this follows naturally from the reply to another question, namely: What makes wage-labourers, capitalists, and landowners constitute the three great social classes?” (Marx 2011 [1864], vol. III: 2205-6). Taking into account the ideal status of class and, despite it

⁵ The concept of the origin and maintenance of class structures as the product of struggle between social groups was not original to Marx, Calvert (1982: 58) notes, “it too originated with the writers of the French Enlightenment” and the utopian socialist Henri de Saint-Simon. Indeed, the influence of Saint-Simon’s writings over Marx in his formative years was in some aspects almost as great as that of Hegel” (Gurvitch 1950: 568-80, in Giddens 2000 [1971]: 2).

⁶ Although Marx raised the question on class in the third volume of *Das Kapital*, he did not live to give an exhaustive answer to this issue (Calvert 1982: 11). Only in the third volume of *Das Kapital*, Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) published the unfinished fragments of Marx’s theory of class which he left at his death. And there, Marx wrote of three classes: “wage-labourers, capitalists and landowners” — “whose respective sources of income are wages, profit and groundrent” — “constitute then three big classes of modern society based upon the capitalist mode of production” (Marx 1962 [1894], vol. III: 862).

is fair to say that it is not always clear what exactly class *is* for Marx, the answer can be that class “is about capital accumulation and the worker’s alienation from what he produces, all because he loses control of the tools or machines he needs” (Holgersson 2017:31). Consequently, “Marxian tradition focus on the (petty) bourgeoisie’s varied degrees of proximities to the ‘means of production’, and consequently, their manifestations in social, economic, and political relations” (Ren 2013: 3). The idea of capital accumulation and class location based on ‘degrees of proximities’ to a certain capital accumulation will be further developed by Bourdieu. As it is analysed further on, the locations of the agents within Bourdieu’s social space are given by “the volume, composition and trajectory of capitals and properties the individual or group is in possession of, when compared with what other individuals or groups have” (Melldahl and Börjesson 2015: 135).

Marx’s social conception is an economics-based class distinction that distinguishes between capital accumulation —including the worker’s alienation from what he/she produces— and social actors such as the capitalists, the petty bourgeoisie and the wage labourers⁷. Indeed, in Marx’s theory of class, any and every economic distinction is at the same time a social distinction. It is for this reason that “capitalism is founded upon a class division.” As Giddens notes, “wages on the one side, and profits on the other, are determined' by the bitter struggle between capitalist and worker', a relation in which those who own capital are easily dominant” (Marx and Bottomore 1964: 69, in Giddens 1971: 10-11).

However, now the question is: ‘How does this capital and power come to be gathered in the hands of a small group of capitalists?’ And the reply to this, in Marxist terms, is the so-called theory of surplus value. Essentially, as Calvert (1982) notes, this is the question which had been asked and answered by Turgot in the mid-eighteenth century. Marx found in Turgot an endorsement of his own belief that the workers are only entitled to a fraction of the value in the form of salaries they produced while the capitalists pocketed the surplus value in the form of profits (1982: 18-25).

This economics-based distinction is a fundamental point of departure in Marx’s *materialist* epistemology. The basic principle of the human condition, according to Marx and Engels, “and therefore the driving force of human history, is not to be found in the realm of ideas, but the thoroughly practical business of working on nature and producing material goods” (1998 [1845]). Indeed, what determines the consciousness of individuals and “the general process of social, political and intellectual life” is “the mode of production of material life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (Marx 2011 [1859]: 11-12).

In addition to creating an inherently unstable economy theorization of industrial capitalism, “Marx’s theory of class was part of a much broader and more ambitious account, in collaboration with Engels, of nothing less than the history of all human societies:” *historical materialism* (Edgell 1993: 2). That is why, for Marx, classes are “the fundamental organizational structures of society”, because they “are the basic actors upon this historical

⁷ Ren notes that “the bourgeoisie becomes conservative and maintains an ideology of the capitalist social order ... [by controlling] the means of production and the ideological apparatuses of the capitalist state, the proletariat are waged workers who have no other means of livelihood; they can only sell their labour power to property owners” (2013: 3).

stage, and the transfer of power from one class to the next forms the process by which, in his view, human society has evolved from one phase to the next" (Calvert 1982: 11, 65). Due to different societies were dominated by different classes around the world, conflict arose between them whenever a social system is on the brink of displacing another.

Whereas Marxian conceptualization understands class as class struggle in the Hegelian sense, Weber's treatment of class, which forms their generative matrix is, "if anything, even more diverse than Marxist ones" due to "its celebrated multidimensionality" (Wacquant 1991: 47). It is worth noting that the Weberian intellectual tradition does not represent a return to an absolute idealistic notion of history by inverting the base-and-superstructure metaphor again, just as Marx did with Hegel's idealistic categorization, or considering the spiritual as an entity ruling the material (Turner 1991 [1948]: *xxi-xxii*). On the contrary, Weberian tradition associates class with "the economic life chances of people, more specifically around the character of the employment relations available within labour markets and work organizations" (Wright 2005: 3). Although class is also determined by other potential factors, "the market is the major determinant of life chances" (Breen 2005: 32), class relations and class situation. In fact, Weber mostly defines class in terms of the differential access to market rewards" (Burriss 1987) by eliminating Marx's reductionism.

For instance, Weber understands the middle class as "a group of people "who have all sorts of property, or of marketable abilities through training, who are in a position to draw their support from these sources"" (Weber 1947: 425, in Ren 2013: 4). They share a common life chances which are distributed by the market according to the resources that individuals bring to it —such as property ownership, particular skills and other assets. Hence, for Weber, "class situation is identified with market situation" because "all these assets only have value in the context of a market" (Breen 2005: 32). Contrary to Marx, who admitted the existence of other historical classes that would eventually become "two inextricably linked and conflicting classes" in any mode of (capitalist) production, for Weber "there can be multiple classes in one society defined in relation to a whole range of scarce resources" (Atkinson 2015: 42) such as "the relative control over goods and skills and from their income-producing uses" (Weber 1978 [1922]: 302). In fact, beyond Marxian focus on class antagonism and struggle, Weber is primarily concerned with class as a relation or situation in terms of capitalist bureaucracy and social organization.

By doing that, Weber offers a more explicit definitions and systematic theory of class than did Marx despite the problem of class plays a relatively peripheral role in Weber's work (Wright 2015: 22). Hence, Weber understands class as "all persons in the same class situation" (Weber 1978 [1922]: 302). Thus

In our terminology, "classes" are not communities; they merely represent possible, and frequent, bases for social action. We may speak of a "class" when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labour markets. This is "class situation."

(Weber 1978 [1922]: 927)

Although potentially, there could be any number of class positions, Weber singles out just three types: a) a ‘*property class*’ primarily determined by property differences; b) a ‘*commercial class*’ determined by the marketability of goods and services; and c) a ‘*social class*’ that makes up the totality of those class situations within which individual and generational mobility is easy and typical (1978 [1922]: 302). Both property classes and commercial classes can be “divided further into a number of privileged and non-privileged classes, with the middle classes in between” (Weber 1978 [1922]). That is why, for Weber, social classes are formed not simply on the basis of the workings of the market: other factors intervene, in particular “individual and generational mobility” (Breen 2005: 42). Moreover, Weber does not, like Marx, determine class as an inevitable product of history. For Weber, history is selectively *constructed* by the influence of a multitude of interacting heuristic factors in his view, and abstract, universal, unstoppable relationship between predecessors and the present.

Beyond the factors intervening in class formation, the concept of ‘class situation’ involves that class is an empirical question with an objective definition such as economic circumstances, and all factors that determine people’s live or *Lebenschancen*. If classes, however, are defined as a matter of empirical facts and *Lebenschancen*, then what does determine individuals’ life chances in capitalist societies? The answer is again fundamentally the same as Marx’s: “Being separated from the means of production forces workers to subordinate themselves to capitalists” (Wright 2015: 34). The fundamental division here is the ownership, or not, of property or the means of production, though not because property holders exploit non-owners but because both groups are “further differentiated ... according to the kind of property ... and the kind of services that can be offered in the market” (Weber 1978 [1922]: 928, in Breen 2005: 32). Consequently, both groups “have different types of resources generating different life chances” and “also —here is another break from Marx— on both sides of this divide, among the propertied and propertyless, there are further differences of market situations, life chances, class situations and thus classes (and not just class fractions)” (Atkinson 2015: 43).

Nevertheless, what is most important about Weber’s notion of class, which Bourdieu would take into account in his class theory formulation further on, is the notion of *status*. Class, indeed, is not the only aspect of the distribution of life chances.

In contrast to classes, *Stände* (*status groups*) are normally groups. They are, however, often of an amorphous kind. In contrast to the purely economically determined ‘class situation’, we wish to designate as *status situation* every typical component of the life of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honor*. This honor may be connected with any quality shared by a plurality, and, of course, it can be knit to a class situation: class distinctions are linked in the most varied ways with status distinctions.

(Weber 1978 [1922]: 932)

As this remark indicates, “where class referred to objective situations and need not lead to group awareness and action, status by definition involved interpersonal subjectivity” (Dworkin 2007: 33). In other words, “status is governed by what is considered honourable, and concerns ideals that are realized in different lifestyles” (Holgersson 2017: 41) which can cause privileges but also responsibilities. Further, despite class and status could be deeply interweaved,

grouping by status again does not necessarily implies a similar economic position, as occurs with caste that is achieved by legitimacy through religion penalisation, law and tradition, as Weber points.

However, property ownership and availability are still playing a fundamental role in defining the historical background of social groups (Milner 1999: 69). For example, in a society where the market system prevailed, “being high in status does not guarantee a great class situation, nor does being economically privileged automatically bring enhanced status, as denigration of the socially mobile or newly rich” —as ‘all money and no class’— attests (Atkinson 2015: 45). Thus, class is “the summation or weighed combination of a variety of positional effects on partly orthogonal scales or divides —of property, occupation, authority, education, and prestige[;] it entails both objective and subjective factors and arises in the sphere of consumption no less than in that of production (Weber 1947, in Wacquant 1991: 47).

Indeed, Weber, Jenkins notes, “can be seen behind the interest in life-style and status, the extension of market models into fields of analysis other than the economic and the notion of ‘the field’ as a model for thinking about ongoing social pattern” (2002: 19). However, although the Bourdeusian theory takes social status as the aggregation formula of economic capital, social capital and cultural capital in multi-dimensional social spaces (Bourdieu 1984), that does not imply that industrial society is open and classless (Lin 2008: 7). As the following section maps out, the individual habitus and tastes of cultural consumption —e.g., sport, music, uses of photography, and diet— largely reproduce and legitimize the unequal class structure of French society (Bourdieu 1965, 1984, in Lin 2008: 7). Hence, by paralleling the class analysis based on a neo-Weberian schemata, Bourdieu suggests that “class distinction not only depends on the accumulation of economic capital but also gradually depends on the reproduction of cultural capital. The rising importance of cultural capital has become a fashionable subject of social stratification studies in post-industrial societies” (Lin 2008: 7). That is why Weber, along with Marx, represents one of the most important narratives of class as an influence on Bourdieu’s theory of class.

Parties, along with class and status distinctions, is also referred by Weber in discussing the distribution of power in capitalist society. For parties, according to him, “collective action is their *raison d’être*”(Breen 2005: 33). That is why, “as opposed to class and status groups, parties always involved association,” and “represented goal-oriented activity; ... [certainly, parties are] “based on either class or status or a combination of the two,” or “they might even be immune to the influence of both” (Dworkin 2007: 34). In contrast, “membership of a status group is more likely to figure in individuals’ consciousness” (Breen 2005: 33). In this sense, Weber’s approach to parties highlights his distance from Marx —who “never assumes an automatic relationship between political parties and the class structure, he views class relationships as defining the environment in which a party or parties operate” (Dworkin 2007: 34).

This picture of the construction of the grand narratives of class revealed that after the works of Marx about proletarianizing class structure, the tripartite idea of class, polarizing class inequality, downward class mobility, class positions defined in relational terms (to the means of production) and revolutionary class struggle of capitalism stimulated enduring debates over changing class structure throughout the entire twentieth century and further on. As the

following section examines, most of the dominant theses of modern social theory on class analysis have been traced to the primary concerns of the classical social and economic theories of Karl Marx and Max Weber; that is, “the Marxian thesis of proletarianization” and the model class-in-itself/class-for-itself, on the one hand, and “the “liberal theories” and Weberian thesis of industrialism” (Lin 2008: 3), on the other. However, both Marxist and Weberian frameworks of class analysis share a common dimension: “employment, production and/or market relationships are regarded as crucial to the placement of the ‘class’” (Crompton 2008: 104). In conclusion, much of the subsequent debates about class were concerned with both the criticism and/or integration —as Bourdieu did— of the fundamentals of Marx’s and Weber’s theories

1.1.3 The class narrative dismantled

Since the end of the Second World War (1939-1945), there have been swift and substantial changes in the Western world, and thus conceptualizing class and theorizing class relationships became a central issue in order to marshal the information necessary to evaluate the extent and direction of such social changes. The post-Second World War was, as Kirk notes, the “age of affluence” that represented the culmination of post-industrialism⁸. As Esping-Andersen notes, “most advanced economies had reached the pinnacle of industrialism and the peak of de-ruralization in the 1960s,” hence “after the “Golden Age” of welfare states class structures were changed by the de-industrializing economy under advanced capitalism” (Esping-Andersen 1999: 25, in Lin 2008: 65). During that period, “class was seen to be an anachronism in a society and culture transformed by the introduction of the welfare state and full employment,” while “workers were viewed by commentators to be moving inexorably towards the status of their middle-class counterparts and in the process inevitably erasing class divisions altogether” due to “superficial conceptions of affluence” based on an increasingly consumption (Kirk 2007: 1-2). Indeed, this “fortuitous state was more imagined than real” as academic research revealed in the 1970s, or else later some critics would identify “a renewed shop-floor militancy disrupting the workplace which implied that struggles around class —in this case, the economics of class— lived on” (Kirk 2007: 1-2).

⁸ Founded on the experiences of the advanced capitalist countries, Lin Thung-hong (2008) distinguishes four thesis which each of them offers different insights and captures different perspectives along a trajectory of the transformation of class structure, that is: the Marxian thesis of proletarianization; the “liberal theories” and Weberian thesis of industrialism; the thesis of post-industrialism which implies the New Class theories; and the thesis of globalization (2008: 3). After the “Golden Age” of welfare states, Bell (1976: 14-27) highlights, the tendencies of the transformation to a post-industrial society can be traced by the following components of occupational structure: (a) creation of a service economy; (b) the pre-eminence of the professional and technical class, and (c) the centrality of theoretical knowledge as the source of innovation and of policy formation. After the ground-breaking study of Bell, the postindustrial impact on the occupational structure in advanced capitalist societies has become a vital topic in the social mobility and stratification field (Treiman 1977; Featherman and Hauser 1978; Wright and Martin 1987; Wright 1997)” (Lin 2008: 8). In short, this thesis emphasizes “the rising capacity of skill assets and the class struggle between intelligentsia and bourgeoisie” (Lin 2008: 18) by claiming that “the exploitative/accumulative capacity of skill assets, in the long run, may improve rather than regress in the power struggle between the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia” (Lin 2008: 65; see also: Bell 1976, Gouldner 1979, and Konrad and Szelényi 1979).

Although the centrality of historical materialism had increased in the 1970s, and class became an uncontested dogma for many scholars and commentators, funeral “narratives predicating the “end of class” re-emerged once again during the 1980s and persist in the present” (Kirk 2007: 2). Hence, by the end of the 1980s, as the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of industrial society, it seemed as the idea of class harked back to a departed “modern” age, and the development of new kinds of social relationships encompassed by a post-industrial, post-modern, consumer society spelled the uselessness of class for making sense of new times as it once was (Savage 2000: *iii*). At that time, a common theme within sociology was that class was becoming increasingly irrelevant as many scholars and commentators have asserted (Pahl 1989; Holton and Turner 1989; Pakulski and Waters 1996; Clark and Lipset 1991). Post-modernists were the first who expressed serious doubts about the effectiveness of the concept of class in contemporary society by questioning old orthodoxies. At that time, many scholars proclaimed that class is disappearing because “people are less likely to form stable identities in class terms and thus less likely to orient their political behavior on the basis of class” (Wright 2005: 2).

Terry Nichols Clark and Seymour Martin Lipset stated in “Are Social Classes Dying?” (1991) that class analysis has grown increasingly inadequate in recent decades as traditional hierarchies — including political parties and ideological cleavages, the economy, the family, and social mobility— have declined and new forms of social stratification have emerged. Consequently, “much of our thinking about stratification —from Marx, Weber, and others— must be recast to capture these new developments” (Clark and Lipset 1991: 397). On that basis, according to Pakulski and Waters, who published *The Death of Class* in 1996, “[c]lasses are dissolving and that the most advanced societies are no longer class societies” (1996: 4). This is partly due to a wide redistribution of property; globalization and the multiple segmentation of markets; the increasing role for consumption as a status and lifestyle generator, and so on⁹. As they clearly suggest, today class is based on the cultural sphere, that is, lifestyle and/or values —including the related “differentiated patterns of value commitment, identity, belief, symbolic meaning, taste, opinion and consumption” (Pakulski and Waters 1996: 24). The concept of class “had been well suited to modern society, but that modern society no longer existed;” one of the prerequisites for an analysis of contemporary society is a decisive break with the modernist approach since “society today is not so stable and uniform as before, being individualized, fragmentary, and unstable, and ultimately post-modernized (Pakulski and Waters 1996: 3, 26, 153-4; Lash and Urry 1994; Holgersson 2017: 10).

Pakulski and Water, however, were not alone. Even leading sociologists who shy away from the excesses of post-modernism suggest that the concept of class is somewhat obsolete. The advanced capitalist Western societies today are characterized not by the social and economic conditions of industrialism but by the conditions of post-industrialism (Western and Baxter 2001: 2). Thus, Giddens (1994: 143-4) argued that sociologists should be studying

⁹ The thesis of globalization is one of the four perspectives along a trajectory of the transformation of class structure distinguished by Lin (2008). According to the Taiwanese scholar, “globalization simply refers to the levels of integration of markets for capital, labor, goods and services among economies around the world” (Lin 2008: 10). However, some “grand globalization theorists” such as Manuel Castells (2000) claim that the global economy is a transformation “not between an industrial and a post-industrial economy, but between two forms of knowledge-based (...) production,” that is, between industrialism and informationalism” (Castells 2000: 219, in Lin 2008: 10). Surprisingly, Lin (2008: 10) points, “only a few grand globalization theorists have seriously examined the empirical evidence relating to class structure and economic inequality” such as Hirst and Thompson (1999).

'individualization' and social division by lifestyle and taste. Bauman began to talk in terms of 'social movements' rather than class (Bauman 1992: 55; 1982, in Holgersson 2017: 10). And Beck (2000) considered the transformation of old localized forms of belonging —such as neighborhood, state or class— into much more open and ambiguous, and globally mediated ones, such as leisure and lifestyle, taste and consumption, media and tourism. Recently, Beck (2016) took the concept of metamorphosis to argue that the intersection of risk inequalities with long-standing inequalities sometimes produces what he called 'risk-class', which ultimately undermines "long-standing processes and social logics, such as class" (Curran 2018: 37). As a result, the ambiguity over Beck's analysis of risk, inequality, and class throughout his work, from *Risk Society* (1992) to *The Metamorphosis of the World* (2016), has been manifested, as suggested in the title of Curran's (2018) paper "Beck's creative challenge to class analysis: from the rejection of class to the discovery of risk-class."

On the other hand, many class researchers were on the defensive, feeling that the post-modern critique of class was taken to extremes (Skeggs 1997; G. Marshall 1997; Crompton 1998; Savage 2000; Goldthorpe 2007). Most of them proclaimed that class analysis as a means of understanding contemporary social change still prevails today and pointed "to the power of entrenched social class inequalities to shape life chances" (Savage 2000: *iii*). However, they attempted to take stock of this dispute and to reintroduce and rethink class analysis by noting the real problems in current research and calling for the reformulation of class analysis around different methodological and theoretical axes (Skeggs 1997; Crompton 1998; Savage 2000).

In *Formations of Class and Gender* (2002 [1997]), Beverly Skeggs condemned post-modernists theorists who "dismiss class as a structural concept, a relic from modernism which has no applicability to the supposed ability to travel through differences unencumbered by structure or inequality" (2002 [1997]: 7). Here, Skeggs, from a feminist and post-structuralist approach (see also Butler's criticism to binary structural oppositions in the following section), rejects the modernist conceptualization of class without necessarily rejecting the reactionary configuration of the concept of class itself and its validity to fuse class and gender together to produce an accurate representation of the institutionalization, legitimatization and well established "differences in power" in modern society.

Further, by criticizing post-modernism, Skeggs attempts to reinstate class since "to ignore or make class invisible is to abdicate responsibility (through privilege) from the effects it produces. To think that class does not matter is only a prerogative of those unaffected by the deprivations and exclusions it produces" (Skeggs 2002 [1997]: 7). Thus, classlessness discourses seen to be paradigmatic of the new 'global' or post-modern consumerist milieu, and constitutive of a new take on liberalism and individualism (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992). Making class invisible, Skeggs states, "represents a historical stage in which the identity of the middle classes is assured" such as when "the concept was considered necessary by the middle classes to maintain and consolidate differences in power: its recent invisibility suggests that these differences are now institutionalized, legitimated and well established" (2002 [1997]: 7). That is why, rather than abandon the concept of class as a reactionary configuration, Skeggs aims to re-nuance class in order "to show how it is a major feature of subjectivity, a historical specificity and part of a struggle over access to resources and ways of being," which is still in force today "even if we do not feel impeded by it or choose not to recognize it, or to avoid it through disidentifications and dissimulations" (Skeggs 2002 [1997]: 7).

1.1.4 New Narratives about class

The Feminist Impulse

Abovementioned Skegg's (1997) feminist approach on class is directly linked to the trends emerged in the late sixties and seventies. At that time, Marxism was criticized both from outside but also, as the feminist critiques illustrates, from within. Certainly, the feminist critiques of the Marxian's class analysis have argued that while both Marxist and feminism are emancipatory theoretical traditions in capitalist societies, in fact class has increasingly been considered a more important dimension of social structure than gender (Hartman 1979; Wright 2001: 28). The main source of strife between Marxism and feminism being the extent to which patriarchy is seen as autonomous from productive relations.

Juliet Mitchell (1966) argued that, although "the problem of the subordination of women and the need for their liberation was recognized by all the great socialist thinkers in the 19th century" such as Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1893 [1884]) —in which he formulates that gender and class are melded into a single relation as a result of the introduction of private property and capitalism, that is patriarchy is fundamentally reducible to economic interactions—, Marxian class analysis debates over what was once called "class reductionism" or "economic determinism" has waned considerably over the last decades (Mitchell 1966: 12; Wright 2001: 29). As a result, "[t]he position of women in the work of Marx and Engels remains dissociated from, or subsidiary to, a discussion of the family" as "a precondition of private property," while "[t]heir solutions retain this overly economist stress, or enter the realm of dislocated speculation" (Mitchell 1966: 12, 15).

This is based in turn on the assumption that "the liberation of women remains a normative ideal, an adjunct to socialist theory, not structurally integrated into it" (Mitchell 1966: 15). That is why, in the late 1970s, Heidi Hartmann claimed that "while both Marxist method and feminist analysis are necessary to an understanding of capitalist societies, and of the position of women within them, in fact feminism has consistently been subordinated" (Hartmann 1979: 1). In Hartmann's view, "'the housewife emerged, alongside the proletarian [as] the two characteristic laborers of developed capitalist society" (Zaretsky 1973: 114), and the segmentation of their lives oppresses both the husband-proletarian and the wife-housekeeper" (Hartmann 1979: 4). Therefore, only a reconceptualization of 'production' —including women's work in the home and all other socially necessary activities— "will allow socialists to struggle to establish a society in which this destructive separation is overcome" (Hartmann 1979: 4).

According to this perception, Marxist class analysis alone is not able to explain women's increased oppression due to the separation between wage work and home work. Zaretsky pointed out that "while men are oppressed by having to do wage work, women are oppressed by not being allowed to do wage work" (Zaretsky 1973: 114, in Hartmann 1979: 4). Further, Michele Barret in *Women's Oppression Today* (1980), on the other hand, criticized these approaches to class and Marxism for "keeping gender oppression and capitalism *too* separate and instead tried to ride the wave of structural Marxism (much like Poulantzas) to argue that gender domination is only relatively autonomous from material relations" (Atkinson 2015: 86).

Such as criticisms were the seed of increasingly influential voices heralding the need for now call "intersectionality." This term was coined by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 in order to underscore the 'multidimensionality' of marginalized subjects' lived experiences (Crenshaw 1989: 139). 'Intersectional' analysis rests on "the existence of various power

structures that act in concert, and where the situation determines which form of oppression gains the upper hand, whether class, gender, ‘race’, ethnicity, and so on” (Holgersson 2017: 11). Moreover, intersectionality’s class narratives influenced Bourdieu’s later works as this chapter analyses further on.

Intersectionality serves a few theoretical and political purposes, “in which gender, class and ‘race’ mainly, are all depicted as mutually interpenetrating, still tended to rely in some way on vaguely Marxist understanding of class relations” (Atkinson 2015: 87), for example Collins’s *Black Feminist Thought* (2000). However, “the most influential strands of feminist theory per se turned away from class altogether” because “a lot of feminism in the 1980s and into the 1990s was part of the cultural turn, which was in fact central to the associated journey in social theory from Marxism through structural Marxism—in which ideology was given room for autonomous manoeuvre” (Atkinson 2015: 87)— to the post-structuralist belief that it is linguistic discourses that shape human experience.

For example, Judith Butler’s recognition of the arbitrariness of the sign, despite locating it in Derrida’s writings, and her rejection of “the claims of totality and universality and the presumption of binary structural oppositions [such as the distinction between the material and cultural spheres, even on an analytical level] that implicitly operate to quell the insistent ambiguity and openness of linguistic and cultural signification” (Butler 1990: 40). Her claim is in order to make common cause with the new orthodox left and a known neo-Marxist tactic of dismissing queer politics—a theory built both upon feminist and gay and lesbian studies—as ‘merely cultural’ (Butler 1998: 38-9) rather than being understood as “an expansion of the ‘economic’ sphere itself to include both the reproduction of goods as well as the social reproduction of persons” (1998: 40).

In fact, in queer theory there is no attempt to use class as a social phenomenon. In general, class is a category of social construction, and only as a meta-narrative or an essentialist proposition are only taken into consideration in the writings of Queer theorists (Kirsch 2000: 38). However, some scholars such as Kirsch refocus current debates about “a ‘queering of culture’ to a level of analysis that includes social movements, race and class, power and dominance, and ultimately, social change” (2000: 18). Kirsch also claims, as feminist theorists did in the 1960s and 1970s with the case of women, “the relative experience of queer people is comparable with all those who have been marginalized” (2000: 36). Therefore, such approaches have “led a shift from a broad acceptance of class as central to the sources of change, conflict or cohesion within society, to a new emphasis on identity politics and new social movements as political conduits for action, and thus a move from the politics of redistribution to that of recognition” (Kirk 2007: 2).

Finally, despite the “tempestuous” and “unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism,” the feminist impulse to reconnect culture to class by criticizing Marxism’s dominant class narrative was, after all, an “internal criticism and not intended to overturn Marxism altogether” (Atkinson 2015: 85; Hartmann 1979). Nevertheless, even if suitably critical of Marx, not all feminists took to extremes the Marxism’s class analysis; some of them had no intention of joining the post-modernist view and its sceptical narrative approach—e.g., Lyotard’s perspective (Atkinson 2015: 87; Lyotard 1993 [1979]). Hence, Ulrika Holgersson (2017: 60) notes, the interaction of class with other categories in forming human lives “along with the assertion that sexuality was essential to the capitalist system, inspired many feminists in the eighties and nineties to look beyond Marxism” and materialism, “to the proponents of the

cultural turn and their projects to revitalize class” theory by combining analyses of culture and class.

The Cultural Turn

As we have seen, after the collapse of communism (from the late 1980s to early 1990s) and the subsequent narratives predicating the “death of class,” the development from modern industrial society to post-industrial (or post-modern) society was echoed in the humanities and social sciences in the so-called “the cultural turn,” which describes a shift in emphasis from economics and politics, that is a positivist epistemology, to a study of cultural conditions — such as the dialogue between sociology and history, cultural studies, literary criticism, linguistic analysis, etc. It is possible to identify a range of reasons for this development. In part, the cultural turn derives from the association between the orthodox Marxism and the Soviet Union and Communist parties’ authoritarianism, and narrow economic view of society and history —often referred to as *economism*—, Marx’s class theory, and class analysis more generally, were often an object of scorn and serious attack at that time. Yet, it was also possible to turn to impending post-modernism¹⁰. In fact, characteristic of post-modernism is scepticism and the talk of ‘metanarrative’, regarded the ethnocentric and patriarchal logic of Marxism, which is based on the opposition between worker and capitalist as limiting and critically useless binary opposition, thereby excluding women and their unpaid family work as the feminist criticism argues. Indeed, the post-modern narratives and “the scholars who have been inspired by the cultural turn, but without losing their interest in class analysis ... owned much to the feminist critique of Marxism that had begun back in the seventies” (Holgersson 2017: 1-2).

How, then, does the cultural turn relate to Marxian grand narrative of class? According to Marx, a person’s economic prospects in life depend significantly on their relationship to economically valuable assets of various sorts (Wright 2005: 2). But, does the production relationships ultimately make “objective” the feeling of belonging to a particular class for Marx? And what has happened in recent decades to convince so many scholars and commentators to reject the materialist approach? Did Bourdieu find the inspiration not only to bear class in mind, but also to reconfigure the analysis of it in the cultural shift? In thinking about such issues, it is worth turning first to Marxist conception of class, and the question posed in the last pieces he wrote.

First, the issue of attempting to answer these questions by objectifying class has been the subject of extensive debate. As Marx has been widely accused of economic reductionism, after his death his collaborator Engels noted that although the economic situation might be ‘ultimately’ determinant, at any particular moment, other social relations —political, ideological— would also be affecting human actions (Crompton 1998: 29). As a result of Engel’s intervention, the debate about the exact nature of the relationship between the base

¹⁰ Post-modernism can be defined as “a philosophical approach that aimed to recast the traditional concept of truth and question the celebration of universal ideas and the march of progress, in order to concentrate on the life of the individual in all its diversity” (Holgersson 2017: 1). Critics at post-modernism argue that “[a]lthough class analyses have been challenged for decades by changing social realities and criticisms from postmodernism, the consensus of the theorists is still that the concept of class should initially be based on the relationship to economic assets” (Wright 2005, in Lin 2008: 23).

and the superstructure —that is, the economy (the organization of production) and culture¹¹ (ideology, values, religious norms, and identity)— was not closed.

Despite the emergence of a critical Marxism —it developed, revised, and questioned Marx’s ideas, often crossing them with ideas from other intellectual traditions—, Marxism was “being critiqued not only by the usual suspects —conservatives and neoliberals— but also by leftist scholars, including those in various stages of abandoning Marxism but still committed to radical projects of participatory democracy” (Dworkin 2007: 3). Such critics did not consider the fact that class theory and analysis in the humanities and the social sciences have been “dualistic” in understanding culture and society —i.e., such dual nature have been “founded on the distinction between an objective socio-economic structure and forms of consciousness and action shaped by it” regardless they are “derived directly or indirectly from Marx’s works” (Dworkin 2007: 3). Similarly, Marx’s class formation also has a dualistic perception. Since the relations of productions play a “determining” role in Marx’s class theory, “the changes in the economic foundation [the economic structure or the relations of production] lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure” (Marx 2011 [1859]). Consequently, “economic transformations, rather than law, politics, religion, aesthetics, and philosophy —the ideological expressions through which people manifested their consciousness of these transformations— elucidated the real movement of history” in Marxian class theory (Dworkin 2007: 23). Thus, Marx’s base/superstructure model in class formation is a dualistic key element in order to understand not only Marxian’s but also Bourdieu’s class conceptualization and, by extension, the class narratives in the twentieth century.

As a result, Holgersson argues,

At one extreme, we can assume there is a fairly automatic, mechanical relationship between economy and culture; in between, different forms of interaction or dialectic; and the other extreme, culture is largely independent of the economy. But to remain within the Marxist fold, we cannot advocate the idea that culture and language govern the economy rather than vice versa. Do that, and we cross the point of no return.

(Holgersson 2017: 12)

Further, if the Crompton’s triadic definition of class (see section 1.1.1 to this chapter) is applied here, then the discussion turns on whereas the objective class in itself (Crompton’s second definition) becomes subjective class (the third meaning), and if so, how. As Marx recalled in the 2011 [1859] preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, transformations in the relations of production were responsible for corresponding changes in the superstructure. Thus, there must be some sort of transformation or link between Crompton’s third definition —class for itself—, and the class in the objective sense, the class in itself. The term ‘class’, however, has not just been to describe levels of material inequalities or social prestige, it has also been identified as social actors, or potential social forces, which have the capacity to transform society —for Marx, the struggle between classes is certainly the major motive force in human history (Crompton 1998: 11).

Consequently, the base/superstructure metaphor and the question of how material being relates to consciousness and behaviour have characterized many contemporary debates in

¹¹ As Dworkin noted, Marx himself never claimed that culture was part of the superstructure. Rather, subsequent cultural theorists believed that Marx’s description of the superstructure logically included it (Dworkin 2007: 23).

social stratification. Beyond the “orthodox consensus”¹² that emerged in the social sciences during the 1950s and 1960s, and those who never broke with Marxism —the best known are Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci or Stuart Hall— lies the work of the historian Edward Palmer Thompson. At a time when structuralist and determinist ontologies had a profound impact on the social sciences and humanities, Thompson developed a “continuing dialogue between sociology and history” concerned with the concept of class and “against the more determinist versions of the model of economic ‘base’ and ideological ‘superstructure’ which had been developed from Marx’s work” (Crompton 1998: 41) and greatly influenced Bourdieu’s thought.

Within the British tradition of working-class history and the significant academic growth of Cultural Studies in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in his seminal book *The Making of the English Working Class* published in 1963, Thompson aimed to produce “a biography of the English working class” by understanding class as a *historical* phenomenon (class in the subjective sense), “unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness” (1963: 9-12). As he argues, “I do not see class as a ‘structure’, nor even as a “category” (class in the objective sense), but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships” (1963: 9). Thus, class is a “social and cultural formation.” The fact that one which cannot be “defined abstractly ... but only in terms of relationship with other classes” (Thompson 1978: 85-86) implies a dialogic relation which draws in the direction of Bourdieu’s social theory and his conception of habitus as “embodied” *dispositions* or *behaviours*, as next section analyses. Thompson presents the essence of the definition of class thus:

a class we are thinking of a very loosely defined body of people who share the same categories of interest, social experiences, traditions and value-systems, who have a disposition to behave as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways.

(Thompson 1978: 85)

However, “while at one level class exists independently of what people think about it and thus finds an objective status within a set of social relations, or relations of production, there is additionally the meaning Thompson seeks to ascribe to class: the *making* of class” (Kirk 2007: 7-8). Indeed, for him, “the ‘making’ of the class had been essentially ‘an active process, which owes as much to agency as to conditioning ... Class is defined by men as they live their own history and, in the end, this is its only definition’” (Thompson 1963: 9-11, in Milner 1999: 111). The conception of the *making* of the class is considered from “a ‘culturalist’ understanding of class as constituted pre-eminently in class consciousness” (Milner 1999: 111). Certainly, class is “an abstract force which nevertheless has real consequences ... [and, like Marx] as embedded in relations of production, but he is emphatic that classes cannot be discussed or identified independently of class *consciousness*” (Thompson 1963: 10, in Crompton 1998: 41). For

¹² During the 1950s and 1960s, sociology was dominated by a series of assumptions labelled by Giddens (1981) and others as “orthodox consensus . . . [in] which writers such as Talcott Parsons, R.K. Merton, S.M. Lipset and others were the major luminaries” (Giddens 1981: 88). The orthodox consensus “was influenced by the logical framework of positivism . . . the predominance of a broadly functionalist approach . . . and a conception of ‘industrial society’, whereby the technology of industrialism and its attendant social characteristics (rationality of technique, extensive division of labour, and so on) as the main motive force transforming the contemporary world” (Crompton 1998: 12).

Thompson, the *making* of the class is based on agency, which “brings class formations to life to find articulation in institutions and traditions, some of which survive, some of which fall by the wayside” (Kirk 2007: 8).

For most historians and many sociologists who later found themselves drawn to the idea of the cultural turn, Thompson’s explicit reformulations and willingness to study culture and class consciousness —such as the emphasis on the processes by which “experience” mediates between being and consciousness— were crucial to the development of class relations (Milner 1999: 111). Hence, “class eventuates as men and women *live* their productive relation ... and as they *experience* their determinate situations ... with their inherited culture and expectations, and as they handle these experiences in cultural ways” (Thompson 1978: 150). Indeed, his ground-breaking work was undoubtedly a significant contribution to the “culturalist-action” thesis versus the “economic-determinist” thesis. As Dworkin notes, despite the conflicts and tensions between historians and sociologists in the 1960s and 1970s, and the doubts raised about the relationship between base and superstructure, these scholars “made decisive (though different) contributions to a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of class and class consciousness” (Dworkin 2007: 5).

Here Dworkin makes a distinction between two types of criticism that have been identified against the binary understanding of society established by the base/superstructure metaphor, to which Ulrika Holgersson added a third. The first type of criticism has argued that “the centrality accorded to class narratives has marginalized other forms of identity” due to “the political, social, economic, and cultural changes” since the late seventies such as “the shift in advanced capitalist societies from manufacturing to service economies” (Dworkin 2007: 5); the increasing centrality of environmentalism; feminism; the decline of the industrial working class, various assertions of religious, national, ethnic, gay and racialized rights, etc. These changes went hand in hand with new ways in how identity itself was understood. New memberships in multiple ingroups were not fully convergent or overlapping, so the associated identity is both more inclusive and more complex as it was once in traditional industrial society (Roccas and Brewer 2002). As a result, individuals are yet “likewise defined and constructed by their gender, race, ethnicity, region, and nationality, among other things; class is thus one form of identification among many: it cannot be viewed in isolation and nor does it have a privileged status” (Dworkin 2007: 6).

The second type of criticism pointed out by Dworkin (2007: 6) challenges the epistemological influence of the base (that is, the economy) on the superstructure (culture) —that is, it questions the link between the second and third of class distinctions displayed by Crompton. Such criticism is due to the influence of the *linguistic turn*¹³. Consequently, rather than class consciousness being considered as “ultimately rooted in an objectively verifiable structure,” class is seen by the scholars who have been inspired by the cultural turn as a linguistic and discursive construction —that is, a “ultimately a cultural construct, a form of representation” (Dworkin 2007: 7). The implication of this thinking for humanities and social studies have been particularly pronounced: the shift from the “social” and economics to the “cultural” and language speeded up the split between the purely macro-level class analysis associated with Marxian theory and materialism that are “easily presented in nice graphs and scientific

¹³ According to this position, language is a key factor in constructing human experience, so the logic of the linguistic turn subverts the binary model’s common sense, and our understanding of our interests is not derived from the corresponding economic structures because what we perceive as an objective structure is an illusionary effect of what Castoriadis (1975) names the “social imaginary.”

discourse” (Rocca 2017: 4), and the “all-encompassing embrace of culture” and contingency (Chibber 2017) on the other. These two critiques to base/superstructure model can be considered analytically distinct and/or overlapped. For example, apart from post-Marxism (Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985]) and feminist scholars, some historians moved away from the Thompson tradition and focused on the linguistic sense of class from a post-structuralist approach (Jones 1983; Joyce 1991, 1994, 1995; Scott 1999 [1988]).

Finally, Holgersson’s criticism of the base/superstructure metaphor’s *teleology* concerns the wider context of which it is part: historical materialism as a perspective for the analysis of social development, in which “history is a process of the continuous creation, satisfaction and re-creation of human needs” driven by the struggle between the classes (Giddens 1971: 22). This “open fight” that requires the “oppressor and oppressed” binomial —although it is not a binary two-class model society because each society is composed of a multiplicity of classes— dominates in all systems of production and carried on uninterruptedly in all eras. Although a preliminary objection may be drawn from this theory is that it is excessively deterministic and the arguments that “the economic ‘base’ determines the political and ideological ‘superstructure’ of human societies, and that it is material being that determines human consciousness, rather than vice versa” (Crompton 1998: 30) may be overly reductionist, Holgersson notes that it has not been all objections to Marxist tradition. As a “natural starting point,” Marxism has both advantages and disadvantages “if only because so much of the literature on class bears the Marxist imprimatur; yet there are several means to the same end” (Holgersson 2017: 14). One of them is offered by Bourdieu, whose theory of class is the theoretical approach adopted in this thesis.

Reconstructive Narratives

While Bourdieu did not consider himself a Marxist sociologist, or indeed a post-structuralist, Marx heavily influenced Bourdieu’s thinking, particularly the early Marx of the *Theses on Feuerbach* (Jenkins 2002: 19). Nevertheless, Bourdieu analyses people’s access to material resources, education and cultural codes, social networks, leisure activities, and the like (Bourdieu 1973, 1984), and in this way, Holgersson highlights, “he manages the feat of talking about class in both the economic and the cultural senses, without setting them up as unworkable antitheses” (2017: 14-5) as the base/superstructure metaphor establishes.

Bourdieu’s metaphorical *reconstruction* of the concept capital allows to understand capital not solely in economic terms, but metaphorically “as the possession of a variety of resources” (including knowledge and practices), “the possession of which endows actors (or agents – Giddens) with the capacity to act in the social world” (Wynne 1998: 24). Such resources, forms of power or capitals include for Bourdieu cultural, social and symbolic capital, in addition to economic and, in very specific cases, political capital. Further, Bourdieu substitutes the concept of class structure for that of social space, the space where “people figuratively speaking exist” (Wacquant 1991: 52). This social space, Wacquant notes, can be understood as “the multidimensional distribution of socially effective forms of power (or capital ...) underlying social positions” (1991: 52). For this space is at once “a field of objective forces and a field of struggles over the very criteria of group formation”, where each actor possesses different amounts of capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) in different combinations (Wacquant 1991: 52). In short, “endowment of such capital, the struggle to acquire it, together

with analyses of the use to which it is put” (to flux and change to better or worse positions in society), is the essential definition of Bourdieu’s social theory (Wynne 1998: 24).

Certainly, it is one thing to recognize that there are other valuable class narratives arisen in recent decades that reformulate and integrate key ideas from Marxist and non-Marxist currents of class analysis. That is, from grand paradigm battles to pragmatist realism, as Wright (2015) defines the approaches to class and inequality in Social Sciences today. For example, David Grusky and Kim Weeden’s neo-Durkheimian re-configuration of class analysis based on occupations as “micro-classes.” As its core, Grusky and his co-authors (Grusky and Sørensen 1998; Grusky, Weeden and Sørensen 2000; Weeden and Grusky 2004, 2012) proposal is to build class analysis on the basis of highly disaggregated or delocalized occupational categories, the so-called micro-classes, “in recognition of Durkheim’s understanding of occupations as the fundamental unit of economic activity, solidarity, and interests in developed capitalist economies” (Wright 2015: 113). Based on Bourdieu’s formulation on homogeneous conditions¹⁴, they reason that occupations are the true loci of social inequality reproduction, and it is membership in an occupation rather than any kind of wider entity such as the idea of “big classes” that is likely to be inherited (Sokolov and Sokolova 2018: 5).

However, the natural consequence of the cultural shift “has been the declining influence of the idea that class is fundamentally about *interests* and *power*, and a corresponding turn away from the macro-level class analysis associated with Marxian theory;” that is, “class has increasingly become viewed through the contingencies of its cultural construction rather than as an obdurate structural fact” (Chibber 2017: 27). But this transformation has not been total: both Marxist scholars such as Erik Olin Wright and Charles Tilly, and Weberian John Goldthorpe have sustained a vital tradition of materialist class analysis (Chibber 2017). For them, “class retains a distinctive centrality” and they continued to “use the concept of class in the account of people’s subjective understanding of their location in systems of stratification” and “concerning the explanation of economic inequalities” (Wright 2001: 14). According to Chibber, there are signs now of a growing unease with the all-encompassing embrace of culture, as evidenced by the success of Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013), which is based on “the detailed analysis of the trajectory of two dimensions of economic inequality and their interconnection: income and wealth” (Wright 2015: 129). Although the absence of discussion of the magnitude of the economic inequality was largely shared by both conservatives and liberals, this situation has changed dramatically: today, talk about inequality is everywhere (Wright 2015: 128) —and this is the context in which Piketty’s book appeared.

Furthermore, Aage Sørensen (2000) commits to reconstruct an exploitation-centered concept of class based on material processes of distribution. To do this, Sørensen first orders class concepts in three different ways according to their level of theoretical ambition: the unequal distribution of capital or *nominal classifications*; the empirical existence according to life conditions, and some consciousness of their own social existence; and at the highest level, *class as exploitation* as “a process by which one class obtains an economic advantage at the expense of another class” (Sørensen 2000: 1526-8; Ollivier 2008: 265). Then, he proposes “rehabilitating” the concept of exploitation, which has been at the core of the Marxist tradition of class analysis, “but to many people this concept now seems like esoteric and irrelevant radical jargon” (Wright 2015: 79). Indeed, “since the abandonment by most Marxists of the

¹⁴ In *Distinction*, Bourdieu states that “homogeneous conditions of existence impose homogeneous conditionings and produce homogeneous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices” (Bourdieu 1984: 104; in Weeden and Grusky 2012: 1728).

labour theory of value as a coherent framework for economic analysis,” the concept of exploitation has become “to seem more like a heavy-handed piece of antiquated rhetoric than a rigorous tool for understanding the inner workings of class relations in capitalist society” today, “by closely identifying it with the economic concept of rent” (Wright 2015: 79-80).

Because of this sort of discussions and the resulting increase in economic insecurity and precariousness of employment in the 1980s and 1990s, the question whether “the precariat” should be considered “a class” was raised by Guy Standing in 2011. “On the basis of the three dimensions of relations —relations of production, relations of distribution, and relations to the state— Standing identifies seven classes,” including the precariat, that comprise the class structure of contemporary capitalist societies (Wright 2015: 158). In his book, Standing outlines the characteristics of this new group of insecure workers that have in common uncertainty, volatile labour, lack of occupational identity, and no control over their time; despite their heterogeneity, they all end in the same disposable workforce necessary to the global economy converging toward the neo-liberal model while being progressively denied a growing set of rights usually granted to “full citizens” (Panini 2014; Standing 2014). Some critics suggest that the precariat is “a part of the working class” or even “an aggregation of several distinct class locations” rather than a distinct class from the working class, but “it is also certainly the case that in some rhetorical contexts calling the precariat a class could help elevate the status of the issues connected to precariousness and serve as a way of legitimating and consolidating a program of action” (Wright 2015: 173).

Despite narratives refusing class to disappear and explanations on the base/superstructure model are a recurring conundrum, the above review of authoritative work on class analysis and comments upon its relevance to this project reflect that the formation and reconstruction of class needs to go beyond the opposition between objectivism and subjectivism. Bourdieu’s class theory is “undoubtedly a classic paradigm” (Hong and Zhao 2015: 3) that allows us to translate the objective social and economic conditions into class identity and bridge the divisions between both “class in itself” and “class for itself” (Marx), and material structures and historic actors (Weber). Thus, the following sections provide a set of thinking tools of Bourdieu’s class theory —including, social space, *habitus*, capital, and field— in order to support the methodological purpose of this investigation.

1.2 LOCATING HABITUS: PIERRE BOURDIEU’S THEORY OF CLASS

The interest in middle class’s social practices and representations may be attributable in part to the increasing influence of the work of Pierre Bourdieu¹⁵ in Anglo-American sociology and

¹⁵ According to *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Pierre Bourdieu, (born August 1, 1930, Denguin, France—died January 23, 2002, Paris) was “a French sociologist who was a public intellectual in the tradition of Émile Zola and Jean-Paul Sartre. Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* (socially acquired dispositions) was influential in recent postmodernist humanities and social sciences.” The French sociologist “was born into a working-class family in southern France. He attended a secondary school in Pau before transferring to a more prestigious school in Paris. He was later admitted to the École Normal Supérieure, where he studied philosophy under Louis Althusser. He then taught at a lycée in Moulins (1954-55). Bourdieu was drafted into the army, and in 1955 he was sent to Algeria, where he later worked as a lecturer and researcher at the University of Algiers (1958–60). While there he engaged in ethnographic research, particularly among the Berber-speaking Kabyle. Bourdieu’s experience in Algeria resulted in *Sociologie*

cultural anthropology. However, Bourdieu had become a crucial reference point in relation to issues such as education, social and economic mobility, culture, digital practices, migration, youth and crime. As the author of numerous seminal books, his prominence increased exponentially during the 1990s for two reasons. First, when he became “a highly visible participant in political struggles against the neoliberal orthodoxy that was coming to dominate political discourse in Continental Europe” during the 1990s (Weininger 2005: 82). And second, when his work became a necessary reference to understand “not just the outcomes of economic inequality, but the way other forms of capital – cultural, social, linguistic and symbolic capital – all operate in variable ways to reproduce class divisions” (Kirk 2007: 6).

In doing so, Bourdieu created a formidable set of relational concepts whose application aimed to understand the variable ways to reproduce inequalities and social domination. These concepts—including the central notions of habitus¹⁶, capital and field, the latter also “encompassing Bourdieu’s notion of ‘the social space’ as a national balance sheet of symbolic capital and symbolic power” (Atkinson 2016: 1)—“were not meant to be used solely as theory, but rather as a theory-method, which became Bourdieu’s career-long attempt to bridge the divide between theory and practice” (Costa and Murphy 2015: 3). As a result, Bourdieu has become one of the most influential sociologists of the later twentieth century not only to the fact that he is regularly included in rankings of leading class theorists but also that rarely does a month go by without a book or article published in any language exploring his relevance as an example of “the necessary and mutual implication in each other of theory and research” (Jenkins 2002: x).

The aim of this section is to analyse Bourdieu’s class theory as both a theoretical construct and method, which is an exercise of ‘art of application’ in class analysis. Nowhere is Bourdieu’s class theory more developed than in his classic work *Distinction*, which was originally published in French by Les Éditions de Minuit in Paris in 1979, as *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*, and translated into English in 1984. *Distinction* is a study of “the relationships between the universe of economic and social conditions and the universe of lifestyles” based on data collected in the 1960s and 1970s in France (Bourdieu 1984: *xii*). It is in the context of an analysis of this study (supplemented, to be sure, by a consideration of relevant earlier and later works related to his class conceptual apparatus) that this chapter attempts to map out Bourdieu’s theoretical construction and methodology following the basic organisational

de l’Algérie (1958; *The Algerians*), which established his reputation. He returned to France and taught at the University of Paris (1960–61) and the University of Lille (1961–64) before taking a position at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in 1964. At the latter school he established the Centre for the Sociology of Education and Culture. In 1981 he became the chair of sociology at the Collège de France ... From 1975 Bourdieu was editor of the journal *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, and in 1989 he founded the review *Liber*. Beginning in the 1980s, Bourdieu inserted himself into the public realm, supporting the rights of the unemployed, the homeless, and immigrants without papers. He spoke out against globalization and neoliberalism and often commented on political situations. A 2001 documentary film about Bourdieu, *La Sociologie est un sport de combat* (“Sociology Is a Combat Sport”), was a surprise hit in France” (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 2020a).

¹⁶ As Cockerham and Hinote note, “[t]he concept of habitus originates with Edmund Husserl (1989 [1952]: 266-293) who used the term to describe habitual action that is intuitively performed, such as eating soup with a spoon. The concept was expanded by Bourdieu (1977a: 72-95) to encompass a much wider range of behavioral dispositions, including those that are mediated through external social structures ... However, Bourdieu ... did not just rest on Husserl’s ideas and his own analysis of deeply embedded peasant folkways. Rather, his concept was also shaped from his critiques and embrace of various aspects of French structuralism, along with the influence of Panofsky’s ideas about the function of ‘mental habits’ and ‘habit-forming forces’ [Swartz 1997: 102]” (Cockerham and Hinote 2009: 202).

structure developed by Elliot B. Weininger (2005) in “Foundations of Pierre Bourdieu’s class analysis.” Recent authoritative work that reviews Bourdieu’s work based on Weininger’s approach has been completed by a number of authors, notably Jenkins (2002) and Atkinson (2016). Before proceeding to a discussion of the main research tools provided by Bourdieu’s class theory – capital, field, *habitus* –, the following section discusses two fundamental concerns that motivate Bourdieu’s approach to class as an attempt to transcend the dichotomy between objective and subjective social worlds.

1.2.1 Locating the Bourdieusian narrative: Beyond the reconstruction of class

As we have indicated above, one of the central discussions on class analysis and which “unifies Bourdieu’s work is the attempt to understand the relationship between ‘subjectivity’ – individual social being as it is experienced and lived, from the personal inside out,” as Jenkins indicates— “and the ‘objective’ social world within which it is framed and towards the production and reproduction of which it contributes” (2002: 25). Indeed, Bourdieu’s model of society –the *social space* to adopt his own terminology– can be understood as the multidimensional space where individuals are socially and culturally mapped in society.

To analyse this space consisting of “inter-related fields” and his understanding of “social collectivities, particularly social classes,” is also important to address two basic concerns that unifies Bourdieu’s approach to class (Jenkins 2002: 87). These two issues, Wieninger notes, “relate to (1) the significance and role of the analysis of *symbolic systems* in class analysis, and (2) the question of *boundaries* between classes” (2005: 84).

Basically, as Bourdieu himself states in the Preface to the English-Language Edition of *Distinction*,

The model of the relationships between the universe of economic and social conditions and the universe of life-styles which is put forward here, based on an endeavour to rethink Max Weber’s opposition between class and Stand [status], seems to me to be valid beyond the particular French case and, no doubt, for every stratified society, even if the system of distinctive feature which express or reveal economic and social differences (themselves variable in scale and structure) varies considerably from one period, and one society, to another.

(Bourdieu 1984: xi-xii)

Indeed, Bourdieu’s *Distinction* takes as its object the development of the Weberian “opposition between class and Stand [status]” (Bourdieu 1984: xii). In the review of Weber’s work attention is paid to examining three different dimensions of the concept status: as “actual prestige groupings or conscious communities;” as “more diffuse notions of ‘lifestyle’ or ‘social standing:’” and as “non-market claims to material entitlements or ‘life chances’ [that is, all factors that determine people’s live or *Lebenschancen* as opposed to the life chances that generate hierarchical social positions]” (Crompton 1998: 119).

In comparison to class, Crompton’s three dimensions of Weber’s conception of status shows that Weber’s status groups are linked based on culture rather than economics. As Weber argued, “status honour or prestige ... is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific *style of life* is expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle” (Weber 1978 [1922]: 932). Here the discussion focuses on the extent to which Bourdieu interprets Weber’s relationship between class and status.

Such a discussion is considered particularly important in any attempt to explore the degree of homogeneity associated with, in this case, China's middle class especially in terms of their social practices and representations —that is, their lifestyle¹⁷— of such group. As we have seen, status groups are not built from solidarity or social *collectivity*. Their link is based *associatively* on culture rather than economics. The key ideas of Bourdieu's concern with "the relationship between 'subjective hopes' and 'objectives chances'" is that there is "an adjustment between the individual's hopes, aspirations, goals and expectations, on the one hand, and the objective situation in which they find themselves by virtue of their place in the social order, on the other" (Jenkins 2002: 27-8).

Thus, Bourdieu interprets Weber's contrast between class and status as a pure "analytical convenience" in terms of a distinction between the material (or "economic") and the "symbolic" —"on which Bourdieu, moreover, is inclined to disallow;" and he insists that "class analysis cannot be reduced to the analysis of economic relations; rather, it *simultaneously* entails an analysis of symbolic relations, roughly along the lines of the status differentiation referred to Weber" (Weininger 2005: 84).

Consequently, the definition and the identification of middle-class individuals cannot be reduced to the economic relations. Certainly, China's middle class can not only be defined according to economic criteria such as income or level of consumption, it "*simultaneously* entails" a definition in terms of symbolic relations such as lifestyle. Beside economic criteria that define the group "in itself", as a statistical category, Bourdieu asserts that the emergence of a (middle)class cannot occur without deep symbolic changes such as the ones which occur in social practices and representations.

The discussion then turns on whether class and status become "two types of *real* unities which would come together more or less frequently according to the type of society," or if "it is necessary to see them instead as *nominal* unities ... which are always the result of a choice to accent the economic aspect or the symbolic aspect —aspects which always coexist in the same reality" (Bourdieu 1966: 212-13). In addition to stating that class analysis has both an economic and a symbolic dimension, this remark also indicates that Bourdieu rejects direct participation in debates about where the boundaries around specific classes should be drawn *a priori*. Due to his conceptualization of symbolic struggles as part of the class struggle, Bourdieu's concept of class "is an essentially contested concept" —as a result, where the boundaries are, for him, is contested (Crossley 2010: 89).

Using the varieties of meaning of the term class identified by Sørensen in this chapter, Bourdieu's conceptualization of class "makes no claim to the empirical existence of classes, identified with class boundaries, nor do they suggest why the dimensions of inequality, on which the classifications are based, come to exist" (Sørensen 2000: 1526). In "What Makes a Social Class?" (1987), Bourdieu argues that

[i]n the reality of the social world, there are no more clear-cut boundaries, no more absolute breaks, than there are in the physical world ... These boundaries can thus be conceived of as lines or as imaginary planes ... Now, the construction of (mobilized or "mobilizable") groups, that is, the institutionalization of a permanent organization

¹⁷ According to Gérard Mauger (Centre de Sociologie Européenne, CNRS-EHESS), lifestyle is "a set of practices and/or representations specific to a social group" ("Mode de vie." Universalis.fr, Encyclopaedia Universalis France Sas. Available at : <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/mode-de-vie/>, accessed 1 August 2020).

capable of representing them, tends to induce durable and recognized divisions which, in the extreme case, i.e., at the highest degree of objectification and institutionalization, could take on the form of *legal frontiers*.

(Bourdieu 1987: 13)

Bourdieu contends that by drawing boundaries “tends to induce durable and recognized divisions which, in the extreme case, could take on the form of legal frontiers”, and mobilizable class boundaries may turn into institutionalised inequalities. Consequently, not only a permanent organization capable of representing social groups can “induce durable and recognized divisions,” but also other social actors such as private enterprises or policymakers can provide definitions of class based on recognized divisions —such as lifestyle, political ideas or identities— which could take on the form of ideological conceptualizations and boundaries in society (see *hidden agenda* in Chapter III).

However, there are other reasons for Bourdieu’s reticence about entering into discussions on the boundaries between classes.

One of the major stakes in these struggles is the definition of the boundaries between groups, that is to say, the very definition of the groups which, by asserting and manifesting themselves as such, can become political forces capable of imposing their own vision of divisions, and thus capable of ensuring the triumph of such dispositions and interests as are associated with their position in social space. Thus, alongside the individual struggles of daily life in which agents continually contribute to changing the social world by striving to impose a representation of themselves through strategies of presentation of self, are the properly political collective struggles.

(Bourdieu 1987: 13)

First, Bourdieu states that the “very definition” of the boundaries between groups is purely a form of political conflict to impose “their own visions of divisions” and “a representation of themselves.” In short, the definition of class boundaries can be a tool to impose the hegemony of a social group on the rest of the society and legitimize effective sanction on persons, groups or entities. Secondly, by seeking to point out boundaries ahead on time, sociologists run the risk of presenting classes “as a metaphysical substance or entity” instead of “as a dialogical structure, itself thoroughly relational” at the level of self-dynamics, which can “serve as the point of origin of agentic possibilities” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 974).

Indeed, according to Bourdieu, class is not a natural, teleological, inherent, objective, or unavoidable phenomenon; to the contrary, Bourdieu agrees with Thompson’s understanding of class as a “historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness” (Thompson 1980 [1963]: 8-9). Both of these objections stem, Weininger points out, “in part, from Bourdieu’s antipathy towards arguments (frequent during the 1960s and 1970s) over the ‘real’ lines of division separating classes —above all, those separating the ‘middle class’ from the proletariat— and the political implications of the location of these lines,” instead of focusing on “the question with which all sociology ought to begin” that is “the existence ... and mode of existence of collectives (Bourdieu 1991b: 250),” and approaching boundaries “in terms of *social practices* rather than *theoretical conjecture*” (Weininger 2005: 85).

In short, the significance and integration of the symbolic systems in class analysis can be understood as an attempt to disclose “the *symbolic* dimensions of class struggle, which is not

confined to the narrow sphere of economy, but finds its genuine field in the area of cultural practices” (Joppke 2000: 21). Thus, in Bourdieu’s view, differences of social practices and representations (that is, status or lifestyle) may be seen as manifestations of class differences. At the same time, the *boundaries* between classes “are actively produced and reproduced by the class-individuals’ seeking for “distinction” and social difference from other (“lower”) classes; therefore “classes” are internally connected to “classifications,” i.e. symbolic practices” as the following sections analyse (Joppke 2000: 21).

Having set forth these fundamental concerns on the scope of Bourdieu’s class conceptualization, this section may turn to a discussion of *Distinction* in order to provide a lens for understanding Bourdieu’s conceptual apparatus of class. The object of study of this text is the relations between social classes and status groups —with the latter understood, in the Weberian sense as a collectivities sharing the same lifestyle. This serves to bring into focus “the *primacy of relations*” over the “dualistic alternatives” that prioritizes either structure *or* agency by setting them up as workable antitheses (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992b: 15-19). In doing so, it is necessary to introduce the set of thinking tools created by Bourdieu, such as the core concepts of field, habitus and capital.

1.2.2 Bourdieu and the class positions

Distinction, first published in French in 1979 and translated into English in 1984, can be regarded as the pinnacle of Bourdieu’s theory of class. As we have seen, *Distinction* is “based on an endeavour to rethink Max Weber’s opposition between class and Stand” (1984: *xii*) —or between the economic and the symbolic— in order to “bridge the difference between the subjective and objective social worlds (Jenkins 2002: 25). As a result, Bourdieu approaches class at two levels: at a sociological level —“class divisions are defined not by differing relations to the means of production, but by differing conditions of existence”—, and at a ‘daily level’ where “everyday understandings of the social world” are made (Crompton 1998: 148; Sayer 2005: 74).

In order to evaluate the degree of similarity between status differences and class differences in *Distinction*, this section analyses Bourdieu’s class theory by following, as mentioned above, the analysis organisation structure formulated by Weininger (2005) who notes that Bourdieu maps out a class structure that postulates, first “a causal connection between class location and habitus.” Secondly, the class location a person holds has an indirect impact on their actions or social practices “situated in different domains of consumption —practices which cohere symbolically to form a whole” (a “lifestyle”).” Thirdly, although “these practices serve to constitute social collectivities – that is, “status groups”— by establishing symbolic boundaries between individuals occupying different locations in the class structure”—, they are also daily consumption practices which become a contentious process (or a “classification struggle”). And, the fourth part of Bourdieu’s analytical schema, Weininger points, “demonstrates that this struggle amounts to only one of the many modalities through which “symbolic power” is exercised” by individuals and social groups (2005: 86).

The notions of class structure and social space

This section analyses the concepts of *social space* and class structure to explain how and why social agents conceive and (re)construct the social world in which they are inserted. The starting point for Bourdieu's approach to class is the claim that all agents (and sets of agents) within a particular society are assigned an objective position in social space defined by virtue of the access they afford to economic and cultural capitals (Bourdieu 1987: 4; Crossley 2010: 88; Jenkins 2002: 85). This proposition will be elucidated in stages by reviewing the concepts of class structure, capital and social space.

As "Bourdieu replaces the concept of class structure with that of social space" (Wacquant 1991: 52), social class has been "inevitably understood in terms that relate it to a series of placements in the occupational structure" (Wynne 1998: 18; Payne 1987: ix). Further, the social space tends to function symbolically as the concept through which society is apprehended by Bourdieu, that is a space characterised by an "unequal distribution of scarce goods and the multitude of potential positions" (Melldahl and Börjesson 2015: 135). Thus, the model that Bourdieu constructs of occupational division of labour —namely the *class structure* or *system*— is intended to be understood as the *social space*.

As the structure of class lifestyles is "hidden under the diversity and multiplicity of the set of [social] practices" performed by the agents, Bourdieu attempts to constitute in *Distinction* an obvious indicator of class —that is, a set of agents "whose similar conditions of existence produce similar *habitus* and similar access to goods and power"— by reference to occupation (Bourdieu 1984: 101; Jenkins 2002: 139-140). Having done this, Bourdieu then examines

national survey statistics for the economic capital (using indicators such as home ownership, luxury car ownership, income, etc.) and cultural capital (newspaper read, frequency of theatre-going, enthusiasm for classical music, etc.) possessed by the dominant class. The two forms of capital are inversely related: the more of one, the less of the other, a general rule which also holds good in the middle classes. This produces a rather more complex model of 'the space of social positions'—as structured by the differential distribution of two kinds of capital—than is commonly allowed for in simple up-down hierarchical models of stratification (Bourdieu 1984: 128-129). This is the interaction, in Weberian terms, of class and status.

(Jenkins 2002: 140)

However, by introducing the concept of cultural —together with social and symbolic— capital, Bourdieu "grants the notion a considerably wider purview than do Marxian theories, which restrict its scope to a system of positions defined in terms of ownership of and/or control over the means of production" (Weininger 2005: 86). As an attempt to distinguish himself from Marxism theorists, Bourdieu (1985) states that although he could "easily minimize the difference with Marx," of course he is aware that "we are all so impregnated, whether we know it or not, whether we want to be or not," with the problems and false solutions (class-in-itself and class-for-itself, working class and proletariat, and so on) which Marx has bequeathed to us." However, we "must not be afraid to "twist the stick in the opposite direction"" (Bourdieu 1985: 195-196). Indeed, although Bourdieu avoids determining all the "positions in the relations of production" since it implies a division based on economic capital, he is not afraid to develop a model for the middle-class, artistic, intellectual or self-employed occupations that were reviled by most Marxian analytical schemes.

In Bourdieu's understanding, every individual has a particular amount or volume of capital, and their capital has a particular composition (Crossley 2010: 89). The concept 'capital' emerges to describe the stakes in social fields,

In analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.)

(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992b: 97)

As "different segments of capital have different strengths as class barriers," locations in the class structure, which is the structure of the distribution of power (or capital), are differentiated from one another in terms of the composition of such capital (Hong and Zhao 2015: 4). Thus, the capital possession "commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions" (Wacquant 1989: 39). The very use of the word 'capital' "alerts us to Bourdieu's appropriation of economic metaphor to understand social life" (Jenkins 2002: 86). Whereas for economists there is only one — universal— capital, for Bourdieu "exist multiple *species* of capital which cannot be subsumed under a single generic concept": there are as many capitals, as many "sets of actually usable resources and powers" (Weininger 2005: 87; Jenkins 2002: 86; Bourdieu 1984: 114). Hence, it should be noted that Bourdieu defines capital as "the set of actually usable resources and powers —economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital" (Bourdieu 1984: 114).

These resources and powers are "principally differentiated into four categories: economic capital, social capital (various kinds of valued relations with significant others), cultural capital (primarily legitimate knowledge of one kind or another) and symbolic capital (prestige and social honour)" (Bourdieu 1991a: 229-231, in Jenkins 2002: 85). However, in capitalist societies, economic and cultural capital are the two most important ones. Whereas the importance of economic capital is widely recognized, in the case of the cultural capital, which is embodied 'by' the family and the school, takes considerable training and early socialization to acquire it. Indeed, the conversion from economic capital to other forms of capital, in particular to cultural capital, needs an investment of time.

In the end, the structure of this space is based on the social powers distributed of the various forms of capital, which according to Bourdieu's empirical investigation are

firstly *economic* capital, in its various kinds; secondly *cultural* capital or better, informational capital, again in its different kinds; and thirdly two forms of capital that are very strongly correlated, *social* capital, which consists of resources based on connections and group membership, and *symbolic* capital, which is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate.

(Bourdieu 1987: 4)

The possession of capital endows actors that are located in positions throughout the occupational system with the capacity to act in the social world. Or, to put it more precisely, the maps that we find in *Distinction* "usually locate occupational groups and social practices rather than actors or individuals" (Crossley 2010: 91). However, the model of the class structure developed by Bourdieu is not understood solely as class as occupation. His model of

class structure is constituted by the aggregate statistical data about individuals, classified according to a wide variety of indicators, among which the possession of economic and cultural capital holds a leading role (Jenkins 2002: 88). Every individual, on Bourdieu's account, has a particular amount or volume of capital with a particular composition.

In so far as these individual possessions and attributes can be quantified, however, "they have a distribution within any given population and it is possible to construct a graph or 'map' of that population" (Crossley 2010: 89) understood as a factorial space composed by three orthogonal axes¹⁸ or levels. Thus,

Thus agents are distributed in the overall social space, in the first dimension according to the global *volume* of capital they possess, in the second dimension according to the *composition* of their capital, that is, according to the relative weight in their overall capital of the various forms of capital, especially economic and cultural, and in the third dimension according to the evolution in time of the volume and composition of their capital, that is, according to their *trajectory* in social space.

(Bourdieu 1987: 4)

Bourdieu's mapping of social space tends to focus upon the first (and most important) axis which differentiates locations in the occupational system according to the total volume of economic and cultural capital possessed. At the first axis, Bourdieu "roughly" differentiates between the upper, middle and lower classes according to the total volume of capital possessed by incumbents. Whereas members of the "dominant class" or "bourgeoisie" are represented by occupational categories such as private-sector executives, industrial managers, professors, artists or self-employed academics that occupy overlapping positions at the upper end of the axis, skilled and unskilled workers occupy overlapping positions at the lower end of the axis, that is "*les classes populaires*". In between, members of the petite bourgeoisie or middle class such as small business owners, nurses, technicians, middle management positions, secretaries, civil servants and primary school teachers fall, as one might imagine, rather badly between these two stools (Jenkins 2002: 139).

The second orthogonal axis in the factorial space decomposes these three classes with the Marxian vocabulary of 'class fractions' not only based on their occupations but also on the composition of the capital possessed by incumbents (Blasius and Friedrichs 2008: 25). Members of these *class fractions* are characterized by a certain configuration of a specific composition of lifestyle attributes whose differences in lifestyles and tastes within the classes constitute "subtle distinctions" (Blasius and Friedrichs 2008: 26) such as the occupational categories within the dominant class —e.g., a professor holds the greatest cultural capital and the least economic capital, while an industrialist holds the greatest economic capital but relatively little cultural capital.

Finally, the third axis in the factorial space is generated from indicators according to the *trajectories* of the capital followed by their incumbents —i.e., according to the evolution of the historical track in terms of volume and composition of capital formation. That is why, this

¹⁸ The statistical technique that was retained by Bourdieu in order to quantify his data material and put his thinking in mathematical terms is the Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA). It is "a technique similar to factor analysis, but used with categorical variables" (Weininger 2005: 88). Crossley (2010) highlights that "this is a method of 'data reduction' akin to 'factor analysis' but suitable for categorical variables. It allows us to take a relatively high number of non-numerical variables and to derive from them a small number of numerical variables" (2010: 91).

research on social stratification in urban China analyses whether members of Beijing's new middle class are more likely than any other members of the peasants or migrant workers' groups to have been born into this class (see Chapter IV). Here Bourdieu's "quasi-structural treatment of time" opens up "an intriguing area" for the study of mobility in general, and for the study of the emergence of a new middle class in urban China in particular.

Further, we must consider two additional variables in analysing Bourdieu's mapping of social space. On the one hand, to each of the classes Bourdieu assigns attributes of "a certain lifestyle" which in turn generate what he refers to as "taste" or as "dissociation (or distance) from necessity" (Bourdieu 1984: 260, 57, 177; Blasius and Friedrichs 2008: 25), a notion that we address in the following sections. On the other hand, in addition to vertical movements (along the first axis) and attributes of a certain lifestyle, a conversion of capitals can take place in terms of "horizontal" or "transverse" mobility (along the second axis) —in other words, both class location and fraction location may vary simultaneously through time. As such, the horizontal mobility is "the result of conversion and reconversion strategies —when economic capital is 'cashed in' to obtain cultural capital in the next generation, and vice versa"— leading to an acceleration of the competition over access to elite education and, consequently, to a 'diploma inflation', for example (Jenkins 2002: 140). As Chapter IV assesses, this variable for capital conversion could explain China's middle-class transitions as we consider in Chapter IV.

Bourdieu's theoretical model of occupation division of labour is explained "by the objective conditions attaching to objective locations in social space" which "are "occupied" by individuals" (Crossley 2010: 93) according to "their respective distances from "necessity" — that is, how far removed they are, in economic terms, from a situation in which they would be unable to provide for their biological needs for food, shelter, etc." (Weininger 2005: 89). On that basis, Bourdieu constructs empirically the conceptualization of *social space* as a system of social formation.

Agents and sets of agents are assigned a position, a location or a precise class of neighbouring positions, i.e., a particular area within that space; they are thus defined by their relative position in terms of a multidimensional system of coordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent variables.

(Bourdieu 1987: 4)

Having set forth the role of social space in Bourdieusian epistemology, we can understand why the social space constitutes "the theoretical cornerstone" of Bourdieu's theory of class (Melldahl and Börjesson 2015: 135). The social space "meant to represent a single system of objective relations between the various possible combinations of the most important "powers and resources" in the social formation, and their evolution over time" (Weininger 2005: 89). However, this single "structure of objective positions" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992b: 27) not only can be "measured by the mathematical probability of access" in a "socially ranked geographical space" (Bourdieu 1984: 124), but also has a multiple dimensionality (e.g. the three orthogonal axes, the "horizontal" mobility and so on). Indeed, according to Bourdieu's multi-dimensional and relational conception of the social world, the social space "forms the very structure on which the arguments on the social distribution of taste" and lifestyle between the different fractions "can take form and ties them together with the distribution of objective positions" (Melldahl and Börjesson 2015: 135).

As Bourdieu argues, a group's chances of appropriating materially or symbolically any given class of rare assets, "depend partly on its capacity for the specific appropriation, defined by the

economic, cultural and social capital it can deploy in order to appropriate” the assets in question, “and partly on the relationship between its distribution in geographical space and the distribution of the scarce assets in that space” (e.g. measuring “in average distances from goods or facilities, or in travelling time-which involves access to private or public transport”) (1984: 124). Hence, the locations of the agents within the space are given by “the volume, composition and trajectory of capitals and properties the individual or group is in possession of, when compared with what other individuals or groups have” (Melldahl and Börjesson 2015: 135).

In other words, as Bourdieu sums up, “a group's real social distance from certain assets must integrate the geographical distance, which itself depends on the group's spatial distribution and, more precisely, its distribution with respect to the 'focal point' of economic and cultural values” (1984: 124). As a result of such relational construction within the social space, “individuals who have very similar assets are located close to each other, while individuals who are different from one another, in terms of not sharing many pertinent properties, are located far away from each other” (Melldahl and Börjesson 2015: 135). Thus, the objective positions — namely the coordinates or locations— are “occupied” in the multi-dimensional space by ‘agents’ (individuals or groups) as a “quasi-reality” independently of individuals or groups (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992b: 27). However,

A central motivating feature is the denial of substances —‘real’ discrete classes— and the appraisal of relations —‘real’ interrelated positions, located in an objectively defined space. Within this space, based on its objective distribution of assets, classes can be constructed, either as theoretical concepts by the researcher, or by a historical set of actors in the way in which E.P. Thompson describes the making of the British working class (Bourdieu 1984: 114-125; 1985: 723-727; 1987: 2-6; 1989: 16-18).

(Melldahl and Börjesson 2015: 135-136)

As such, the fact that these three axes —volume, composition, and trajectory— constitute Bourdieu’s social space of the social formation, motivate many of the unique features of his approach to class. It must be remembered that for Bourdieu the notion of social space is not only described as a “simple occupationally-based set of classifications,” it is also a “multidimensional distribution of socially effective forms of power (or capital ...) underlying social positions” (Wilkes 1990: 120; Wacquant 1991: 52). As above mentioned, “endowment of such capital, the struggle to acquire it, together with analyses of the use to which it is put” (to flux and change to better or worse positions in society), is the essential definition of Bourdieu’s social theory (Wynne 1998: 24).

To recapitulate, in Bourdieu’s innovative class theory cultural factors operate alongside economic ones with primacy given to neither, that is without setting them up as unworkable antithesis. However, as noted, for this space is at once “a field of objective forces and a field of struggles over the very criteria of group formation,” where each social agent possesses different amounts of capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) in different combinations (Wacquant 1991: 52). The nature of that social world maintains an integrative hierarchical structure and, by virtue of the initial handicaps, a ‘competitive struggle’.

Class habitus

Habitus has a special place in Bourdieu's class theory as a tool of research, not least because it allows "an *indirect* causal link between positions in social space and practices" (Weininger 2005: 90). In his explanatory scheme, habitus provides a primary mediation to access "internalised behaviours, perceptions, and beliefs that individuals carry with them and which, in part, are translated into the practices they transfer to and from the social spaces in which they interact" (Costa and Murphy 2015: 3-4). In this investigation, habitus allows us to explain how and why China's middle-class members "conceive and (re)construct the social world in which they are inserted" (Costa and Murphy 2015: 3). Let us look at a number of specific considerations with regard to what habitus entails.

Bourdieu, as a social scientist, intends to explain "how relations of privilege and domination are produced through the interaction of habitus" (Stahl 2015: 21). His explanation is based on the idea of class as a system of objective determinations in terms of class habitus —not of individuals nor class as a population (Stahl 2015: 21; Bourdieu 1977a [1972]: 85). A striking characteristic of the concept of habitus, is that, from its initial formulation, has always seemed like a "mysterious entity" (Lizardo 2004) or even a "theoretical *deus ex machina*" (DiMaggio 1979) that was able to give rise to an ontological debate. Beyond such discussions, habitus as a tool of research represents a fundamental attempt to "theorise human action as a dialectical relationship between objective structures and subjective agency" (Weininger 2005: 90; Stahl 2015: 21).

As Bourdieu and Wacquant indicate, the purpose of the concept of habitus is "escaping both the objectivism of action understood as a mechanical reaction 'without an agent' and the subjectivism which portrays action as the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention" (1992b: 121). With the idea of habitus, as we have seen, Bourdieu attempts to develop "a position that denies primacy to structure or action" (Wynne 1998: 23). Hence, this Bourdieusian concept "accounts for the fact that social agents are neither particles of matter determined by external causes, nor little monads guided solely by internal reasons, executing a sort of perfectly rational internal program of action" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992b: 136).

But, how does Bourdieu define the notion of habitus? Although, as Lizardo (2004) notes, early definition of habitus can be found in "Intellectual Field and Creative Project" (1968), it is in *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* —first published in French in 1972 (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu 1977a [1972]) — where we can find one of Bourdieu's earliest definitions of habitus that is almost contemporary with the publication of *Distinction*:

A system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of *perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems.

(Bourdieu 1977a [1972]: 95)

However, presumably one of Bourdieu's last and most definitive definitions of habitus can be found in *The Logic of Practice* (1990a: 53). Thus, habitus are

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, *structured structures* predisposed to function as *structuring structures*, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the

operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively “regulated” and “regular” without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor.

Therefore, habitus is “a system of durable [and] transposable dispositions” resulting from, on the one hand, an enduring occupation of a position or location in the social world and, on the other, a product of the conditions associated with particular conditions of existence of a class. That is why, as we explore in more detail below, to each class position corresponds a class habitus (Bourdieu 1977a [1972]). Further, these systems not are only “‘structured’ —by one’s past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences”— but also ‘structuring’ since “one’s habitus helps to shape one’s present and future practices” (Maton 2010: 51).

The habitus is defined as a set of internalized schemes through which people perceive, understand and evaluate the social world; or also, as “mental and cognitive” structures through which agents assess the world (Inda and Duek 2005: 8). Consequently, it is a “structured” and “socialised body” (Bourdieu 1998a: 81). In other words, it is a “structure” systematically (non-randomly) organized of dispositions which generates perceptions appreciations and practices (Bourdieu 1990a [1980]: 53).

Above all, habitus designates the crucial concept of ‘system of *dispositions*’ that “expresses first the result of an organizing action, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination” (Bourdieu 1977a [1972]: 214). As such, the notion of ‘disposition’ brings together these ideas of structure and tendency expressed by Maton (2010: 51) and the conceptualization of actions as the result of a dispositional understanding:

[As a system of *dispositions*] implies a view according to which actions are generated neither by explicit consideration of norms (that is, via the conscious subsumption of the action situation under a morally binding “rule”) nor by rational calculation (that is, via calculation of the relative risks and rewards likely to accrue to different possible courses of action). Rather, in keeping with pragmatist philosophies, a dispositional understanding implies that under “typical” circumstances, action can proceed on a pre-reflexive basis – in other words, without recourse to conscious reflection on rules or estimations of results.

(Weininger 2005: 91)

It must be borne in mind that the concept of habitus is therefore not interchangeable with that of ‘habit’ —that is, an action that “you do often and regularly, sometimes without knowing that you are doing it” (*Cambridge Dictionary online*). To the contrary, dispositions are spontaneous and inventive, and they turn to actions —i.e., social practices. This inventive feature suggests that we are not merely “pre-programmed automatons acting out the implications of our upbringings” (Maton 2010: 51). Rather, the habitus is differentially formed according to “an unconscious relationship” between a habitus and a field, that is, according to the relationship of the positions of the different actors in social space (Bourdieu 1993 [1980]: 76). As a result, habitus emerges as a specific and empirically mutable phenomenon according to each’s actors class position. In “The Production of Belief” (1986b), this relation is summarized by using the following formulation:

[(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice

(Bourdieu 1986b)

In elaborating this point, Maton notes, the formulation above can be unpacked as stating: “practice results from relations between one’s dispositions (habitus) and one’s position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of the social arena (field)” (2010: 51). This enlightening equation points out something of crucial significance for understanding Bourdieu’s concept of habitus: the evolution of habitus construction is not directly related at the “point of production.” Indeed, although the model of class structure established by Bourdieu is understood as a factorial space constituted by three levels differentiating locations in the occupational system, the causal processes giving rise to a specific class habitus are not done in functional sites such as the factory nor the labour market.

Rather, as Bourdieu describes in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977a [1972]), each class condition (that is, a set of conditions of existence) corresponds to a particular location in social space (that is, a particular combination of volume and composition of capital). Hence, the structures constitutive of a particular class condition (including the material conditions of existence) or a particular location in social space produce habitus. Unlike scientific estimations, Bourdieu argues, “which are corrected after each experiment in accordance with rigorous rules of calculation” (1977a [1972]: 78), class experiences illustrate locations in social space by engraving a specific set of dispositions on the individual’s condition. Further, in spite of habitus can be modified by new experiences, the initial formation of the habitus occurs with “disproportionate weight” in the context of each individual’s “early experiences” —that is, “the relatively autonomous universe of family relationships, or more precisely, through the mediation of the specifically familial manifestations of this external necessity (sexual division of labour, domestic morality, cares, strife, tastes, etc.)” —, which “produce the structures of the habitus which become in turn the basis of perception and appreciation of all subsequent experience” (Bourdieu 1977a [1972]: 78).

According to Bourdieu, our early material conditions of existence generate our innumerable experiences of what is likely or unlikely, reasonable or unreasonable, our aspirations and expectations, “that in turn shape our unconscious sense of the possible, probable, and, crucially, desirable for us” (Maton 2010: 58). With this, Bourdieu attempts to specify the conditions of existence within which the habitus is acquired by giving special attention to the economic and social necessity. That is why, in his emphasis upon social practice, Bourdieu does not understand habitus “as simply the aggregate of individual behaviour” (Jenkins 2002: 74). It is understood as “an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted” (Bourdieu 1977a [1972]: 95).

First, it must be admitted that it is not an easy task to stake out the boundaries of the notion of ‘disposition’. It might be inadequately understood as ‘attitudes’, but a “more plausible is a broader interpretation which includes a spectrum of cognitive and affective factors: thinking *and* feeling, to use Bourdieu’s own formulation, everything from classificatory categories to the sense of honour” (Jenkins 2002: 76). Looking at Bourdieu’s definition of disposition, “it expresses first the result of an organizing action, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination” (Bourdieu 1977a [1972]: 214). As referred to in the previous section, Thompson’s conceptualization of class as a “body of people who share the same categories of interest, social experiences, traditions and value-

systems, [and] who have a *disposition to behave* as a class” (1978: 85) is closely linked to Bourdieu’s understanding of ‘disposition’.

In short, Bourdieu defines dispositions as “an acquired system of generative schemes ... [that] makes possible the ... production of ... thoughts, perceptions and actions” (1990b [1980]: 55, in Weininger 2005: 92). Furthermore, the amount of these cognitive and affective factors is what Bourdieu calls a “generative formula.” The dispositions’ formula “enables actors to apprehend their specific situation and its elements as meaningful, and to pursue —typically without reflection or calculation— a course of action which is ‘appropriate’ to it” (Weininger 2005: 92). The regularity of actions in Bourdieu’s scheme appears to be result of unconscious mind —“an unconscious relationship” as defined by Bourdieu (1993: 76). However, Jenkins points out that Bourdieu himself appears to recognise in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*¹⁹ that consciousness *must* be involved with respect to the status of dispositions, and agents define dispositions in terms of their consequences²⁰ (Jenkins 2002:77).

Either way, it is equally clear that the capacity of these set of dispositions imprinted by a given experiences(s) of the particular class condition are *limited*, that is “durable in that they last over time, and *transposable* in being capable of becoming active within a wide variety of theatres of social action” (Bourdieu 1993 [1980]: 87, in Maton 2010: 51). Indeed, “the habitus is thus both structured by conditions of existence and generates practices, beliefs, perceptions, feelings and so forth in accordance with its own structure” (Maton 2010: 50). The habitus acts within this “unity on practices that are ‘phenomenally different’” which is the result of what Bourdieu calls “an obscure and double relation” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992a: 126). This “obscure relation” is further complicated because “on one side it is a relation of *conditioning*: the field structures the habitus ... On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or *cognitive construction*. Habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992a: 127).

As this remarks indicates, although Bourdieu typically defines habitus with reference to this inner-consciousness and practice (or, more precisely, the generative principles and strategies of consciousness and practice), it must be recognized that it also has an “outer” —Bourdieu’s concern with habitus is the problem of how this “outer” (the social) becomes “inner” (the social self or “second nature”) (Moore 2004, 2010: 110). Thus, habitus is “a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perceptions, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class” (Bourdieu 1977a [1972]: 86).

Finally, scholars such as Moore extend the conceptualization of habitus by examining the idea of class habitus. It is possible, Moore notes, “for instance, to talk about “class habitus” — habitus as a “collective consciousness” expressed in objectified form in styles of life and lifestyle choices (and also objective life chances) (Bourdieu 1984) and expressing different degrees of cultural capital” (Moore 2010: 110). Consequently, this unity of collective consciousness is fully capable of acting across different domains of social life. And “that is what Bourdieu means when he says that the dispositions which make up the habitus are the ‘generative basis’ of practices” (Jenkins 2002: 77-78).

¹⁹ “Each agent, wittingly or unwittingly, willy nilly, is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning ... It is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know” (Bourdieu 1977a [1972]: 79).

²⁰ According to Bourdieu’s footnote to *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977a [1972]: 214, n. 1).

Class practices

If in the previous section we identified that “the maps Bourdieu shows usually locate occupational groups and social practices rather than individuals” (Crossley 2010: 91), this section aims to explain the next step of the explanatory process thus entails analysis of how we move from the existence of collectives —i.e., a cloud of individuals— to a map of practices by analysing the notion of ‘class practices’. According to Bourdieu, practice —of which, as we have seen, habitus is a central component— is comprised of both practical and symbolic mastery, often expressed as a feel for the game and an ability to strategically navigate the given field (Bourdieu 1977a [1972], in Burke 2015: 65).

One of the capital assumptions underlying in *Distinction* is the premise that contemporary social collectivities are formed primarily in *the arena of consumption*. According to this assumption, lifestyle can be understood as a set of “practical metaphors” of class consumption (Bourdieu 1984: 173). By performing a correspondence analysis on consumption practices and preferences —“including those having to do with ‘canonized’ forms of culture such as cinema, art, opera, literature, etc., and those that belong to culture in the wider, anthropological sense of the term, that is, food, clothing, media, sports, etc.” (Weininger 2005: 93)—, Bourdieu is able to demonstrate “how diverse social settings and practices exhibit a stylistic coherence or thematic unity²¹ in the lives of embodied agents and in the lifestyle of collectivities” (Jenkins 2002: 78).

More specifically, Bourdieu demonstrate that different preferences and practices cluster isomorphic in different sectors of social space²² (Bourdieu 1998b [1994]: 4-6). He presents the essence of the lifestyle conceptualization thus:

all the practices and products of a given agent are objectively harmonized among themselves, without any deliberate pursuit of coherence, and objectively orchestrated, without any conscious concertation, with those of all members of the same class. The habitus continuously generates practical metaphors ... systematic transpositions required by the particular conditions in which the habitus is 'put into practice' ... The practices of the same agent, and, more generally, the practices of all agents of the same class, owe the stylistic affinity which makes each of them a metaphor of any of the others to the fact that they are the product of transfers of the same schemes of action from one field to another.

(Bourdieu 1984: 172-3)

Despite “external living conditions (capital) and internal disposition system (habitus) are the two core dimensions of Bourdieu’s definition of class” (Hong and Zhao 2015: 6), and based on this perception of habitus as a producer of practical metaphors, many scholars such as

²¹ One is struck by the analogy between Bourdieu’s conceptualization of lifestyle and Weber’s notion of ‘elective affinity’; Chomsky’s theory of ‘transformational grammar’, or Lévi-Strauss’s structuralist analysis (see Jenkins 2002: 78-9).

²² According to Weininger (2005: 93), “the various indicators of lifestyle exhibit a structure that is isomorphic with that social space,” or as Bourdieu prefers to say, “homologous” to, or simply “objectively harmonised” or “objectively orchestrated, without any conscious concertation” (Bourdieu 1984: 173). Based on Piaget’s (1970) approach, Bourdieu’s usage of the term isomorphic “does not refer to producing a “carbon copy” of the external world (field) that is market in the individual mind, but in the development of a set of flexible and transposable procedures, bodily and mental transformations, that are simultaneously a model for, as well a model of, reality, and which imply and correspond to that reality” (Lizardo 2004: 385).

Weininger consider that habitus, as a system of dispositional “schemes”, cannot be directly observed, and can only be understood explanatorily (2005: 93). In contrast to others who insist on the empirical persistence of habitus obtained across the minutiae of everyday life. For example, Bodovski states that although “habitus has a collective nature as a product of collective, class-based practices, at the same time, it can be observed at the individual level as a person’s attitudes, expectations, and dispositions” (Bodovski 2015: 42). Although it is difficult to distinguish between habitus and embodied cultural capital, especially with quantitative data, “the latter refers to a set of dispositions, attitudes, preferences, and behaviours that are unconsciously internalised during the socialisation process” —that is, “embodied cultural capital can be perceived as ‘what’, whereas habitus is ‘how’” (Bodovski 2015: 43). This dispute raises the issue of the possibility changing directly the habitus, and involves academic sociologists, as well as humanities scholars in such debates (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977 [1970]; Sallaz and Zavisca 2007).

The argument of this study is that since social agents internalise collective practices, these practices become “embodied” and, as a result, they can be directly observed at the individual level, as Bodovski argues. At the same way, this habitus can also be defined “as a ‘collective consciousness’ expressed in objectified form in styles of life and lifestyle choices (and also objective life chances) (Bourdieu 1984) and expressing different degrees of cultural capital” (Moore 2010: 110). In the same way that the horizontal mobility might be understood as the result of a cash conversion and reconversion of economic capital to obtain cultural capital in the next generation, dispositions appropriate to one field can be transform according to the logic of another field. In order to understand the similarities in habitus and lifestyle among the members of a group is capital the notion of “differential association.”

Although Bourdieu suggests a more direct link between position and disposition, the concept of differential association also suggests that individuals who have similar volume and composition of capital are more likely to meet, interact and form relationships (because, for example, they can afford the same type of housing, send their children to the same schools, etc.) (Crossley 2010: 93). The members of the dominant class, for instance, are inclined to develop a unitary lifestyle, set of dispositions and a tacit sense of their place in the world —or “class unconsciousness”— around what Bourdieu calls “the sense of distinction.”

As social inequalities are embedded in everyday practices, class habitus is mainly defined by its aesthetic expression that is nearly ubiquitous in everyday life. For instance, in *Service Encounters* (2008), Amy Hanser examines changes to service work in China and the nature of the social interactions involved by exploring the role that symbolic and social boundaries play in the cultural construction of social difference and class distinctions. Following Bourdieu, she examines how distinctions emerge in the course of social interactions. In the same way that Bourdieu demonstrates that each moment of everyday life of dominant class comprises an opportunity for the subordination of function to form, Hanser concludes that “our sense of what is right and what we are entitled do, not only reflect power relations in society but also create them” (2008: 8). In this way, Hanser follows Skeggs’ (1997) perspective of how class is co-constructed with gender —that is to say, in an intersectional or non-hierarchical manner— to redress Bourdieu’s conception of class, as we analyse at the end of this chapter.

On that basis, “daily habits and practices that appear to reveal “natural” differences in fact reflect social inequalities that are viewed through a prism of both difference and hierarchy” (Hanser 2008: 6). For Bourdieu, the subordination of function to form found in language, body language and even in the field of primary tastes in everyday life leads to reinforce both

difference and hierarchy. In the same way, the specific scheme underlying in each sector of social space is what manages the investment of economic and cultural capital in a particular manner that gives rise to the discursive coherence of a lifestyle “as a whole.”

According to Wilkes, Bourdieu, “in his use of three broad qualitative categories (*the sense of distinction* for the upper class, *cultural goodwill* for the middle class, *the choice of the necessary* for the working class), is able to make clear and unambiguous connections between class and broad dispositions” (Wilkes 1990: 120). That is why, “each class fraction being characterized by a certain configuration of this distribution to which there corresponds a certain life-style, through the mediation of the habitus” (Bourdieu 1984: 260).

Consequently, whereas the subordination of function to form is at the core of dominant class’s “sense of distinction,” the absolute priority to function over form is at the core of working class’s “taste for necessity.” The working-class habitus is “antithetical” to that of the dominant class since the working class’s members insist that “art carry a moral message, and to demand choices that evidence a conformity with the class as a whole (which are viewed as an implicit demonstration of solidarity)” (Weininger 2005: 94). As a result, they tend to consume *function-over-form* culture,

not simply because they lack the valued resources to appreciate products in the way demanded by the dominant [class], but because, following the logic of tacit deference to valued goods and practices, they accept what is imposed upon them by the ‘experts’ and ‘artists’ in the field of musical production and, thus, are dispossessed ‘of the very intention of determining one’s own ends’ (Bourdieu 1984: 386).

(Atkinson 2011: 170)

Indeed, Bourdieu provides considerable evidence in *Distinction* to indicate that “taste” in terms of preferences for certain lifestyle choices, represents a cultural counterpart to economic stratification (Hanser 2008: 6). Furthermore, Bourdieu continues a longstanding interest in social taste in his detailed account of how class and art might be articulated (Wilkes 1990: 119, ch. 6), and indeed argues that

[w]hile it is clear that art offers it the greatest scope, there is no area of practice in which the intention of purifying, refining and sublimating facile impulses and primary needs cannot assert itself, or in which the stylization of life, i.e., the primacy of form over function, which leads to the denial of function, does not produce the same effects. In language, it gives the opposition between popular outspokenness and the highly censored language of the bourgeois ... The same economy of means is found in body language: here too, agitation and haste, grimaces and gesticulation are opposed ... to the restraint and impassivity which signify elevation. Even the field of primary tastes is organized according to the fundamental opposition, with the antithesis between quantity and quality, belly and palate, matter and manners, substance and form.

(Bourdieu 1984: 176-7)

Although it appears to be “the omnivore is omnipresent” amongst dominant and dominated, Atkinson argues that, “not only the *genesis* but also the *differentiation* of musical tastes that, on the surface, seem omnivorous are wholly consistent [today] with the original model laid out in *Distinction*” (2011: 169). Although class habitus “applies to all domains of life, from ways of walking and talking to sports played, food eaten, books read or whatever,” but “nothing”, as Bourdieu wrote (1984: 18), “more clearly affirms one’s “class”, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music” (Atkinson 2011: 170). The dominant class or bourgeoisie, Bourdieu

argues, “express a taste for difficult and obscure forms of music, particularly classical, whilst the petite bourgeoisie below them betray their position in the middle,” exhibiting “a lifestyle born of the combination of an aspiration to the dominant class’s lifestyle, on the one hand, and insufficient economic or (especially) cultural capital to attain it, on the other” (Atkinson 2011: 170; Weininger 2005: 94).

The members of petit bourgeoisie are therefore inclined to a “cultural docility” or cultural goodwill (Bourdieu 1984: 321) as they all show a lack of “high” culture compensated for consuming “popularized” forms of legitimate culture (e.g. figurative art exhibitions, “light” opera) and engaging in cultural practices and activities while achieving one’s awareness of self-improvement. This way, they “aspire to the dominant lifestyle” and, at the same time, “distance themselves from the dominated but having insufficient means and dispositions to appreciate it according to the dominant definition” (Atkinson 2011: 170). In particular, Bourdieu demonstrate substantial differences according to possession of different levels and kinds of capital within both the dominant class and petite bourgeoisie’s conditions of existence. Those comfortable among the bourgeoisie through long tradition, hold to traditional cooking, antique furniture and conventional highbrow music, they are thus able to own objects of unique and valued quality (Bourdieu 1984: 265; Wilkes 1990: 120).

The question of the very meaning of culture and symbolic appropriation stands out clearly in the antagonism between the lifestyles and habitus.

The antagonism between the life-styles corresponding to the opposing pole of the field of the dominant class is clear-cut, total, and the opposition between the teachers and the employers (particularly between the lower and middle ranks of the two categories) is comparable to the gap between two ‘cultures’ in the anthropological sense. On one side, reading, and reading poetry, philosophical and political works, *Le Monde*, and the (generally leftish) literary or artistic magazines; on the other, hunting or betting, and when there is reading, reading *France-Soir* or *l’Aurore* ... On one side, classic or avant-garde theater ... museums, classical music, France-Musique, the Flea Market, camping, mountaineering or walking; on the other, business trips and expense account lunches, boulevard theater ... and music-hall, variety shows on TV, commercial exhibitions, the auction room and “boutiques,” luxury cars and a boat, three-star hotels and spas.

(Bourdieu 1984: 283)

This combination of ‘luxurious’ (the employers) and ‘ascetic’ (the intellectuals), which seem incompatible because they are ordinarily associated with diametrically opposed positions in the dominant class, converge at the mid-point which is occupied by the professionals and the senior executives. This “somewhat different combination of luxury and culture, by a strong integration into economic life” and by “an occupational activity which implies a modernistic, cosmopolitan lifestyle, with its frequent foreign business trips (by air), its business lunches and cocktails, its conferences and seminars” (Bourdieu 1984: 305, 309) presupposes a large accumulation of symbolic capital. Bourdieu continues analysing analogous oppositions within different petite bourgeoisie; however, one might be tempted to argue that Bourdieu leans rather heavily on the *volumes and composition of capitals* as key factors of each class’s and fraction’s lifestyle, but he also adduces internal differences in trajectory as determining the different “modalities” of “cultural goodwill” in petty bourgeoisie’s members.

Having constructed his social space on the basis of one set of variables in which each individual’s economic and cultural worth are located in —by providing a set of coordinates by

which we can locate them on a graph—, “Bourdieu then uses a further set of (passive) variables to locate dispositions, tastes, and the distribution of consumption practices via the individuals who subscribe to them” (Crossley 2010: 94). This correspondence, Weininger notes, “is mediated by a subjective system of dispositions whose ‘expression’ across multiple domains of consumption confers a semantic unity on the practices that warrants reference to coherent ‘lifestyles’” (2005: 95).

Nevertheless, “one must move beyond this provisional objectivism” and the conceptualization of social positions as “a static order” (Bourdieu 1984: 244). This position, which runs throughout Bourdieu’s work, is perhaps most clearly stated in

[c]onstructing a theory of the social space presupposes a series of breaks with Marxist theory. First, a break with the tendency to privilege substances – here the real groups whose number, limits, members, etc., one claims to define – at the expense of relationships; and with the intellectualist illusion that leads one to consider the theoretical class, constructed by the sociologist, as a real class ... Secondly, there has to be a break with the economism that leads one to reduce the social field, a multi-dimensional space, solely to the economic field, to the relations of economic production, which are thus constituted as co-ordinates of social position. Finally, there has to be a break with the objectivism that goes hand in hand with intellectualism, and that leads one to ignore the symbolic struggles of which the different fields are the sight, where what is at stake is the very representation of the social world and, in particular, the hierarchy within each of the fields and among the different fields.

(Bourdieu 1985: 723)

Indeed, the assumption of breaking with the objectivism forms the background to Bourdieu’s emphasis on the importance on symbolic struggles. The next step of the explanatory process thus entails differences of lifestyle can become a focus of symbolic struggles. These struggles are, in effect, aspects of class struggle and class fractions conflicts over one’s location in social space and the scheme or principles of that space. In the context of *Distinction*, these conflicts are struggles for distinction, in which members of those clusters seek to establish both the superiority of their peculiarities and an official sanction for them (Crossley 2010: 96). Further, the struggle for distinction is not only another context in which distinct class *habitus* is formed, but also provides a lens for understanding Bourdieu’s attempts to combine status and social class.

Field, struggles and symbolic violence

In order to understand interactions between social agents, class or class fractions, Bourdieu argues that it is necessary to examine the social space not only by locating the object of investigation, but also interrogating the ways in which previous knowledge about the object under investigation had been generated, by whom, and whose interests were served by those knowledge generation practices (Bourdieu 2005: 148; Thomson 2010: 67). That is why this section introduces the concept of field, a notion intended to distil his understanding of social space (or social structure), and the competitive struggle waged in it. In fact, according to Bourdieu, social space can equally be termed a “field of social classes” (1984: 345; 1991a: 41) or even a kind of field.

The concept of field is designed to “foreclose an overly structuralist interpretation of social space —i.e., one in which the individuals who “occupy” the various positions are reduced to the role of mere “bearers” of the structural relations that are encapsulated in them (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992a: 94-115)” (Weininger 2005: 95-6). As Thomson notes, the definition of Bourdieu’s *le champ* contains important elements of all of these three analogies: “the field on which a game of football is played (*le terrain* in French); the field in science fiction, (as in “Activate the force-field Spock”); or even a field of forces in physics” (Thomson 2010: 68). As this remark indicates, field is meant to recall a playing field, a battlefield or a force field, and more specifically “a multidimensional arena in which economic *and* cultural capital are both the objects *and* the weapons of a competitive struggle between classes” (Jenkins 2002: 142).

To see how these analogies come together in Bourdieu’s concept of field, it is helpful to give a summation. In *On Television and Journalism* Bourdieu defined field as

a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies.

(Bourdieu 1998c [1996]: 40-41)

In this context, fields are understood in terms of “the stakes which are at stake —cultural goods (lifestyle), housing, intellectual distinction (education), employment, land, power (politics) social class, prestige or what ever”— because “each field, by virtue of its defining content, has a different logic and taken-for-granted structure of necessity and relevance which is both the product and producer of the habitus which is specific and appropriate to the field” (Jenkins 2002: 84). On that basis, the different elements of the same lifestyle composition (clothes, furniture, holiday destinations, etc.) stand in a hierarchical relation to one another, giving rise to a hierarchical classification of the various lifestyles.

This, in itself, is not particularly new and “more than one commentary has compared Bourdieu’s *Distinction* with Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1931 [1899]) given their similarity with regard to an analysis that emphasises the symbolic importance of leisure to status” (Wynne 2000: 29-30). Veblen argued that “the conspicuous consumption (of goods, housing, clothes, leisure) is an important means by which higher social groups are able to make their status visible to themselves and to other” in order “to demonstrate their superior position in clearly visible ways, if status is to mean anything in increasingly large, urban, mobile, and egalitarian societies” (Lutzenhiser and Gossard 2000: 213). Moreover, Max Weber was also concerned with the *social legitimization* of status groups through customs and political/legal arrangements (Lutzenhiser and Gossard 2000: 213). Since “consumption is an integral element of social hierarchies in a number of societies” (Lutzenhiser and Gossard 2000: 213), lifestyle can be understood, according to Weber, as “the way in which individuals express/ elicit prestige —with it begin necessary that specific lifestyles be adopted by all those belonging to, or wishing to belong to, certain status circles” (Weber 1946: 198, in Lutzenhiser and Gossard 2000: 213). Although these status distinctions are reinforced and reproduced through customs, laws and rituals which, at the same time, maintain and reproduce certain lifestyles, particular status positions also can both “confer privilege and visit punishment upon

individuals as a consequence of their display of certain styles of life” (Lutzenhiser and Gossard 2000: 213-214).

Extending Veblen’s and Weber’s perspective, Bourdieu focuses on lifestyle from the habitus in order to construct his conception of social space in. While social agents find themselves “in a socially formed and sanctioned landscape where various styles of action, privileges and prohibitions are already given (as Weber points out)”, “it is also a world shared by other agents who are engaged in their own lifestyle-based status performances (Veblen)” (Lutzenhiser and Gossard 2000: 214). However, what Bourdieu adds to this account is his observation of habitus, cultural capital, lifestyle and social *horizontal* mobility according to “a hierarchical status of a lifestyle as a function of its proximity to or distance from the ‘legitimate culture’ in which the latter refers to those elements of culture universally recognized as ‘worthy’, ‘canonical’, or in some other way ‘distinguished’” (Weininger 2005: 96; see Trigg 2001).

Therefore, Bourdieu’s conception of lifestyle has important implications for the debates about class, consumer culture and globalization in contemporary societies. Lifestyle is “a fundamental business of social life —the making of social distinctions being a core interest, and consumption a primary means by which these distinctions are made and reinforced” (Lutzenhiser and Gossard 2000: 214). Indeed, this hierarchical status of a lifestyle or class-based cultural tastes can be understood, in Bourdieu’s words, as a “generative principle” with consumption patterns “expressing particular class conditions of existence” (1984: 175, in Lutzenhiser and Gossard 2000: 214). Consequently, the configuration of the canonized (is, legitimated) culture is the object of desire and discord for many and, as a result, it is in constant tension and struggle.

The aesthetic taste of social agents “with high cultural capital is used to secure positions of status in the social hierarchy” which governed by legitimate culture “through exercising a mark of distinction” (Trigg 2001: 105). What provides the principle for the logic of distinction is the habitus. It is reflected in a series of selected practices by the social agent in such areas as consumption, which gradually forms symbolic boundaries between individuals occupying different positions in the class structure and further legitimates this class structure (Hong and Zhao 2015: 5). This is how social agents “*learn* to consume culture and this education is differentiated by social class” (Jenkins 2002: 138). That is why, for instance, “a working-class household would not tend to be impressed by fashions such as nouvelle cuisine, in which the presentation of food is more important than the quantity on offer” (Trigg 2001: 106).

For Bourdieu, the process of achieving “distinction taste is always a negative phenomenon in which those higher up the social hierarchy will tend to distinguish themselves from those at the bottom: it is a process based on a criticism or differentiation from that which is popular (Trigg 2001: 106). There is, therefore, a constant tension and struggle deriving from the potential to obtain the most distinctive practices or objects. Trigg analyses the sociological model of the “trickle-down effect” to represent the difference between Veblen and Bourdieu over the tastes from the dominant class to the dominated class. Whereas Veblen argues that “the working classes, although hampered by a lack of resources, are subject to the drive of emulation, Bourdieu develops his notion of popular culture to argue that the working classes are resistant and opposed” (Trigg 2001: 108), leading to “cultural unworthiness” (Bourdieu 1984: 251) —in other words, a lack of capital and antithetical disposition— to the tastes of those higher up the social hierarchy.

With regard to the relationship between the dominant class and the dominated class, Bourdieu is particularly keen on the role of the middle class and how the “trickle up’ of tastes from the working class to the upper class allows the latter to outflank the middle class, whose pretentiousness leaves them confused by the way in which popular tastes are embraced” (Trigg 2001: 106). According to Bourdieu’s interpretation of the “trickle-down effect,” the most “distinguished” objects or social practices are seized upon by the dominant class —the ones with the greatest economic and/or cultural capital— who acts as “taste maker” (Bourdieu 1984: 247-56). Once such objects or practices become progressively “popularized,” the dominant class tends to abandon them in favour of new objects and practices in order to reassert the exclusivity of their taste (Weininger 2005: 96) while inevitably the middle classes remain wedded to a race to claim those forms of legitimate culture, which “is confined to amassing a knowledge of, and imitating, the existing ‘legitimate’ tastes of the dominant class” (Wynne 1998: 51).

Here, Gramsci’s notion of hegemony will then be key in making sense of the manner in which the active *consent*, which mostly has an economic base, of the subordinate classes to their domination is achieved (Crompton 1998: 43; Carroll 1992). On that basis, agents of civil society are co-opted “by the state in order to secure acquiescence of the subordinate classes and identification with the hegemonic world-order,” resulting in “coercive orthodoxy” (Katz 2006: 335; Persaud 2001: 65). Hence, as a result from a combination of consent and coercion, hegemony can be considered a certain lifestyle and thought that “is dominant, and is diffused throughout society to inform norms, values and tastes, political practices, and social relations” (Sassoon 1982).

By doing this, Gramsci rejects the base/superstructure metaphor of economic Marxism and replaces it “with an image of multiple relatively autonomous domains, including ideology and politics” (Atkinson 2015: 93). Also, he emphasizes “the pervasive importance of culture and ideology to the persistence of structures of class domination.” Culture, he argues, is neither neutral, “apolitical nor a mere reflection of the ideology of the dominant class” (Crompton 1998: 43), rather culture is where every struggle between classes are done; because class struggle is “always also a struggle between cultural modalities” (Hall 1981). Although Bourdieu admitted to having read Gramsci very late (Bourdieu 1990c: 27) —however, Gramsci’s language of hegemony and consent *look like* Bourdieu’s symbolic domination and misrecognition—, they have two profoundly different understandings of social action (Burawoy 2012). If Gramsci is too optimistic about the possibility of contesting domination by virtue of workers’ critical perspective —due to their position in production— and an “embryonic sense of an alternative that could be jointly elaborated in dialogue with intellectuals” (Burawoy 2012: 203), Bourdieu was too pessimistic “because resistance and challenge to the status quo are supposedly impossible” (Atkinson 2015: 75).

Unlike with the writings of Gramsci, Bourdieu demonstrated to having made a careful acquaintanceship with Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) —firstly, “Bourdieu’s conception of culture is highly reminiscent of that offered in Veblen,” and secondly Bourdieu uses Veblen’s concept of “conspicuous consumption” in *Distinction* (1984: 31, 55-6, 281-2) “arguing that the privileged display the abundance of their resources by ostentatious waste” (Gartman 1991: 425). Although Veblen did not dismiss the possibility of there being multifarious lifestyles, Bourdieu is the one that using the concepts of cultural capital and habitus “is able to build a theoretical framework in which the lifestyles of different social groups can be understood in relation to the social hierarchy” (Trigg 2001: 110). And “there

does within *Distinction* a recognition of contemporary change when Bourdieu, prefacing contemporary debate about new middle class, symbolic consumption” and globalization in sociology, argues that the new bourgeoisie is the initiator of the ethical retooling required by the new logic of the economy that moves beyond the production of goods (and needs and consumers), in favour of a hedonistic consumption, based on credit, spending, enjoyment and a new morals “which judges people by their capacity for consumption, their ‘standard of living’, their life-style, as much as by their capacity for production” (Bourdieu 1984: 310).

Here Bourdieu appears to detect signs of an alternative cultural conflict in which legitimacy itself is at play. Indeed, “the new service economy is productive of a new middle class which rejects the standards of an ‘old’ bourgeois ethic of duty and obligation in favour of a hedonistic morality based more upon enjoyment and the pursuit of pleasure” (Wynne 1998: 52). However, to think in terms of the dynamic nature of contemporary lifestyles evolves recognising the centrality not only of the habitus but also of the symbolic function of everyday practices and representations to Bourdieu’s perceptions of class struggle.

The aesthetic sensibility that orient actors’ everyday choices in matters of food, clothing, art, music —and which extends to things as seemingly trivial as their bodily posture— serves as a vehicle through a simultaneous classification of not only all others but also him- or herself as alike or different. As a result, consumption becomes a battlefield in which “classification struggles” over individuals and classes take place. Thus, “it is only through these constant, reciprocal acts of social classification that social *collectivities* are born: bounded social groups are the result of practices that seek to symbolically delimit “regions” of social space” by functioning at a pre-reflexive level (Bourdieu 1984: 174-175, 476; see also 1991b: 120; 1990b [1980]: 140, in Weininger 2005: 99). Thus, according to Bourdieu,

the basis of the pertinence principle which is implemented in perceiving the social world ... is based on nothing other than interest the individuals or groups ... in recognizing a feature and in identifying the individual in question as a member of the set defined by that feature. This can be clearly seen in all the classifications built around a stigmatized feature ... like the everyday opposition between homosexuals and heterosexuals, isolate the interesting trait from all the rest (i.e., all other forms of sexuality) ... It is even clearer in all ‘labelling judgements’ ... *catagoremes* in the original Aristotelian sense, and which, like insults, only wish to know one of the properties constituting the social identity of an individual or group ... The logic of the stigma reminds us that social identity is the stake in a struggle in which the stigmatized individual or group ... can only retaliate against the partial perception which limits it to one of its characteristics by highlighting, in its selfdefinition, the best of its characteristics ... by struggling to impose the taxonomy most favourable to its characteristics.

(Bourdieu 1984: 475-476)

Principles of social division function in producing groups in the same way as the logic of the stigma: by combining symbolic acts which highlight the best of its characteristics to self-definition and definition of the others according to its members. This implies that principles of division “function within and for the purposes of the struggle between social groups, in producing concepts, they produce groups, the very groups which produce the principles and the groups against which they are produced” (Bourdieu 1984: 479). In the end, he notes, what is at stake in the struggles about the meaning of these self-definitions and definitions of the others —and, consequently, of the social space— “is power over the classificatory schemes

and systems which are the basis of the representation of the groups and therefore of their mobilization ... which modifies the schemes of perception" (1984: 479). In short, a separative power, a distinction, *diacrisis*, *discretio*, is what draws "discrete units out of indivisible continuity, difference out of the undifferentiated" (Bourdieu 1984: 479).

In practice, this separative "power over the classificatory schemes and systems" is shaped by "their relative proximity to or distance from the legitimate culture" (Bourdieu 1984: 479; see also Bourdieu 1991b: 242; 1990b [1980]: 139; 1987: 11; 1990c: 135). That is why, social scientists are compelled to measure closely the distance from the canonized culture of everyday practices and representations such as body language or consumption choices, and the games of culture of distinction which "are played in and on the gap between the nominal and the real" (Bourdieu 1984: 304). The full importance of these symbolic indicators —i.e., symbolic practices and representations, and symbolic struggles— lies in the fact that it shows the boundaries "in which the relevant collectivities are demarcated from one another —that is, in which each identifies itself and its opponent(s)— along with the interests that can form the object of conflict (Bourdieu 1990c: 138).

In the same way, however, that the social space itself is free of any inherent boundaries, Bourdieu stands back from "direct participation in debates about where the boundaries around specific classes should be drawn" in an effort to understand class better as a contested concept (Crossley 2010: 98). Where the boundaries are, for Bourdieu, it is part of the class struggle. This is a key element in order to understand the essential determining features of class and power. Hence, "[the] power of imposing a vision of divisions, that is, the power of making visible and explicit social divisions that are implicit, is the political power par excellence: it is the power to make groups, to manipulate the objective structure of society" (Bourdieu 1990c: 138). That is why, the struggle of classifications is the essential division of class struggle.

It is therefore often forgotten that social scientists shape groups by treating individuals who belong to these categories as members of a natural group or class. However, Bourdieu argues that sociologists' attempt to reflect a reality is a purely 'theory effect' —"that is, it is an example of the way in which social theories shape the realities they purport to describe" (Crossley 2010: 98). Although "not all classificatory schemes have an equal likelihood of attaining social recognition" (symbolic capital) (Weininger 2005: 100), we must not forget that the power of imposing a division is the power of manipulating the objective structure of society. In analysing this critical issue, Bourdieu states that the effectiveness of the symbolic power, whose most exemplary form is the power to produce groups, depends on two conditions: the possession of symbolic capital and the degree to which the vision proposed is based on reality (1990c: 138).

Beyond the tendency to label, and turning to the subject of the conditions of the symbolic force and the structure of social space in formation of social collectivities, we can assume that class formation is a causal and continuous process which, notwithstanding ebbs and flows, builds upon actors' practices and representations. It implies that class boundaries are in no way pre-established: hence, objectives differences expressed in each of its constitutive axes reproduce themselves in an infinite number of possible configurations in the form of subjective experiences of difference (Bourdieu 1987: 10, 15). For the same reason, the boundaries that are established through lifestyles are not clearly demarcated, rather these boundaries are necessarily indefinite and blurred, they are undeniably permeable (Bourdieu 1991b: 234).

In the same way that class boundaries are in no way pre-established, lifestyle practices can appear to be largely a matter of free will, but they tend to cluster in particular patterns reflecting not only class differences —the most decisive variable in determination of lifestyle—, but also gender, age and other structural variables. Consequently, Bourdieu suggests, the different lifestyles, have no permanence, existing only in the stream of ongoing practices (1990a [1980]: 141) which performance hierarchically according to the canonized culture. People construct, therefore, their social behaviour according to a social allocation of *honor* (as it understood by Weber) on the basis of their definitions and interpretations of the situations they find themselves in. These, however, are just their interpretations or perceptions based on the symbolic veil of honor and practices, but they misperceive the real basis (both the economic and cultural capital underlying the different habitus) of these practices.

That is how the symbolic capital works (see Bourdieu 1991b: 238). In this case, such misperception is a “legitimizing theatricalization which always accompanies the exercise of power,” and which “extends all practices and in particular consumption.” As a result, “[t]he very lifestyle of the holders of power contributes to the power that makes it possible, because its true conditions of possibility remain unrecognized” (Bourdieu 1990b [1980]: 139). Insofar as this is the case, the misperception of social space —which characterizes both the dominant and the dominated, but to the advantage of the latter— is also “symbolic violence”.

Here, according to Cockerham (2013: 138), the merit of Bourdieu’s (1984) approach is that maintains there is a structural dimension to lifestyle practices —such as consumption practices— rather than individuals making random or uncoordinated choices on their own. In other words, “Bourdieu shows a clear preference for structure²³ over agency²⁴ as seen in his strong emphasis upon the effects of class hierarchies on behaviour” (Cockerham 2013: 134). In contrast to Cockerham’s statement, Costa and Murphy (2015: 3) argue that “the conceptualisation of habitus is a reflection of Bourdieu’s attempt to overcome the dichotomy between structure and agency whilst acknowledging the external and historical factors that condition, restrict and/or promote change”. This study on the PRC’s middle class aims to emphasize Costa and Murphy’s argument rather than Cockerham’s by taking into consideration both theoretical systems and human experiences, practical state and objective state as interdependent modalities of symbolic power.

Modalities of symbolic power: from systems of classification to the power of representation

While the most extensive portion of Bourdieu’s work on symbolic violence deals with educational systems, such violence is found in others field as well such as the field of consumption (Schubert 2010: 191). In *Distinction*, one of the most influential works in studies of consumerism, “Bourdieu discredits the idea of a *desinterested* sovereign judgement described by Kant, arguing that the aesthetic sense is never apart from any interest” according to aesthetic classifications which maintain and expand a system of domination in society (Schubert 2010: 191). As such, Bourdieu states, “[s]ocial subjects, classified by their

²³ Structure is defined by Sewell “as sets of mutually sustaining rules and procedures to the enactment of social life, along with resources, that empower or constrain social action and tend to be reproduced by that action when it occurs” (Sewell 1992: 19, in Cockerham 2013: 128).

²⁴ According to Emirbayer and Mische (1998), agency can be understood “as the process by which individuals recall their past, imagine their future actions, critically evaluate their present circumstances, and choose their behaviour based upon their assessment of a situation” (Cockerham 2013: 128).

classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.” In short, “[t]aste classifies, and it classifies the classifier” (Bourdieu 1984: 5-6).

The approach also lies easily alongside the work of authoritative social scientists within the grand narrative of class. Bourdieu expands upon insights of Durkheim²⁵ and Mauss (1963 [1903]) that categories in mind are social in origin to argue that “whereas taste would seem to be a personal quality, it is actually social” (Schubert 2010: 191). Thus, symbolic violence can be seen observed in seemingly minor practices, “such as might occur when an ‘uncultivated’ middle class or working class dinner sits an expensive restaurant with members of the upper class, not knowing which fork to use with the salad or which spoon to use with the soup” and the resulting “anxiety and embarrassment that arise with the misuse” of the cutlery “signify and reproduce both the agent’s position in an existing social structure and the legitimacy of that structure” (Schubert 2010: 191-192).

However, whereas consumption practices express habitus classifications —namely, pre-reflexive expressions such as a decision about which store to enter or preferences for a particular kind of music—, the objective classifications are the result of a clear codification “producing clear classes and making clear cuts, establishing firm frontiers” according to logical considerations or formalizations such as the statements of many scholars about the “crystallization” of China’s new middle class. A diverse set of social practices, representations and class formation phenomena can be analysed according to Bourdieu’s theory of class, those concerning both the “embedding” processes through which differences in the ongoing practices are converted into materialized barriers, and the processes in which “both external systems and human experiences, objective and subjective worlds, are interdependently considered and analysed” (Costa and Murphy 2015: 6).

Since Bourdieu asserts that the emergence of a (middle)class cannot occur without deep symbolic changes such as the ones which occur in social practices and representations, it can be assumed that codification implies an alteration in the way boundaries function, and consequently an alteration of their embedded symbolic power. For Bourdieu “politics is the site *par excellence* of symbolic effectiveness, an activity which works through signs capable of producing social entities and, above all, groups” (Bourdieu 1991b: 249). On that basis, Bourdieu notes, “a class exists in so far as —and only in so far as— representatives with the *plena potentia agendi* may be authorized to speak in its name” (1991b: 250). This implies that a class exists in so far as it accedes to the discursive realm. For instance, in Chapter IV, particular attention is given to the idea that discourse relies on the structure of social space by receiving from the group the power to form the group (Bourdieu 1990c: 138). On that basis, the fact that a finite set of individuals whose boundaries can be traced claim or expect to be member of a class or refer to the notion of “working class” or “middle class” automatically proves that the group does exist.

²⁵ Despite the lack of space to offer here a systematic comparison between Bourdieu’s theory of class and Durkheim’s thought, which would require an historical-analytic section to explain the social and intellectual chain that link them to each other, it cannot therefore be omitted the fact that Durkheim is the source of Bourdieu’s interest in social classification (Jenkins 2002). In short, the influence of the thought of Durkheim in Bourdieu’s works can briefly summed up in four aspects: “namely, the fierce attachment to rationalism, the refusal of pure theory and the stubborn defence of the undividedness of social science, the relation to the historical dimension and to the discipline of history, and lastly the recourse to ethnology as a privileged device for ‘indirect experimentation’” (Wacquant 2000: 105).

The linguistic designation of the collective articulated by senses of belonging or affinity —or, as a negative reference point, incompatibility— according to similarities (or dissimilarities) of practices and representations (that is, lifestyle) confers a collective projection on social actors' awareness of individual identity. In the same way, Bourdieu notes, that the working class exists in and through its representatives —who give it an audible voice and a visible presence—, “and in and through the belief in its existence which this body of representatives succeeds in imposing, by its mere existence and its representations, on the basis of affinities which objectively unite the members of the same 'class on paper' as a probable group” (Bourdieu 1991b: 251). As the ontological status of class is similar to the status of social space, class “does not exist ready-made in reality” (Wacquant 1991: 57) because it is built “on the basis of their similarities of interest and dispositions” of its members (Bourdieu 1987: 7).

To this extent, Bourdieu's conception of class is constituted through material and symbolic similarities of interest and dispositions that they are actually “material and symbolic struggles waged simultaneously over class and between classes” which act as a (trans)historically variable and “reversible effect of these struggles” (Wacquant 1991: 57). As we have seen, these material and symbolic struggles are defined “not by differing relations to the means of production [as Marx's theory of class claims], but by differing conditions of existence, differing systems of dispositions produced by differential conditioning, and differing endowments of power capital” (Brubaker 2004: 46). Thus, the discursive contribution “to the shaping and reshaping of social space ... must be credited with a power of ‘social construction’” in line with lifestyle differences: “part of the effectiveness of the linguistic designation of collectivities derives from its capacity to render overt social cleavages that were already given to pre-verbal experience, and thus, ‘familiar’” (Weininger 2005: 103). Further, discourses rely on the structure of social space since authorized spokesperson “receives from the group the power to form the group” (Bourdieu 1990c: 138).

Thus, Bourdieu argues that locations —including its corresponding dispositions— and discursive identity do not suffice to members of a class (or fraction) be entitled to take collectively action for the sake of common problems (or “class interests”) as a class in what he deems a “real” sense (unlike ‘class on paper’). Indeed, for Bourdieu, “real classes must be formed as a group and mobilized, and this presupposes representation in a double sense: it presupposes categories of class which function as social identities; and it also presupposes representative organizations who mobilize, organize and articulate the interests of classes” (Crossley 2010: 88).

However, Wacquant notes, the ability to proffer a properly political expression in the public sphere by imposing one's classification, far from being universally given to all social actors, is contingent upon possessing “the socially recognized competency and the sentiment of being founded to do so” (Bourdieu 1977b: 64, in Wacquant 2004: 6). On the one hand, “among the working class political judgments stem from the ethical springs of the class ethos in continuity with everyday reasoning” (Bourdieu 1984, in Wacquant 2004: 6) despite they do not feel entitled —due to their lack of cultural capital— to make political judgements. On the other, “among the bourgeoisie or dominant class they result from use of a properly political cypher applied to the specialized stances of political debate” (Bourdieu 1984, in Wacquant 2004: 6).

As a result, analysis of functioning of parties or the union and their work of *representing* the collective suggests that “the fundamental antinomy of democratic politics is that *the act of delegation* ... is always pregnant with the possibility of dispossession and even usurpation, and all the more so as the group represented is more deprived of economic and cultural capital” as

in the case of the working class's lack of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991b: 215, in Wacquant 2004: 6, emphasis added). The authority to speak on behalf of the class (as an "objective" form), maintain its boundaries, and mobilize its members is *delegated* to "professional politicians" that "are entrusted with the expression of the will of their constituents but pursue strategies aimed chiefly at one another" (Wacquant 2004: 6). And indeed Bourdieu argues that

[t]he political field is one of the privileged sites for the exercise of the *power of representation or manifestation* [in the sense of public demonstration – tr.] that contributes to making what existed in a practical state, tacitly or implicitly, exist fully, that is, in the objectified state, in a form directly visible to all, public, published, official, and thus authorized.

(Bourdieu 1991b: 215)

Within the political field, as a field for the performative representation of the social space, the power of social institutions to represent, nominate and fabricate symbolically class and its boundaries, and mobilize its members is characterized by a solid structure that should of course be able to do so in independence from any categorizing schemes of the social actors who are subject to classification by them. Thus, an illustrative example of Bourdieu's conception of the power of social institutions is the power to issue credentials of educational institutions as a "structural mechanism that mediate sociopolitical and economic forces while simultaneously reproducing fundamental principles of social stratification" (Naidoo 2010: 457).

As we have seen, "the efficacy of performative discourse is directly proportional to the authority of the agent that enunciates it and to its degree of congruence with the objective partitions of society" (Wacquant 2004: 7). However, the question in this respect is who does demarcate these "objective partitions of society" (or collectivities) from one another "to induce durable and recognized divisions"? The answer is that *legal frontiers* operate "at the highest degree of objectification and institutionalization" in terms of demarcating class boundaries (Bourdieu 1987: 13). Indeed, Bourdieu argues that, alongside the individuals struggles of daily life —for the power to "impose a representation of themselves through strategies of presentation of self"—, "are the properly political collective struggles" (1987: 13). Their ultimate aim is therefore to achieve "the power to nominate held by the state, i.e., the monopoly over legitimate symbolic violence, agents" such as politicians, who struggle to impose representations "which create the very things represented, which make them exist publicly, officially" (Bourdieu 1987: 13). Their goal, Bourdieu notes, "is to turn their own vision of the social world, and the principles of division upon which it is based, into the official vision, into *nomos*, the official principle of vision and division" (1987: 13).

Due to differences are established by lifestyle practices and individuals struggles of daily life continually contribute simultaneously to classify and be classified, law (*nomos*) acts as the official agency —namely the state's "principle of vision and division"— that is composed of "specialists" who produce, interpret and applied the *nomo's* codified symbolic system. This state's legal "official vision" enables to sanction any transgression by using "the legitimate use of physical and *symbolic* violence over a definite territory" (Bourdieu 1998b [1994]: 40). Appropriating Weber's formula on the state, Bourdieu understands, above all, that the state has a monopoly on imposing classificatory schemes (e.g., the power to issue credentials of educational institutions) and adjudicate the validity of all such schemes.

As "what is at stake in symbolic struggles is the imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world and its divisions, that is to say, symbolic power as *worldmaking* power," in addition to its

legal categorization, the state deploys a series of agencies dedicated to count and classify its population, and regulate activities, such as economic activities, kinship relations, migration regulations or labour rights. Such categorizing and classificatory system that emanate from the state generates, on the one hand, “gradual and continuous differences which structure the established order” (Bourdieu 1984: 480); and, on the other hand, however, “the state’s authority can itself become an object in such struggles, via the mobilized collective’s petition of agencies and bureaus” (Weininger 2005: 105). For example, LGBTQ community’s “presence or absence in the official classification depends on its capacity to get itself recognized, to get itself noticed and admitted, and so to win a place in the social order” (Bourdieu 1984: 480-481). Since recognition by the state is often the only way to achieve “an official definition of one’s social identity,” LGBTQ community struggles to obtain this official definition which will save “its bearers from the symbolic struggle of all against all” (Bourdieu 1991b: 240).

In addition to definition of one’s social identity, in recognizing “boundaries —even the most formal-looking ones, such as those between age-groups”—, the state also distributes “advantages and obligations, such as the right to pensions or cheap fares, compulsory schooling or military service” (Bourdieu 1984: 476-477). What emerges from this is a discussion on the modalities of symbolic power from the fluctuating boundaries that are generated through the play of lifestyle choices, such as consumption practices, to the rigid and regulated practices authorized by the state. Here the concept of the individual trajectory attempts to refine Bourdieu’s account of “class habitus to the level of class fraction by reference to individual trajectory” (Wilkes 1990: 126).

Consequently, Bourdieu uses the idea of class trajectory to argue that all social collectivities (more generally of class fractions) present an upward or downward trajectory which explains changes in the historical background of occupational or class structure (see Chapter IV further on). In short, in order to fully grasp the concept of class as an integrated whole, Bourdieu suggests, social scientists must analyse class as “historical artifacts” (1987: 8-9) by reconstructing the “historical labour” that has produced the class and social divisions (1991b: 248).

Fashioning dominations

Having sketched out Bourdieu’s class theory and class analysis, further on this section analyses other treatments of the conceptualization of the class structure. As we have seen, the legitimations of the system of social domination and subordination in Bourdieu’s thinking are constituted within and through the symbolic relations. Hence, power and relations of domination and subordination in the workplace are important in Bourdieu’s thinking, but the social world is delineated by all other forms of (symbolic) dominations inscribed in bodies, behaviours, aspirations, decisions and actions. At the same time, in developing this account of Bourdieu’s theory of social space, class has been seen as a concept fashioned at a number of sites beyond people’s work, just as much in their free time, education, sexuality, consumption as it is in relationships. In what follows, by analysing *Distinction*, and especially *Masculine Domination*, class is examined to firmly linked to elements such as region of origin, race and, gender to developing them further (see Chapter IV).

Bourdieu’s central contribution, as seen above, “can be said to have been his willingness to consider both culture and economy at once, without putting them in conflict with each other” (Holgersson 2017: 109). But, within the system of interactive factors, not all of them depend

on one another to the same extent. The principles of logical division, Bourdieu notes, “which are used to produce the classes are of course very unequally constituted socially in pre-existing social classifications” (1984: 106-107). Hence Bourdieu differentiates between the primary principles of division (the set of actually usable resources and powers: economic, cultural and also social capital) designating location in social space and secondary (such as country of origin or gender) deriving from demographic characteristics (Bourdieu 1984: 106-107, 114).

As a result, Bourdieu highlights, this hierarchical difference is due to “the volume and composition of capital give specific form and value to the determinations which the other factors (age, sex, place of residence, etc.) impose on practices.” The different factors in the system of determinations, therefore, constitutes a class condition that varies “greatly in their functional weights” and “in their structural force.” This causes that “groups mobilized on the basis of a secondary criterion (such as sex or age) are likely to be bound together less permanently and less deeply than those mobilized on the basis the fundamental determinants of their condition” (Bourdieu 1984: 107).

For Bourdieu, “in the ‘symbolic struggle of all against all,’ criteria based on gender, ethnic, age, or racialized categorizations has less capacity to achieve recognition than more ‘structural’ criteria such as class, which legitimates a relationship of domination by embedding classificatory criterion in a biological nature that is itself a naturalized social construction in the same way the ‘social arbitrary’ of gender domination is tied into natural differences or even converted into nature” (2001: 22-3, 19). On this point, we consider Skeggs’ contribution on how class is “co-constructed with gender” —that is to say, in a non-hierarchical manner²⁶— to redress Bourdieu’s conception of class. Consequently, in Chapter IV identities are not considered as “reflections of objective social positions which is how class is often theorized (if at all),” rather identities are understood as “continually in process of being re-produced as responses to social positions, through access to representational systems and in the conversion of forms of capital” (Skeggs 1997: 94).

On that basis, as “the impact of a factor such as gender on the habitus varies according to location in social space, and not vice-versa ... [t]he habitus is always ‘gendered’; however, the consequences of this (with respect to the practices that it produces) vary according to position in social space” (Weininger 2005: 109). Thus, for example, Bourdieu declares:

In fact, analysis by fractions would probably show that, in politics as in aesthetics, the differences between the sexes tend to diminish both when one moves from the dominated classes to the dominant classes and when, within the dominant class and no doubt also the petite bourgeoisie, one moves from the economically dominant fraction to the dominated fractions. Everything suggests that the refusal of sexual status, in political or other matters, tends to increase with educational level. Thus when the sexes have similar secondary or higher education, more women than men consider that membership in a family planning movement is a political act or that sex education is a political problem (the relationship between the sexes on the same questions is inverted at lower levels of education).

(Bourdieu 1984: 404)

²⁶ Skeggs claims that “we need to think against Bourdieu’s assumption that gender and sexuality are reproduced by the take-up of norms; rather, it is precisely the inversion of norms that is the product of feminist and queer struggles” (2004: 26).

Beyond the variability of primary and secondary factors, their importance in the formation of habitus and the explanation of practices is significant in Bourdieu's understanding of class formation. However, in later work, the Weberian concept of life conditions is adopted by Bourdieu to suggest that location in social space and life conditions are the main factors affecting the habitus formation, obscuring further determinants such as race or gender. The analytic strategy Bourdieu pursues in later works is to put aside the causal hierarchy attribute to primary factors, and focus on evaluating social domination as "historical artifacts" in class analysis.

Thus, in contrast to 1979's *Distinction* (1984), in 1998's *Masculine Domination* (2001)²⁷, Bourdieu writes on gender by exposing "the temporal differences between types of femininity, the practice of femininity and the different values attached to different forms" (Skeggs 2004a: 22). Indeed, in Bourdieu's later works, the Frenchman thinks gender as a "form of symbolic violence in the cultural field that produces transmogrifications (changes into a different shape)" that results from the combination of the habitus —internalization of gendered schemes and perceptions— and the relative autonomy of the economy of symbolic goods (including the institution of marriage).

This classificatory principle leads Bourdieu to argue that the "androcentric" ideal of femininity —that is, masculine domination— perpetuates itself within the latter "unaffected by the transformations of the economic modes of production" (Bourdieu 2001: 96). Despite there is no necessary biological base for such domination, this androcentric ideal of femininity has been effectively "naturalized" by asserting, for instance, that "the social *construction* of the sexual organs *records* and symbolically *ratifies* certain indisputable natural properties" such as the association of "phallic erection with the vital dynamic of swelling which is immanent in the whole process of natural reproduction" (Bourdieu 2001: 13).

That is why, the "unaffected" concept of gender is "highly distinct from class: built around a dualistic opposition, it has attained a rigidity and a permanence unmatched by any other classificatory principle" (Weininger 2005: 111). Accordingly, although "queer theorists have tried to think through the workings of gender *and* sex," for Bourdieu queers reproduce gender divisions in which there is always a masculine dominant —i.e., "queers families become normal because they always reproduce heterosexual gender roles" (Skeggs 2004a: 24). In other words, the symbolic androcentric scheme of femininity has been naturalized around a dualistic opposition (male-female) being incorporated into the habitus of every social agent regardless of one's sex and gender.

Focusing on the aspects of perpetuation of gender schemes across historical time, Bourdieu's later treatment of masculine domination reveals "the *relative autonomy* of gender domination" by treating "women's oppression as analytically independent of class ... in the processes of converting economic into symbolic capital (Fowler 2003: 470, 480-1). In contrast to his earlier treatment of gender as a "secondary criterion," this new approach to gender leads Bourdieu to a "cognitive revolution" (Bourdieu 2001: 4) based on "'history of women' which brings to light ... the *history of the agents and institutions which permanently contribute to the maintenance of these permanences* [of gender schemes], the church, the state, the

²⁷ Weininger highlights that, "[t]o be sure, *Masculine Domination* does contain remarks, reminiscent of the causal argument from *Distinction*, in which the gendered character of social actions is contingent on class location: "bodily properties are apprehended through schemes of perception whose use in acts of evaluation depends on the position occupied in social space" (Bourdieu 2001: 64). Nevertheless, these remarks are complemented by others in which the relation between class and gender shifts" (2005: 111).

educational system, etc., and which may vary, at different times, in their relative weights and their functions” (Bourdieu 2001: 83).

In other words, ‘history of women’ and/or ‘the feminine’ represents a new and important methodological tool in the understanding of social domination across historical times. Thus, the true object of a history of relations of domination (between sexes) is

thus the history of the successive combinations [different across historical time] ... of structural mechanisms (such as those which ensure the reproduction of the sexual division of labour) and strategies which, through institutions and individual agents, have perpetuated the structure of the relations of domination between the sexes, in the course of a very long history, and sometimes at the price of real or apparent changes.

(Bourdieu 2001: 83-84)

Indeed, “the androcentric unconscious ... and masculine domination has lost part of its immediate self-evidence” thank to feminists’ allegations starting in the late sixties and seventies regarding the fact that class and Marxism alone are not sufficient to explain gender asymmetries. Bourdieu claims, however, that “some of the mechanisms which underline this domination continue to function” (Bourdieu 2001: 56). Statements such as this clearly indicate that gender divisions are not secondary factors anymore, and the primacy of class as a symbolic factor of classification in *Distinction* is over. Once the primacy of class analysis is revoked, and the classificatory principles “can no longer be automatically interpreted” due to the intersection of “combinations of domination” (Weininger 2005: 112-113), class emerges as a principle of division “on the same level” as gender or sexuality in certain societies.

One implication of this is that gender asymmetries are intended as separate —but interactive— forces structuring social practices from other principles of “vision and division” such as class or race asymmetries. Such a position is becoming almost a truism in theorising social inequality(ies) in contemporary scholarly. Indeed, these intersectional relations in the social space between independent classificatory factors, which were first suggested by Skeggs in 1997²⁸, also appear in Bourdieu’s later works. In fact, class understood as a collectivity composed of practices and representations of social classification appears to be an uncertain category within the turbulent narratives of class. However, since Bourdieu stated in the introduction of *Distinction* his concern with the development of the Weberian concept of *Stande* or status, the question of the existence of and mode of existence of groups, classes, collectivities or individuals has remained at the center of Bourdieu’s class analysis to the end of his career.

Indeed, Bourdieu argues that social distinctions and classificatory schemes can be observed in a variety of social practices and representations including those traditionally associated with leisure and amusement such as cultural consumption, tourism or holiday making, sports and other tastes. These fields in social space, he argues, “can be examined for the degrees of cultural and economic capitals possessed by those who inhabit them, and the social positions and trajectories of such individuals can be socially and culturally mapped in society” (Wynne 2001: 29). Although this in itself is not particularly new as many scholars point —by comparing Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984) with Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1925) given their

²⁸ Skeggs’s “focus on how class is co-constructed with gender ... has even inspired the theories now better known by the name (which she dislikes) of *intersectionality* (Tornhill and Tollin 2008; Holgersson 2008; Skeggs and Wood 2012, in Holgersson 2017: 111; see also Aschoff 2015: *ch. 1*).

similarity in terms of the importance of the analysis of popular culture, lifestyle and the symbolic significance of leisure to status—, Bourdieu's entire approach to class in *Distinction* intends to offer an integrative program of empirical research as a move from a social space based on the relationships of individuals, classes and/or collectivities to the means of production, towards one based on relationships to the means of consumption. The upshot of his approach is that the attempt to integrate the structuralist and the constructivist's perception on class in a multidimensional conception of social space inspires new revisions of the grand modern narrative of class with important implications for the debates about class, consumer culture, gender and post-modernity.

According to our purposes, the primary interest in these debates is the increasing concern in the PRC's social space given to those fields of urban lifestyle that go beyond the occupational space and the increasing importance given to leisure in the emergence and development of a middle class's social identity. If we relate this approach to the so-called class crystallization in China today then we must be able to engage in an examination of this cleavage society or (middle) class crystallization which relates as much to social fields beyond work as it does to those fields themselves. Moreover, by using Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus in his class theory, and operationalising them in a way that allows for an evaluation related to trajectories of social (and/or geographical) mobility, the degree of class habitus needs to be calibrated to know to which extent these different accumulations of capital may relate to different forms of intergenerational transfer of privilege and disadvantage, social mobility, and differentiation in lifestyles. After 40 years of reform and opening up in the PRC, it becomes possible to evaluate the degree to which we may be witnessing the crystallization not of an urban middle class as such but rather the emergence of middle-class specific practices and representations and considerable inequality and increased stratification, challenged by forms of capital accumulation according to the logic of a consumer-oriented professional middle class, and what Gordon (1991: 44) calls "the entrepreneurialization of the self."

After having contextualised the most significant theories and debates about class in the general intellectual framework of contemporary Social Sciences, and having elucidated in detail Bourdieu's epistemological and methodological approach to class by illustrating the core concepts of social space, field, habitus and capital in his class theory and the currents that make up the current categorization of his work —e.g., from an intersectional approach—, in the next chapter we review the intellectual debates about the Chinese middle class both outside and inside China by identifying and analysing the historical and socio-political framework, and the discursive spaces in which they are expressed.

CHAPTER II

THE INTELLECTUAL DEBATE

The aims of this chapter are (c) to define the space in which the cluster of intellectual narratives about the Chinese middle class are generated in China studies; and (d) to review pertinent work on the debate concerning the standard criteria for defining the Chinese middle class. Such primary objectives should be coupled with the hypothesis of research design for the study, in this case with (h3) the current academic categorization of the 'Chinese middle class' reflects the diversity of thought in China studies; and (h4) the socio-political context and contestation have added a complex ideological dimension to the description of social groupings and structures in the PRC. As anthropological and sociological research on stratification, inequality and mobility in the PRC has flourished over the last three decades, here the goal is to analyse the literature on Chinese middle class and review contemporary work on this subject and comment upon its relevance to this research.

For over three decades, China's middle class has been the subject of much debate but little agreement. Class as socio-economic structure, class as performance (the rehearsal of identity), and class as ideological formulation are all involved in the intellectual debate that has emerged after reform in the PRC (Goodman 2014: 5). However, in order to shed light on the middle class's formative process, we can note that for the most part intellectual debate has centred on two important issues. The first is "definitional", and the second issue involves "a sociological debate" from an ontological approach over class in China today (Li 2010: 135-6). Therefore, this chapter distinguishes the various criteria for defining middle class from two analytical approaches: the consideration of the middle class more as a state-sponsored discourse rather than a social structure; and the conceptualization of class as a historical phenomenon embodied in the new imaginary that Chinese society is elaborating. Due to different criteria, scholars estimate the size of the middle class differently (Hong and Zhao 2015); and, due to the dual perspective we use (class as a state-sponsored discourse and class as a historical phenomenon), we can estimate the initial intentions of scholarly in China's social stratification. An understanding of these related issues is essential to make sense of the heterogeneities of the Chinese middle class, especially in attempting to examine the lifestyle and social practices and representations of such a group (Chapter IV).

As we have seen, like many other sociological concepts, there is little scholarly consensus on which criteria should be applied when ascertaining who belongs to the middle class (Cheng 2010a: 13). Consequently, "it is hard to estimate the size of China's middle class in a definitive way and to clearly describe its characteristics" (Li 2010: 152). We must admit, indeed, that is

not an easy task to provide a definition of a concept that has for decades accumulated considerable variety of different perspectives of scholars, journalists, Party-state ideologists and the average Chinese middle incomers.

However, one major obstacle for these differences is linguistic. First, the variety of terms that scholars use to refer to class and classes are rendered in a number of different ways in Chinese, of which two are most commonly used: 阶级 (*jiejí*), it is often translated as ‘class’ —with a politically sensitive word which comes from the CCP’s Marxist-Leninist ideology—, and 阶层 (*jieceng*), which linguistically denotes ‘stratum’ or ‘strata’ (Goodman 2014: 4). Second, the absence of distinction between plural and singular in the Chinese language further confuses the issue and, thirdly, in articles written in Chinese there is no way to express whether the middle class is a collection of different strata (the middle classes) or a coherent class (Rocca 2017: 4). As a result, some scholars speak of ‘classes’; others, of ‘strata’; and still other, of ‘groups.’ The construction of these categories, accompanied by contestation and conflation, is not simply a matter of academic concern but also one with socio-political and ideological implications (Guo 2008: 39)²⁹.

There is a consensus, though, among the public, consumers, Party-state ideologists, scholars and government policymakers concerned with the question of the emerging middle class that:

First, the middle class stimulates economic growth and contributes to the modernization of society. It is a force of stability, limiting the power of the rich and providing the lower classes with an opportunity to improve their condition. The middle class acts as a buffer between the ruling elite and the lower classes, reducing the chances of conflict between the two and limiting social inequalities. Second, there is an embryonic middle class in China, but it is too small and/or it is not a “real” middle class. Third, there is an absolute need to build a real middle class. The Chinese middle class is invoked to assume the role of an ideal class able, in a sort of circular movement, to “govern” China as well as to be governed by the Chinese government, which should, in turn, promote its growth.

(Rocca 2017: 3)

It is here that the agreement ends. Despite there is a clear agreement in China’s studies on the importance of the social, economic and political role of the middle class in social change, differences in scholarly discussion revolve around the definition of the middle class. The intellectual debate centres on how these three general principles mentioned above by Rocca lead to identification of the middle class and, in particular, which social groups should be included in the analysis (Goodman 2014: 96).

However, problems among Western scholars were noted with respect to identifying the emergence of China’s new middle class. As Cheng Li notes, despite the increasing importance of middle class in Chinese media and social scientists, “scholarly communities outside China have been remarkably slow to accept the notion that Chinese middle class has become a distinct socio-political force” (Cheng 2010a: 6). Cheng also notes that “with a few notable exceptions, Western scholars are hesitant to acknowledge the existence of a Chinese middle class, let alone explore its political implications” (2010a: 7). Dickson (2016: 20-24) has argued

²⁹ The most common expressions which refer to ‘middle class’ are 中产阶级 (*zhongchan jiejí*) – the middle propertied class- or 中产阶层 (*zhongchan jieceng*) -the middle propertied stratum-. Also, ‘middle class’ is often translated as *zhongjian jieceng* -intermediate class-, and *zhongdeng shouru jieceng* – literally, the middle incomer stratum-.

that Cheng's assertions on the CCP's resilient authoritarianism are problematic for at least two reasons. First, Cheng presumes that Chinese scholars offer more credible insights on Chinese politics and economy because they share the same perspective on the "distinct socio-political" nature of the middle class, and foreign scholars hold another more "slow" or sceptical (Dickson 2016: 23). But, as this chapter shows, there is an insightful debate on social change among China's specialists, regardless of their nationality.

And, as Dickson notes, the second problem with the assertion is that Cheng suggests that China "can only be understood in terms of its own history, and that the experience of other countries provides no insight into a country's political trajectory" (Dickson 2016: 23). However, Dickson claims that "no country is totally unique ... [and] comparison can still provide insight into why one option was adopted in one country and a different one in another country" (2016: 23). Beyond the debate about the "fast ascendance amid slow acceptance" of the emergence of China's middle class, the point here is not about who is right, but why and what phenomenon scholars both Western and Chinese seek to express by using the concept of *the middle class* (Rocca 2017: 11).

Although, some experts doubt the existence of a middle class in China because its scientific discourse not be considered as an empirical discourse, the fact that so many people in China "claim or expect to be members of the middle class or refer to this notion proves that the group does exist" (Rocca 2017: 10)³⁰. Further, observational work and case study material on the lifestyles (Goodman and Robinson 1996; Cartier 2008; Fan 2002; Li and Niu 2003; Sun 2008) indicates that a new social middle-class practices and representations emerged since the post-Mao era constitutes a new social phenomenon of the post-eighties' generation. The scholarly debate presented here aims to give a signification or "context" to these new social practices and expectations in order to *refigure* them according to the new global discussions and social perspectives.

Having now set forth these brief considerations on the scope of the middle-class definitional debate, this chapter attempts further on to contextualize it historically. As Rocca suggested, "the emergence of the issue of the middle class is not a natural, essential, teleological, unavoidable phenomenon but the result of specific events and developments" (Rocca 2017: 7). It necessarily implies discussing the framework of the sociological debate about social identity in China by taking into consideration its components and characteristics, surveying the discursive spaces that this debate has found to express itself, and identifying its *hidden agenda* and scope of influence.

2.1 THE RE-CONFIGURATION CONCEPT: THE GLOBAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MIDDLE CLASS'S EMERGENCE IN CHINA STUDIES

Although in the late 1978 the CCP determined to adopt a more market-oriented development strategy, the social structures that were put in place during 1950s and 1960s have continued to shape social mobility and individual life chances for successive generations in the PRC

³⁰ Many empirical studies have suggested that subjective social status is a more precise measure of social position and an important correlate of factors such as health in old age (Demakakos *et al.* 2008), health status (Singh-Manoux, Marmot and Adler 2005), middle-aged mortality (Kopp *et al.* 2004) or psychosocial vulnerability (Cundiff *et al.* 2013).

(Goodman 2014: 1). Nonetheless, the reforms of the 1990s led to economic growth, a dramatic increase in living standards, the first manifestations of a consumer society and the emergence of new social classes, new class relationships and new social practices and representations (Rocca 2017: 5). Thus, new social configurations in post-Mao era emerged as a result of the convergence of these two factors: “the intergenerational transfer of both privilege and disadvantage” put in place during 1950s and 1960s³¹, and the “cumulative factors” not only economic but also socio-political referenced by Rocca.

The emerging middle class posed a challenge for the China studies community largely. However, the most prominent PRC’s scholars who have written about the contemporary middle class in China are a sizeable group at CASS the Institute of Sociology (Lu Xueyi, Li Chunling, Li Peilin), at Tsinghua University in Beijing (Li Qiang and Sun Liping) and others well-known for their studies include Zhou Xiaohong (Nanjing University), Xiao Wentao, Li Youmei (Shanghai University), Li Lulu (Remin University) as well as Lu Hanlong (Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences) and Liu Xin (Fudan University) (Anagnost 2008: 504-507; Cheng 2010b: 60; Goodman 2013: 53).

An intellectual discourse centered on the emergence and characteristics of the Chinese middle class has also taken shape outside China. For example, David S.G. Goodman, Luigi Tomba and Yingjie Guo, all of them at The University of Sydney; Jean-Louis Rocca (Sciences Po), Ann S. Anagnost (University of Washington), Jie Chen (Old Dominion University), Lin Thung-hong and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao at Academia Sinica in Taiwan; Teresa Wright (California State University), Deborah S. Davis (Yale University), Cheng Li (Brookings), Alvin Y. So (The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology), Zhou Xueguang (Stanford University), and Wang Feng (University of California).

The middle class is a new socioeconomic entity that consists of many subgroups that differ profoundly from one another in terms of their family origins, capitals possession and social identities —such as occupation, geographic and family origins, gender and so on. Despite the heterogeneities of the alleged middle class, and to better review and evaluate the context of the intellectual debate about the middle class in China studies, I distinguish three waves, or phases, from the literature:

- The initial wave: from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s.
- The construction wave: from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s.
- The *re-configurational* wave: from the mid-2000s to the present.

This chronological schema is based on the analysis conducted in 2009 by Li Chunling (Li 2009b) using a database of major PRC’s academic journals and periodicals articles with “middle class” in title from 1979 to 2007. As Cheng (2010b: 58) highlights, the initial small wave of academic interest in the mid-1980s “reflects discussion of the emergence of rural industrialists in township and village enterprises.” The second wave, in the mid-1990s, represents the construction period of a discourse on the middle class in the PRC, “the age of the middle class” (Xu 2002). Sociological research went beyond the classical Marxist approach on class analysis and started focusing on the historical experience of Western societies in order to *construct* the middle-class discourse. This *construction wave* ends by the mid-2000s with both the publication of Zhou’s characterization of China middle class as the consumer avant-garde but political rear guard (*xiaofei qianwei, zhengzhi houwei*) and with the starting point of an

³¹ Goodman 2014: 18.

increasing number of scholarly publications focused on various subjective aspects of the emerging middle class. Finally, the third wave, most recent, and largest wave is indicative of this “surge in multifaceted research” in the mid-2005 attempting to approach the subject in an epochal change of worldviews and *re-configuration* of national and social views (Cheng 2010b: 58; Beck 2016: 5)³². Then, this three-phases schema is further developed to illustrate chronologically the intellectual debate about the PRC’s middle class and to understand contemporary social change in the context of a post-industrial —or global— culture and an increasing individualisation of the social structure.

2.1.1 The initial wave: from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s

The list of Chinese scholars who have written about the middle class in the PRC is a roll call of the country’s leading social scientists (Goodman 2013: 53). However, according to the content analysis on journal articles with “middle class” in title conducted in 2009 by Li Chunling (Li 2009b), the Chinese academia started the discussion of this social group in the mid-1980s. At that time there was no mention of a proper *Chinese* middle class neither a class narrative of social change in sociology journals. This initial small wave of scholarly interest was focused on the first socioeconomic manifestations of market economy: the emergence of rural industrialists in townships and village enterprises.

Cheng noted that “the term middle class was rarely used during the first four decades of the PRC”, it “remained foreign to the Chinese” (Cheng 2010a: 7). It was only later the CCP changed its policy to permit private entrepreneurship in 1977 did the term “middle class” begin to appear in Chinese academic journals and periodicals. At the time, “the state economy was greatly weakened during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76 and this problem was compounded with the return to the cities of nearly 18 million ‘educated youth’ whom the CCP had sent to rural areas during the Cultural Revolution” (Bernstein 1977; McLaren 1979; Zang 2008: 62). In order to maintain social stability and the political legitimacy of the CCP, “the government thus modified its policy toward private business to create a new labour market for urban unemployed youth” (Zang 2008: 62).

However, underprivileged or uneducated social strata individuals such as workers with a non-skilled and low-paid jobs, rural peasants and ex-criminals “took advantage of this policy change since they could not otherwise find a better job elsewhere in the cities” (Gold 1990: 157–78; Szelenyi and Kostello 1996: 1082–96). Many of the emergent rural industrialists —owners of townships and village enterprises in rural areas—, and the private entrepreneurs — newcomers to the Chinese cities— came from these lower status people. Unexpectedly, “these low status people became the backbone of a small or ‘individual business’ sector (*geithu*)” (Zang 2008: 62).

According to the PRC’s sociologists, these rural industrialists and urban entrepreneurs were not a proper middle class. They were “marginalized because of their humble origins, poor educational attainment”, and “because they often relied on trade speculation in making profits”

³² According to Ulrich Beck, in China “transformation means what China has experienced since the Cultural Revolution and the Chinese economic reform: an evolutionary path from closed to open, from national to global, from poor to rich, from isolated to more involved.” Metamorphosis of the world means, thus, “more than, and something different from, an evolutionary path from closed to open; it means epochal change of worldviews, the refiguration of the national worldview” (Beck 2016: 5).

(Zang 2008: 62). Beyond this, “the consensus among Chinese scholar was that the concept of the middle class should not be employed to describe these groups,” in large part because these ‘individual business’ “came from an uneducated group, the so-called ‘new rich’, both *baofahu* or *tuhao* in Chinese” (Cheng 2010a: 8).

A further indication of the nature of initiation over this period is the appearance of the term *suzhi*, often translated as ‘quality’, though translated more accurately as ‘human qualities’ by Goodman (2014: 110). In Anagnost’s (2004) study of the corporeal politics and the changing relationship between value and bodies encompassed by the term *suzhi*, she analyses the new discursive power of this concept when it became conjoined with the idea of population (*renkou*) in the economic reforms in post-Mao era. *Suzhi* is a concept which is difficult to define precisely, it was “originally a term referring to the individual’s inherited qualities, which are then cultivated to achieve excellence” (Goodman 2014: 110). While Goodman sets the origin of *suzhi* with state campaigns to introduce birth control (in the 1970s) and then education reform (1980s), Anagnost highlighted that “the discourse of population quality (*renkou suzhi*) may have first appeared in the 1980s, in state documents investigating rural poverty that attributed China’s failure to modernize to the “low quality” (*suzhi di*) of its population, especially in rural areas” (Anagnost 2004: 190).

In either case, what is clear is that “the idea of *suzhi* was added to each of those concerns to encourage individual development for the public good” and, in the process, “the idea of *suzhi* lost any idea of inherent quality and became instead a matter of cultivation” (Goodman 2014: 110; Kipnis 2006). Further, analysing the intellectual context in which *suzhi* developed has a significant effect, particularly on the understanding of the hierarchical distinction between high and low *suzhi* in middle class lifestyle and as a national goal (Kipnis 2006) (see Chapter III and IV).

Anagnost presents the intellectual context of the initial wave of scholarly debate of middle class and the emergence of *suzhi* as a political concept thus:

This idea [*suzhi*] represents a shift in state policy focus from regulating births to raising the quality of the population as a whole; in other words, a shift from quantity to quality. Anxieties about the low quality of the Chinese people entered into the culture fever (*wenhua re*) of the late 1980s, in which intellectuals debated the cultural impediments to modernization. By the early 1990s, population quality had become a key term in the party-state’s policy statements and directives to cadres, even as it began to circulate more broadly as a general explanation for everything that held the Chinese nation back from achieving its rightful place in the world. At the same time, as economic reforms increased privatization and dismantled the institutions and entitlements of state socialism, *suzhi* appeared in new discourses of social distinction and the discursive production of middle classness. *Suzhi*’s sense has been extended from a discourse of backwardness and development (the quality of the masses) to encompass the minute social distinctions defining a “person of quality” in practices of consumption and the incitement of a middle-class desire for social mobility.

(Anagnost 2004: 190)

Indeed, *suzhi* refers to “the somewhat ephemeral qualities of civility, self-discipline, and modernity” and it “marks a sense and sensibility of the self’s value in the market economy” (Yan Hairong 2003). In the PRC’s market reform, *suzhi* “abstracts and reduces the heterogeneity of human beings by coding their value (worth) for Development” (Yan Hairong 2003). Thus,

Rather, the notion of *suzhi* in the neoliberal economy compels a conception of the human subject as lacking, in need of constant readjustment, supplementation, and continual retraining (*zhongsheng xuexi*). As the notion of *suzhi* codes the value of human subjectivity as a crucial productive force for Development, *suzhi* is the concept of human capital given a neoliberal spin to exceed its original meaning of stored value of education and education-based qualifications to mean the capitalization of subjectivity itself.

(Yan Hairong 2003)

In this regard, *suzhi* is closely akin to the concept of *coloniality*³³ as a constitutive and specific element of the world pattern of capitalist power (Quijano 2014). As the concept of coloniality suggests, *suzhi* soon became a categorization of the “minute social distinctions defining a ‘person of quality’ in practices of consumption and the incitement of a middle-class desire for social mobility” (Anagnost 2004: 190). As a result, this powerful discourse of distinctiveness places individuals “in a specific position in the civilization ladder of Chinese society” (Tomba 2014: 85) (see Chapter III).

It [the concept of *suzhi*] plays a central role in contemporary processes of citizenship, simultaneously contributing to understandings of the responsibilities, obligations, claims, and rights that connect members of society to the state; to determinations of which individuals and social groups are included in this set of rights and responsibilities and which are excluded; to discourses on how to produce the “ideal” citizen as well as what to do about the less-than-ideal citizen; and to processes and institutions that produce and reproduce boundaries and gradations between different types of citizenship and citizen. ... *suzhi* is very much a part of contemporary public culture, being reproduced by numerous different social actors and in a variety of popular, as well as official, discourses.

(Jacka 2009: 524)

Interestingly, the very difficulty of defining *suzhi* as with the difficulty of “measuring subjectivity by its intendedness and quality for Development” (Yan Hairong 2003) among Chinese citizens can be an advantage. According to Anagnost: “it is this very insubstantiality of *suzhi* that allows it to stand in for a differential separating the middle class from its other” (Anagnost 2004: 197). However, the notion of *suzhi* forces the ethics of market through the acquisition of various goods, leisure activities and services, notably housing such as gated communities where “the lower orders only have access in service” —“the ‘other’ in question is not just the lower orders in general, but quite specifically the migrant worker” (Goodman 2014: 111) -.

To return to our analysis on the initial small wave of scholarly focused on the Chinese middle class, only since the mid-1990s has research on middle class started its way into China’s intellectual mainstream. However, according to Cheng,

Two factors have been particularly instrumental in increasing both public awareness of and scholarly interest in China’s middle class. The first is the Chinese business community’s drive to promote the image of Chinese consumers as potentially the

³³ Quijano’s paper “Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social” (2014) specifies that coloniality “is based on the implementation of a racial/ethnic classification of the world’s population as a cornerstone of this pattern of power. Further, coloniality operates in each of the levels, areas and dimensions, material and subjective, of daily existence and in a social scale” (2014: 285).

“world’s largest middle-class market”; the second is the Chinese government’s decision to “enlarge the size of the middle-income group.”

(Cheng 2010a: 8)

To the extent that sociologists might also be seen as a part of China’s middle class, it can also be seen as a case study that attempts to say something about a set of wider social processes associated with class and social change in China. As such it is argued that the relationship to and identification with the subject of the research on China’s middle class by its researchers is problematic when considered in any post-repression context such as the Tian’anmen Incident of 1989. However, the initial concern of the construction wave is to gauge and document the shifting stratification order which involved China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) as a “milestone in China’s reform and opening-up and socialist modernization drive³⁴.”

2.1.2 The construction wave: from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s

Starting in the mid-1990s, the construction wave represents the construction period of a discourse on the middle class in China commenced with “an uptick of interest in the middle classes of foreign countries” and “the surge of multifaceted research on the emerging middle class” (Cheng 2010b: 58-59)³⁵. Although the surge of multifaceted research on the emerging middle class began in this second wave, it was not until the beginning of the third wave in the middle of the 2000s, when more and more scholarly studies focused on subjective criteria - including size, composition, rate of expansion, and characteristics such as income, consumption patterns, cultural norms, and political attitudes (Li 2009b). The publication in 2005 of Zhou Xiaohong’s characterization of China middle class as “the consumer avant-garde but political rear guard” (*xiaofei qianwei, zhengzhi houwei*) (Zhou 2005) marks also the end of the construction wave as this section attempts further to illustrate.

It was after the Tiananmen Incident of 1989 and the open-door policy resumed that the interest in the middle class emerged in China’s studies. In the wake of the events of 1989 “the days of the CCP seemed numbered, many China watchers predicted the imminent downfall of the Party” (Dickson 2016: 1). But they were wrong. The CCP’s strategy for survival included “a combination of repression, legitimation and co-optation of new elites into the Party” (Dickson 2016: 7). The Party-state shifted its political agenda from class struggle -based on the empowerment of the state socialist working class-, to economic modernization -with the middle class as the main actor on the social stage-. But, as Guo points out in commentating upon apparently divergent trends in China’s social stratification,

the official social vision and the intellectuals’ ideal society have actually converged on common ground in the middle reaches of society despite their differences. This new model of society dominated by the middle classes —by whatever name— will necessarily differ dramatically from the Maoist two-class structure; so will the new status order as well as the nature and meaning of social life. But one thing has not changed; this society is still based on the ‘doctrine of the mean’ and suggests that the idea of age-old egalitarianism predominates.

³⁴ President Hu Jintao in Permanent Mission of China to the WTO (2011), *China in the WTO: Past, Present and Future. The Tenth Anniversary of China’s Accession to the WTO*. Available at https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/s7lu_e.pdf, accessed 18 October 2019.

³⁵ For example, He Qinglian 1996, 1998, 2000; Fei 1996; Qin 1999, 2002; Xiao 2001; Li 2001; Chen 2002b; Lu 2002; Luo 2002; Dong 2003; Chen *et al.* 2004).

(Guo 2008: 52)

Simultaneously, the Party “shifted its recruitment strategy” by replacing “the officials appointed in the Maoist era who had more ideological zeal than practical skills” (Dickson 2016: 13-14). However, in order to recruit the right members according to the new ideological and economic goal, the CCP leaders should first know well the candidates and the type of social stratification they would have to face in the future. That is why, in the mid-1990s, most of sociological research was directly sponsored by official organizations. In particular, the CCP leaders encouraged scholars to do research on the issue of the *Western* middle class.

Goodman presents the development of the Party-state’s policy at that time towards university teachers and researchers thus:

At the start of the reform era, university teachers were rapidly becoming dissatisfied. Compared to others with similar educational and social backgrounds, their salaries seemed to be going backwards, and many were forced to take second jobs. A small but vocal minority were involved in reform activity during the 1980s that stepped beyond the Party-state’s acceptable limits (Wright 2010: 72). In the wake of the events of 1989 in Beijing where both students and academic staff served in leadership positions, the government moved to improve salaries and conditions for university teachers. A new relationship with the Party-state was established, particularly during the late 1990s when university staff, as members of the state sector, were privileged through the processes of housing reform.

(Goodman 2014: 157)

Of course one could easily point the importance of Party-state in *social engineering*, a concept defined by Tomba as the specific policies and practices through which the state selectively promoted the creation of a middle class³⁶ such as housing, neighbourhoods and, in this case, research sponsorship (Tomba 2014: 89). However, the highly controversial question of the intellectual debate about the middle class is: “*who* makes up the Chinese middle class?” (Li 2010: 139).

Although in the 1950s, social sciences were prohibited for the sake of the historical materialism as the only legitimate discipline, Cheng Li noted that most of the Chinese scholars who conducted research on the middle class in the 1990s were sociologists who raised in the 1950s and 1960s (Rocca 2017: 31; Cheng 2010b: 59)³⁷. Cheng adds that this sociological research may reflect the fact that political controls remain in place over certain academic disciplines (2010b: 59).

The vast majority of the most influential Chinese scholars working on this subject were “sent-down youths” who were forced to spend many years in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. When they returned to the cities, Cheng highlights (2010b: 63), all the scholars belonging to the first generation of Chinese sociologists, spent time abroad —mainly in Western countries and Japan— as visiting scholars or degree candidates. Moreover,

³⁶ According to Tomba, “while social engineering generally refers to the control and manipulation of ideas and behaviours, [the emergence of an awe-inspiring Chinese middle class is] a very concrete form of engineering: namely, the specific policies and practices through which the state selectively promoted the creation of a middle class” (Tomba 2014: 89).

³⁷ Namely Li Chunling, Li Lulu, Li Peilin, Li Qiang, Li youmei, Liu Xin, Lu Hanlong, Lu Xueyi, Sun Liping, Zhou Xiaohong and Zhu Guanglei.

Compared with other groups analyzing China's emerging middle class, these PRC scholars boast many advantages. The time they spent studying at academic institutions abroad generally served to familiarize them with Western social science's cutting-edge theories, paradigms, and methodologies, especially highly technical quantitative surveys. Furthermore, their extraordinary experiences early in life (as sent-down youths) and their intimate knowledge of China's ongoing transformation provide them with an invaluable grassroots perspective. Finally, the fact that many of them hold academic leadership positions, such as department chair or dean, may increase their opportunities to conduct empirical research.

(Cheng 2010b: 62)

After the reform and opening, as Hong and Zhao note, "Chinese society provided a natural laboratory" (2015: 4) for Chinese scholars for both discussing the dynamic changes of social stratification and creating opportunities for proving their work value to society. From the end of the 1980s, the PRC's sociologists searched for political influence—that is, symbolic and economic capital. According to the new capitalist logic that Chinese society was facing, if they could demonstrate the importance of their research for the decision-making process, they would be in a position to gain more prestige and power (Rocca 2017: 76).

The increasing number of studies on the emergence of a middle class and social change in China went hand in hand with the growing influence of Chinese sociologists on the intellectual and official discourse. In other words, the PRC's sociologists have made their academic pursuits indispensable as a source of information for both the Chinese government and the public in China today (Cheng 2010b: 59). Indeed, the influence of Chinese social scientists on the decision-making process and public debate was real.

Rocca points that this "generational phenomenon" explains the technocratic ideology, the influence of the Anglo-Saxon academic community and the *modernizing*³⁸ vision behind the

³⁸ As Gilman explains, "from the late 1950s through the 1960s, modernization theory, dominated American social scientific thought regarding economic, political, and social change in the postcolonial world. Rooted in the contrast between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies, modernization theory posited the existence of a common and essential pattern of 'development,' defined by progress in technology, military and bureaucratic institutions, and the political and social structure. As the newly independent states of Africa and Asia and the older states of Latin America accelerated their industrialization after World War II, American social scientists used the term modernization with increasing frequency to describe this process. By defining a singular path of progressive change, the concept of modernization simplified the complicated world-historical problems of decolonization and industrialization, helping to guide American economic aid and military intervention in postcolonial regions" (Gilman 2003: 3). It should be remembered that postcolonialism is modeled on postmodernist studies, with which shares notions and approaches, and may be considered as a reaction to or departure from colonialism in the same way postmodernism is a reaction to Modernization theory or modernism. Also, sub-disciplines of postcolonial studies examine the effects and consequences of colonial rule on the practice of arts—in particular literature—, feminism, political ideologies such as anarchism, and Christian thought. It should be noted that, "unfortunately, the story typically concludes, modernization theory was hopelessly reductionist in its conception of change abroad, fundamentally conservative in its politics, and blindly reflective of the political and social prejudices of the midcentury American Establishment. As a result, it helped lead American policy makers into terrible mistakes, most notably the Vietnam War, and was discredited by the early 1970s. By the 1980s, modernization theory had become a cliché, dismissed as a symbol of the misinformed platitudes of the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson eras, in contrast to the weary wisdom of our own age ... Understood on its own terms, modernization theory was the fruit of American social scientists' effort to build a comprehensive theory not only for understanding what was happening in postcolonial regions, but also for promoting change

concept and the scholarly studies of Chinese middle class conducted from the second wave on. As a result, as early as the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, the debate about the middle class, its composition and its role in social, politic and economic change in China was then a matter of scientific knowledge. Many scholars focusing on the “Western experience” and the role of middle class in the emergence of democratization processes referred back to Modernization theorists, in particular Moore, Huntington and Lipset (Rocca 2017: 8; Cheng 2010a: 3-31; Goodman 2014: 153; Nathan 2016). From the postcolonial perspective, the “Western experience” and Modernization theory approach to analyse social change in China can be considered as an example of Eurocentrism and ‘coloniality of power’ in China’s studies on international relations and domestic policies³⁹.

Among RPC scholarly, the “Lipset thesis”, named for social scientist Seymour Martin Lipset (1922-2006), which holds that democracy is more likely in well-off countries than in poorer ones, was stood on its head (Reilly 2013). Cheng noted that Lipset, but Huntington also, recognized the importance of the middle class in democratic stability, which they attribute to moderate and institutionalized class conflict rather than more radical and potentially violent conflicts (Cheng 2010a: 19-20). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, thus, the common theme in China studies was: democratization is a prerequisite of China economic growth?

Cao (2009) highlighted that Modernization is a process of transformation from *traditional* society to *modern* society based on capitalist values. The interpretation of modernization theorists of what modern society is have produced many perspectives, with Moore, Lipset and Huntington⁴⁰ as the key thinkers. However, Cao notes, they all agree on nearly every detail of

that would make these regions become more like ‘us’-and less like the Russian or the Chinese” (Gilman 2003: 3-4). According to Chinese scholars, Rocca noted, “China follows the path described by the ‘post-industrialism’ theorists: in the course of modernization, middle incomers discover that life is not restricted to its material aspect” (Rocca 2017: 135). Rocca also noted that due to the influence of the Anglo-Saxon academic community, and in particular the American universities, on Chinese social sciences, the so-called: “Western experience” was largely assessed through the eyes of modernization theories, with Moore, Lipset and Huntington as the major references. As a result, “science is said to solve problems of public policy, and most scholars dream of becoming policymakers. This phenomenon also explains why modernization theories are supposed to shed light on the path forward. In particular, as Chinese intellectuals want, above all, to modernize China, they tend to promote an ahistorical vision of reality, similarly to the post-Second World War French intellectuals” (Rocca 2017: 76).

³⁹ According to Quijano, coloniality or *colonialidad* “is a different concept, although linked to the concept of colonialism. The latter refers strictly to a structure of domination and exploitation. The concept of colonialism refers to the control of political authority, production resources and labor of a given population are held by another of different identity, and whose headquarters are also in another territorial jurisdiction. But it does not always, nor necessarily, imply racist power relations. Colonialism is obviously older, while coloniality has proven to be, in the last five hundred years, deeper and more lasting than colonialism. But it was undoubtedly begotten within it and, even more, without it could not have been imposed on the global intersubjectivity, in such a rooted and prolonged way ... Eurocentrism has virtually led everyone to admit that in a entirety the whole has absolute determining primacy over each and every one of the parts, and therefore there is one and only one logic that governs the behavior of the whole and each of the parties” (2014: 285-286).

⁴⁰ Goodman highlighted that “Barrington Moore’s (1913-2005) observation of the relationship between social and political change —‘no bourgeois, no democracy’— has become a starting point for almost everyone (from outside the PRC) investigating the potential for China to become a liberal democracy (Moore 1967: 418 in Goodman 2014: 153). In his view, the middle class’s *bourgeois impulse* to modernization “creates a new and more autonomous social structure in which new elites do not have to depend on coercive state power to flourish, as had been the case under an aristocracy” (Cheng 2010a: 19). Goodman adds that “the logic of this proposal is that new social groups with growing economic

what modern society is. First, in an economy, the manufacturing and service sectors have an absolute advantage over the other sectors, reflecting the strictly hierarchical form of organization.

Second, in politics, the modern governmental system adopts a rational and secularized procedure in decision making whose maximum expression lies in a fully developed democratic consciousness among the people (Cao 2009: 8). For Lipset, economic growth and democracy are directly related. Lipset argued that economic development would enlarge the middle class and that the middle class would support democracy (Nathan 2016: 5). Based on this theory, many scholars from the second wave —both Western and Chinese— predicted that the middle class, as it grew, would exert more pressure for liberalization in the PRC (Nathan 2016: 8).

Third, modern societies are highly stratified in social structure, concentrate in cities with a high rate of social flow, based on social status and social roles which largely defined by abilities and achievements and, consequently, the function and status of the family diminishes (Cao 2009: 8; see also Chapter IV that analyses if the same scheme can be applied in present-day China). Rocca answers the question posed above suggesting that the Modernization Theory tries to prove that capitalism could give birth to a social group able to impose democracy on authoritarian regimes, explaining that democratization is a prerequisite of economic growth. For this reason, Chinese scholars, including those who have close ties to the political establishment, have also paid close attention to the political attitudes of China's middle-class individuals. From the mid-1990s the dominant view within the PRC's scholarly circles was that China's middle class was an unlikely agent of democratic change and a force of socio-political stability that had often been considered a privileged ally of the regime. As time went by, however, an increasing number of the PRC's scholars have begun to rethink the political role of the middle class and wonder if "yesterday's political target could be today's political ally, so too could today's political ally become tomorrow's political rabe-rouser" (Cheng 2010b: 72).

Fourth, following Cao's definition of *modern* society (2009), modern culture is characterized by its separation and independence of its inner sectors, all of them based on the core concepts such as rationalism, individual freedom, competitive spirit, and emphasizes on efficiency and functionality. Fifth, Cao added, the modern subject has a strong motive for success, exhibiting a high level of rationality and initiative in dealing with relevant affairs; they are open to new things, have a strong sense of participation in public affairs and trust in the world in which they live.

At the end of the 1960s, the core concepts of Modernization theory were revisited by its theorists in order to realize that the modernization in the West as the pattern of development

strength but less access to political power and influence pressure for change because they want political support for their activities". Samuel P. Huntington (1927-2008) considered, on the other hand, that a country's transition process to democracy is not related, alone, to a market economy. In his view, the democratic process often depends on historical and situational elements, both domestic and international (Huntington 1993: 27, 115). Cheng (2010a: 19) pointed that, in Huntington's view, "a country's transition to democracy often depends on historical and situational factors, both domestic and international Huntington believes that a middle class tends to be revolutionary in its early development but grows increasingly conservative over time. The newly emergent middle class in a given society tends to be idealistic, ambitious, rebellious, and nationalistic in its formative years. Its members gradually become more conservative, however, as they begin to register their demands through institutionalized means rather than street protests and become engaged in the political system so as to protect and enhance their interests."

may not be suitable for other countries, and it is not the only possible road to modernization. However, continuity is seen in the New Modernization theory, even if the inherited concepts and its basic features are now composed of diversified elements, they are still used by specialists. For example, a long-standing Western maxim postulates that there exists a dynamic correlation, or even a causal relationship, between the expansion of the middle class and political democratization by emphasizing the vital role of the middle class in democracy (Cheng 2010a: 19).

In *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (1991), Huntington outlines that liberal democracy is a consequence of the increasing social complexity that results from the development of the entrepreneurial, professional and managerial middle classes (Huntington 1991: 74). According to this consideration, it has been argued that the rise of China's middle classes presents the Party-state with a complexity that the latter will not be able to adequately manage (Goodman 2014: 155; He 2003; Tang, Woods and Zhao 2009).

However, as Thung-hong Lin indicates in discussing possible Chinese class formations of social democratic model⁴¹ and Modernization model,

[a]s an anti-Marxist approach, ironically, the political modernization theory agrees with the argument of "bourgeoisie democracy" raised by Marx and Moore. Both the Marxist theory and the modernization model assume that the bourgeoisie and middle classes are pro-democratic and anti-revolutionary forces; while the working class is the anti-democratic and revolutionary pioneer (Lipset 1959, 1981; Przeworski 1985; Rostow 1960; Kuznets 1955). The major difference between the two approaches is the anticipations of the transformation of class structure and of the fate of the "bourgeoisie democracy": the modernization model states that the growing middle class effectively mitigates the revolutionary force of the working class by rewarding the democratic parties and social reformers (Lipset 1959).

(Lin 2008: 108)

Democratization in East Asian countries such as Korea or Taiwan focused the debate regarding the Chinese middle class over the potential implications its development will have for political change in the PRC. While a majority of Chinese studies point that the Chinese middle class has largely been a political ally of the authoritarian regime rather than a catalyst for democratic change (He 2003), foreign scholars supporting modernization theories were mobilized to confirm that without a new class of 'enlightened citizens', there would be no chance of seeing a democratic system established in China (Cheng 2010: 20; Rocca 201: 76). Nevertheless, this possible political consequence of the emergence of entrepreneurs and the growth of the

⁴¹ The social democratic model, as Lin (2008) highlights, is another influential theory inspired by Marx that raises some counter-arguments of the class struggle under capitalism. This model, "usually traced back to the intellectual legacy of Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky from the late nineteenth century, proposes the linkage between the growing working class and democracy (Przeworski 1985; Giddens 1999). It argues that Marx is correct in terms of the impact of proletarianization, which stimulates the consciousness and the left-wing ideology of the working class. However, the social democrats criticize that Marx is incorrect in terms of the revolutionary preference of workers; instead the working class prefers a more democratic regime, in which the political equality and the class struggle are supposed to benefit the organized labor as the majority of the voters (Przeworski 1985; Rueschemeyer *et al.* 1992; Thompson 1963; Wright 2000). At last, the model also implies that the better organized the social democratic coalition, the better chances for the working class to shape the institutional arrangements of welfare state in favor of itself (Korpi 1978, 1983; Przeworski 1985; Esping-Andersen 1990)" (Lin 2008: 108-9).

middle class is certainly recognized within the PRC by both scholars and, with somewhat more concern, the Party-state (Goodman 2014: 153; Rocca 2008: 129-130; Li 2013: 23).

Arguably democracy building is the most important debate in the field of contemporary China's studies. Yet, the Chinese case contradicts the tide of history, as the social forces that economic development has helped create have no desire to see a competitive electoral system replace the current Party-state regime (Rocca 2017: 172; Tsai 2011: 136–58). But, “Why doesn't the Chinese middle class like democracy?”⁴² Zhang Li states that Chinese middle class that increasingly embraces liberal values still supports an authoritarian regime because its heightened sense of security (Zhang 2010: 7). It is the fear of an economic or military crisis or an internal power struggle that triggers a breakdown of order that explains that class's high level of expressed support to Party-state (Nathan 2016: 17).

In the same vein, Jie Chen and Bruce Dickson argue that, partly due to their close political and financial ties with the state and partly due to their shared concern for social stability, these new economic elites do not support a system characterized by multiparty competition and political liberty, including citizens' right to demonstrate (Chen and Dickson 2010 in Cheng 2010: 20). Jie Chen goes further to suggest that the proximity to the state determines the orientation of the middle class toward democratic change (Chen 2010: 338, 2013: 90). Further, empirical studies support this theory of substantial proportion of middle incomers owe their social status to the state as the Chapter IV attempts to prove by analysing the respondents'⁴³ social origin. To quote Jianying Wang and Deborah Davis on the perceptions of fairness of the PRC's middle class: “those who benefit from close association with the state are more likely to hold a favourable view toward the status quo” (Wang and Davis 2010: 170).

Indeed, Chinese middle class's proximity to the Party-government apparatus –by buying agents to influence the governmental process⁴⁴- is one of the four explanatory factors⁴⁵ indicated by Ann Chen (Chen 2002a) of why people are not convinced of the virtues of representative democracy. Secondly, Chen also notes that the PRC's middle classes see themselves as superior to the lower classes in nearly all relevant aspects; it is a psychological obstacle to their acceptance of political equality based on the one-citizen-one-vote principle⁴⁶. Third, in order to reduce the potential for the explosion of China's “social volcano”⁴⁷, middle class has often perceived threats from the lower classes and, along with the rich, have made common cause in resisting democratization and averting the collapse of the regime⁴⁸. And fourth, the Russian

⁴² One of the key questions raised by Ann Chen in “Capitalist Development, Entrepreneurial Class, and Democratization in China” (Chen 2002a: 411).

⁴³ In this study, ‘informants’ are also referred to as ‘respondents’, ‘participants’, ‘interviewees’, and so on. However, it should be noted that qualitative researchers use ‘informants’ for ethnographic fieldwork such as interview protocols, and/or focus groups, while ‘participants’, ‘interviewees’ and ‘respondents’ are usually considered to be individuals or groups who agree to take part in a quantitative research process.

⁴⁴ Chen, “Capitalist Development”, 411.

⁴⁵ These four explanatory factors were identified by Cheng Li (Cheng 2010a: 20) in Ann Chen's paper “Capitalist Development”.

⁴⁶ Chen, “Capitalist Development”, 417.

⁴⁷ Concept used by Martin King Whyte in *The Myth of the Social Volcano: Perceptions of Inequality and Distributive Injustice in Contemporary China* (2010).

⁴⁸ Chen, “Capitalist Development”, 413.

experience with democratization has prompted Chinese middle class to associate democracy with political chaos, economic breakdown, the mafia, and other ‘social evils’⁴⁹.

In parallel to these increasing studies and their attendant controversies on China’s changing social structure, research from a variety of defining aspects of the emerging middle class have documented the nature of this multifaceted phenomenon. Both Western and Chinese scholars categorize China’s middle class by employing a wide variety of objective and subjective criteria, they also express divergent views on the assessment of those criteria or, as Rocca suggests, a *hidden agenda* (Rocca 2017: 3). Li (2009: 47) identified various aspects including its size, composition, rate of expansion, and characteristics such as consumption patterns, income, cultural habits, and political attitudes. The differences in scholarly discussion centre on how these objective and subjective principles lead to identification of China’s middle class. This is undertaken in detail in section 2.2 with particular reference to the active role and growing influence of the PRC’s scholars in the normative question —political and performative— of China’s emerging middle class.

The surge of this multifaceted research on the middle class marks the end of the second wave, together with the simultaneous publication of Zhou Xiaohong’s two books in 2005⁵⁰. In *Zhongguo zhongchan jieceng diaocha* [Survey of the Chinese Middle Strata] (Zhou 2005), the Chinese scholar underscores the notion that the Chinese middle class lacks shared core values, the Chinese middle class is not about politics or democratization change, and so not a social structure in the way that classes have previously been understood in the PRC (class as a social group with a shared class conscious). Zhou’s characterization of China middle class as the consumer avant-garde but political rear guard (*xiaofei qianwei, zhengzhi houwei*) (Zhou 2005) indicates the loss of confidence in the ability of the ‘emerged middle incomers’ to act politically as a middle class.

As we have seen, as early as the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, Chinese researchers identified democratization with the emergence of an urban middle class (Rocca 2017: 174). Both democratization and the establishment of capitalism —the two key commandments of Modernization Theory—, were the most common frameworks applied in the literature by those attempting to understand China’s political economy of change (Goodman 2014: 32). If at the beginning of the 2000s many Chinese and foreign scholars and journalists contended that the middle class was potentially able to bring democracy to China, a few years later the optimist did not last long (Rocca 2017: 173, 78). Further, democratization theorists could have been taking a key component for granted when analysing China’s social change: civil society⁵¹.

⁴⁹ Chen, “Capitalist Development”, 414.

⁵⁰ *Zhongguo zhongchan jieceng diaocha* [Survey of the Chinese Middle Strata] and *Quanqiu zhongchan jieji baogao* [Report on Middle Classes in the World].

⁵¹ To quote Lipset: “Sakatchewan sensitized me to the relationship [between civil society and democracy] as I began to realize that this intensely politically active area, with a population of 800,000, had at least 125,000 positions in community organizations and government that had to be filled” (Lipset 1996: 7). As Nathan points out, here Lipset was alluding not to overtly political organizations, but to school and library boards, collectively managed grain elevators, cooperative stores, and the like-associations that, in a Tocquevillian sense, were training grounds for effective political participation (Nathan 2016: 11). This neo-Tocquevillian emphasis on the socialization function of civil society as the major role in building citizenship skills and the attitudes crucial for motivating citizens to use their skills is a reductionist approach, as Foley and Edwards note (1998: 11-12). Further, Lipset’s definition of civil society in *American Exceptionalism* (1996) is based on the “moral context” of Americanism, an

2.1.3 The 're-configurational' wave: from the mid-2000s to the present

The third wave is the most recent and it is indicative of the development in multifaceted research on various aspects of the middle class. As we have seen, this multifaceted research on China's middle class surged in the previous wave, and it reflects the need to understand the *metamorphosis* of China. As Chapter I has considered, Beck's concept of metamorphosis aims to comprehend the "radical transformation in which the old certainties of modern society are falling away and something quite new is emerging" (Beck 2016: 3). But, Beck also noted, it is not about an "emerging" middle class, it is about our perspective on the social space, "we live in a world that is not just changing, it is metamorphosing."⁵²

From the mid-2000s, the emphasis of both outside and inside the PRC's scholars on sizing and categorizing Chinese middle class blinds us to the fact that social change in China is an agent of metamorphosis. It has already altered our way of being in the world, the way we live in the world, think about the world, and seek to act upon the world through social action and politics (Beck 2016: 4).

According to Max Weber, Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias, the concept of 'social class' is mainly an imaginary phenomenon, linking objective conditions and subjective perceptions. Some groups of people define it as an ethos that constitutes a guideline for behaviours and actions. Individuals who desire to belong to this group have to respect this framework by respecting signs of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1979; Elias 1983).

(Rocca 2008: 128)

Despite Beck's perspective on class may postulate ambiguously the idea of the 'death of class' (see Chapter I), his perception on social change today appeals to grasp this metamorphosis of the world as a necessary approach to *refigure* the new beginnings, to focus on what is emerging from the old and seek to grasp future structures and norms in the turmoil of the present (Beck 2016: 1-5). That is why the question of the Chinese middle class is problematic beyond the RPC socio-political context and inequality issues. In particular, the 'middle class' lacks sociological homogeneity, as Guo (2008: 39) explains, it is not so much a hodgepodge of intermediate groups or an embodiment of desirable values, and a shorthand for the mainstream of a harmonious well-off society, or new master of the country in place of working class.

Zhou and Chen noted that the organizational actions of the middle class seldom target the fundamental problems in politics and social life —such as inequality, corruption, political representation, censorship or authoritarianism—, but rather issues of group interest concerning specific actors (Zhou and Chen 2010: 102[41]). In fact, a common example of the

association of rational agents, a set of associations, a "process of engagement between the individual and associations", and "an arena in which individuals each pursue their own-self chosen conception of the good life" (276-277) (Foley and Edwards 1998: 12). Because of the special circumstances of social change in China, Lipset's concept of civil society becomes inapplicable to urban middle class's associational life in contemporary China.

⁵² Indeed, as Beck stated, "change implies that some things change but other things remain the same — capitalism changes, but some aspects of capitalism remain as they have always been." Metamorphosis implies, as stated previously in Chapter I and this chapter, "a much more radical transformation in which the old certainties of modern society are falling away and something quite new is emerging. To grasp this metamorphosis of the world it is necessary to explore the new beginnings, to focus on what is emerging from the old and seek to grasp future structures and norms in the turmoil of the present" (Beck 2006: 3).

middle classes acting in defence of their own group interest is housing quality —the homeowners' movements (Zou 2005; Cai 2005; Chen 2009; Rocca 2013; Zhang Lei 2005). Jie Chen's study on the attitudinal and behavioural orientation of the PRC's middle class to democracy and democratization indicates that this social grouping is keen to protect their individual rights but reluctant to exercise collective action to challenge the state (Chen 2013). These studies suggest that there is "no hope for the emergence of a *real* middle class in the near future in China" (Zhou 2005 in Rocca 2017: 87).

Despite many scholars believed that the emerging homeowners' movement could give birth to an unified collective agency for democratization, after the outcomes of this phenomenon and since Zhao's assumption that the China middle class is a consumption avant-garde but a political rear guard, a significant number of sociologists continue to deny any class consciousness to China's middle class (Shen 2010; Cheng 2010b; Zhou 2008: 110-126; Lu 2010). At the same time, an increasing number of scholars believe that the growing number of NGOs and social organizations in the country will also foster greater middle-class consciousness (Cheng 2008; Zhang Wei 2004; Zhang Lei 2005; Zhang Wei 2005; Pan and Ma 2008). Therefore, in contemporary China it is difficult to provide empirical tests of association and causal relationships to illustrate to what degree this large and internally diverse group has common political interests and a shared class consciousness.

As a result,

Since the end of the 2000s, scholars have shifted their emphasis away from politics. Doubts arose as to the capacity of the middle classes to change the political system, and we will see that many sociologists have gone back to definitions of the middle class based on less controversial criteria like consumption. ... Some scholars have explored another approach, trying to establish a link between Chinese political "tradition" and the emergence of the middle class.

(Rocca 2017: 79)

Indeed, since the end of the 2000s, as Rocca highlights, many scholars have become less optimistic about the capacity of the current middle class to change (politically) China. The fact that fewer papers were published on middle class's political attitudes signals a decline of the intellectual debate about this issue⁵³. Despite the sense of hopelessness for the lack of middle class's civic actions and self-organize mobilizations, Chinese society still provides a unique *natural laboratory* for social scientists worldwide for discussing both micro and macrostructural relationships and the topics of middle class such as the interrelationships with the division of labour, social stratification and social mobility. Thus, scholars and public intellectuals have been engaged in serious academic and private research on and contributed to the public and intellectual debate over in two ways.

On the one hand, many Western and Chinese scholars shifted their emphasis away from the role of the *anesthetized*⁵⁴ middle class in politics and civil society in China, and they started using more objective identification criteria of the middle class. In particular, scholars and

⁵³ Seemingly, the middle class lost its appeal, its image of a young group of people who were entrepreneur and contestant turned into a group that was conservative with their assets, suspicious of political change and unwilling to empathize with the less favoured sectors of society. Middle class became an object of study difficult to classify and label, amorphous and changing, liquid and opaque that questioned, in a way, the infallibility of objective criteria.

⁵⁴ Nathan 2016: 14.

experts working for international institutions and multinational corporations, consulting firms or investment banks have published comprehensive objective and quantitative data-rich studies on the Chinese middle class for different reasons (see this chapter, see Section 2.3). For example, “mainstream scholars favour accounting criteria that are easily presented in nice graphs and scientific discourse” while “for the government, income is the most important element, because its objective is to stimulate domestic demand” (Rocca 2017: 4)⁵⁵. But also, a substantial number of research projects sponsored by international organizations such as ADB or the World Bank, and multinational corporations and consulting/investment firms such as McKinsey or BNP Paribas tried to measure the Chinese middle-class phenomenon.

On the other hand, other social scientists developed a multifaceted and inspiring research started in the previous wave on various aspects of the middle class. These studies were based on qualitative data or a compound of qualitative and quantitative data, with many notable examples such as Hanser’s empirical work on the new construction of ‘structures of entitlement’ —which make middle class and elite groups feel more entitled to public forms of respect and social esteem in settings like luxury department stores (Hanser 2008); the essays assembled by Li Zhang y Aihwa Ong in *Privatizing China* (2008) whose ethnographic fieldwork comprises practices in China everyday life as a novel mix of neoliberal and socialist elements, of individual choices and state objectives (Zhang y Ong 2008); the PRC’s scholars Sun and Zhang (2014) investigate the sociology of leisure on young middle class’s luxury consumption in Shanghai by taking into account subjective identity consumption and consumption behaviour to determine that identity is a more important factor in luxury consumption than class; Hird (2009; 2019) surveyed white-collar men and new meanings of masculinities in the different contexts of urban China; or Chen and Fan’s study on the divergence between subjective and objective status using regression analyses from 10 waves of nationally representative surveys from 2003 to 2012 (Chen and Fan 2015).

Recent authoritative work that reviews the many competing claims in scholarly has been completed by a number of authors, notably Goodman (2014) with his seminal book *Class in Contemporary China* (2014), and Rocca’s *The Making of the Chinese Middle Class* (2017). Also, Lu Hanlong’s proposal to replace the notion of “middle class” with the pragmatic notion of “small prosperity” (*xiaokang*) or “moderately prosperous society” (*xiaokang shehui*) represents a substantial and reflexive study because this concept falls within the traditional notion of “moderation” (*zhongyong*), a core value for the middle-class conceptualization. *Xiaokang* also represents an “enormously helpful” methodological tool to understand “the cultural and ideological foundation for China’s transition to a market economy in the reform era” and “also because it has been used to justify the state’s major policy drive to expand the middle class” (Lu 2010; Cheng 2010a: 23).

⁵⁵ Li Chunling (2010: 152-154) disagrees with Tomba’s assertion and she states that “in the public and government’s view, the middle class is mainly considered an income group and defined by income and consumption criteria. Sociologists prefer to define the middle class based on occupation and employment. There is a major divergence between the income-defined middle class and the occupation-defined middle class. From a sociological perspective, the income-defined middle class is the upper part of middle class. But as the middle class emerges, the income-defined middle class has become the image most representative of a middle-class lifestyle and culture-and will likely remain so. However, Li also notes, the sociological definition undoubtedly overestimates the real size of China’s middle class, while the public definition based on high income and consumption, usually underestimates the size of the middle class. That is why, “combining them will yield a definition that is broadly accepted.”

As Lu Hanlong noted, after Deng Xiaoping launched a reform program in the 1980s, China began to transform from the communist goal of establishing a utopian *datong* (commonwealth) society, where everything belongs to the public and everyone shares social resources and wealth, to the pragmatic approach of building a *xiaokong* (moderate prosperous) society — where all members and their families own their private resources and live a life based on law and governed by elites. *Datong* in its classic traditional sense is an ideal society and *xiaokang*, on the other hand, is a realistic and competitive society (Lu 2010: 108, 111). According to Deng Xiaoping, “*xiaokang* society means that the national income distribution should benefit everyone; in other words, in such a society there are no extremely rich people nor extremely poor people, but there is all around modest prosperity” (Deng 2008 [1979]). By echoing Phillips Huang’s point, Lu suggested that Chinese society cannot be explained fully by either Marxist proletariat theory or American middle-class theory because China includes a large majority of peasants and small capitalists (Huang 2008 in Lu 2010: 108). Consequently, it is essential that ancient and cultural factors such as *xiaokang* be taken into account in order to study China’s social structure and middle class.

Also, worth mentioning is *The Government Next Door* (2014), Tomba’s *re-configurational* approach to middle class contributes to understand the underlying logic of state-society relations in urban spaces in China. His book illustrates how the logic of state-society relations have taken on some of the characteristics seen in metropolitan areas in other parts of the world, in particular extreme residential and social segregation, what Li Zhang terms “spatialization of class” (Tomba 2014: 29-30; Zhang 2010). By analysing China middle class, Tomba *refigures* dynamic changes of social stratification, state-society practices in urban spaces in China and the characteristics seen in metropolitan areas in other parts of the world. Tomba points that everyday practices of power in the middle class’s neighbourhood reinforce governmental legitimacy —meaning daily manifestations of the rationalities of local level administrative action--by adapting and accepting principles such as segregation, social distinction, and quality (*suzhi*) (Tomba 2014: 3, 11, 12).

Practices of everyday interaction between the state and society often challenge the understanding of this relationship as merely antagonistic. While political practices make governing ideologies concrete, tools of domination, as they move closer to everyday life, have the capacity to adapt and differentiate. A particular rationality of government, such as the need to maintain social order, can therefore produce a multiplicity of governing practices. The legitimacy of such practices can be accepted or challenged, or it can be the object of bargaining, without necessarily affecting the overall validity of the principle that inspired them. ... The presence of the state in the neighbourhoods, either in the form of formal grassroots mass organizations or as the concretization of hegemonic political discourses through private or nonstate agents, is a strategy of legitimization of the present regime.

(Tomba 2014: 165-166)

Further, Anagnost’s analysis on China’s middle class’s values and Goodman’s consideration of middle class “more a discourse than social structure” (Goodman 2013: 64) represent two contributions of multifaceted and *re-configurational* work to this issue. Goodman considers that middle class is “an aspiration rather than a carefully thought-out idea” and, in agreement with Anagnost, its task is “inciting aspiring individuals no matter their social status to adhere to new social norms of middle-class identity often defined around consumer practices” (Goodman 2013: 64; Anagnost 2008: 498). To solve this problem, sociologists decide adding education, income and consumption as the decisive criterion to distinguish the middle class

from other classes. This approach shows that multifaceted perspective is the most efficient sociological tool to approach class analysis in contemporary China.

In conclusion, although it becomes possible to document significant differences in the intellectual debate about the emerging middle class it must be remembered that such differences are potentially impinged upon by the principal concern of Chinese middle class: its definition. Furthermore, Social Sciences are carried out in an historical context and their approaches and problems are an expression of that context (Westergaard 1974: 12). Therefore, in order to understand the approaches fragmentation and criteria heterogeneity of the intellectual debate about Chinese middle class, their different definitions must be analysed as an expression of their historical context. Having chronologically established the scholarly concerns of this social phenomenon, this examination of the intellectual debate lays the foundation for a controversial question in the PRC: what is the operational definition of middle class?

2.2 DEFINITIONS AND COMPOSITION OF THE CHINESE MIDDLE CLASS

The individuals and groups in present-day China who belong to the middle class are often just situated literally in the middle in terms of income, education, and occupation. Yet, this numerical definition may be too narrow and not sociologically rigorous (Hsiao 2010: 256). At the same time, understanding the formation of a class needs to go beyond of attempting to *objectify* this social category. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the primacy of relations over the “dualistic alternatives” (objective/subjective) must prioritize either structure or agency (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992b: 15-19). Chinese middle class, thus, must be realized through the interaction between objective and subjective factors and the complex mediation between economy and culture (Hanser 2008: 5). Here the question is: how is it possible to make objective the feeling of belonging to a group? (Rocca 2017: 80).

The construction of Chinese middle-class definitions and categorizations is not simply a matter of academic concern but also is related to the historical context and competing values, theories, paradigms and ideological positions (Guo 2008: 39). Certainly, the following picture emerged:

Not only do scholars, both Western and Chinese, typically employ a wide variety of objective and subjective criteria, they also express divergent views on the assessment of those criteria. Objective criteria, such as education, income, occupation and level of consumption, are all difficult to measure in China, while subjective criteria, such as lifestyle, manners, political ideas and identification with a social figure, leave plenty of room for interpretation. Information can only be obtained through large-scale surveys whose results ensue from the way questions are formulated.

(Rocca 2017: 3)

Indeed, the understanding of class in China varies with the observer, and this too is a marker of the social and political change that has emerged with reform since 1978 (Goodman 2014: 5; Li 2010: 55). However, the various different perspectives of academic sociologists on class have commonalities, overlap and are necessarily related (Goodman 2014: 5). Usually, as Li Chunling, from the CASS Institute of Sociology has point out, four criteria are used to define the middle class in China: income, occupation, education, and consumption. A member of the middle class

should be a person holding a professional or managerial job with relatively high and stable income. Further, a middle-class individual should have received a higher education and be able to afford a comfortable lifestyle with a relatively high standard of living (Li 2010: 139-140).

These four criteria and the “cumulative factors” of the emergence of the middle class in China are inherently linked. The cumulative factors to construct a “social *middlization*” (*zhongchanhua*) or “middle class-ness”⁵⁶ are the socio-political, economic, cultural and historic phenomena converged in a very short period of time, from the middle of the 1990s to the end of the 2000s. The cumulative factors identified are: the globalisation (the PRC’s integration with the world economy) and the rapid socioeconomic development over three decades; an income growth; the construction of a discourse on the middle class linked with the desire to civilize China; socialist legacies; the legitimization of the present State-party regime, and the expectation that political reform in China will be led by the middle class (the emergence of an expanding civil society) (Anagnost 2008; Guo 2013; Wright 2010: 2; Rocca 2017; Tomba 2014). It may be convenient to analyse China’s middle-class definition and composition in this way, by linking Li Chunling’s four criteria and these cumulative factors.

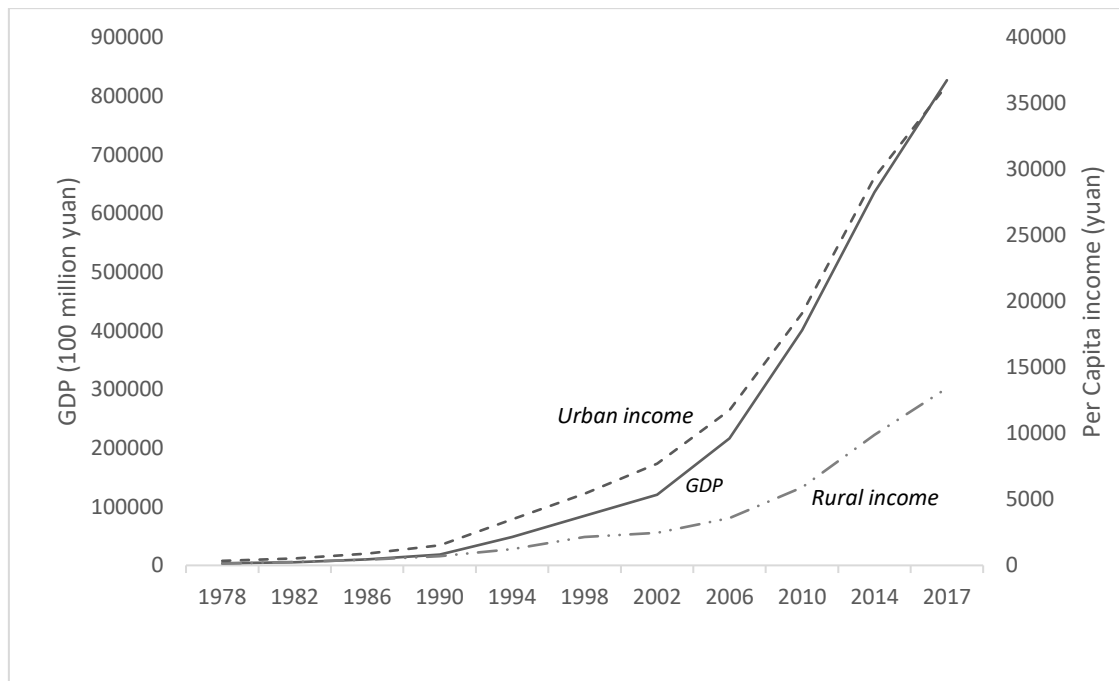
2.2.1 Urbanization, economic and income growth

Many scholars consider that *stable-and-fast* economic growth and increased income from the middle of the 1990s to the end of the 2000s were intrinsically associated with the emergence of China’s middle class. Figure 2.1 illustrates China’s GDP growth and per capita annual disposable income of urban and rural household growth since 1978 until 2017. It should be noted, although, that GDP, as Castells states, is “a completely arbitrary measure that was, historically, a provisional statistical measure that Simon Kuznets developed in 1938 in the United States simply to measure how the economy was doing during the Depression” (2017: 69). Not only in the PRC, GDP is not an objective measure, “GDP is a statistical measure that is historically situated, which has been refined and reformed many, many times to the point that we now don’t know exactly what the definition of GDP is, or on which calculations it is based” (Castells 2017: 69). However, the aim of this chapter is not measuring economic growth and accumulation of material wealth, but rather reviewing pertinent work on the debate concerning the standard criteria for defining middle class, and identifying the hidden agenda and discursive spaces in which the concept of middle class in China has been expressed itself. As most of the studies based on objective criteria have been using GDP, this section adopts GDP as an additional statistical variable that, along with urban and rural income, tends to indicate a trend in China’s studies on middle class —towards using such variables in defining middle class members—, but not to set GDP as an objective parameter. In addition, it should

⁵⁶ Whereas Wynne’s concept of middle class-ness refers to “very different leisure practices and construct social position through the promotion of a particular style of life related to the acquisition of cultural rather than economic capital” (Wynne 1998: 141). Lu Hanlong’s concept of “middlization”, however, “indicates two fundamental changes in the economic development of modern societies: the first is that manpower, or human resources, has become a productivity factor beyond capital; the other is the importance of consumer to production—consumers have become a driving force for economic activities, even surpassing direct producers in importance. Human rights have played a more important role than property rights, and consumers have become more important than producers” (Lu 2010: 105). The two concepts might suggest that middle class have become a kind of ideology. In the case of China, the middle-class ideals have “the same meaning as *xiaokang* (a middlization society, also known as a moderately prosperous, or reasonably well-off, society)” (Lu 2010: 107).

be remembered, as Rocca notes (2017: 3), that the so-called ‘objective criteria’ “such as education, income, occupation and level of consumption, are all difficult to measure in China.”

Figure 2.1. GDP and family income in the PRC, 1978-2017



Source: Li 2010: 137; National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBSC). *China Statistical Yearbook* (2001, 2015 and 2018 editions) and author's calculation⁵⁷.

However, class in China is best understood in terms of urbanization and inequalities (of geographic origin, power, status, and so on), rather than solely in terms of economic indicators,

Although the establishment of the People's Republic came justifiably clothed in the rhetoric of revolution, in practice 1949 also institutionalized not only the rule of the new revolutionary elite but also to some extent the continuation of the social structure as it existed immediately before 1949. While the changes of late 1978 started a process that liberated those regarded as remnant class enemies from the old (pre-1949) society, economic growth and social change has in the longer term privileged still further many of those who became privileged in elite and essentially middle-class positions during the PRC's first thirty years. Indeed, one key determinant of class profiles would seem to be a high degree of path dependence, to which education, wealth, political power and social status all contribute.

(Goodman 2014: 6-7)

Figure 2.1 illustrates the PRC's urban income growth over the last four decades, but alongside this fast-economic growth, the difference between urban and rural per capita family income has not increased significantly. The vast income disparity between urban and rural households in 1978 has been confirmed for over four decades. According to China Statistical Yearbook 2018, an annual national household survey prepared and provided by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the difference between the family income in urban households (343,4 yuan) and rural

⁵⁷ Guojia tongji ju [National Bureau of Statistics of China, NBSC]. *Zhongguo Tongji Nianjian* [China Statistical Yearbook] (2001, 2015 and 2018 editions). Beijing: China Statistics Press. Available at: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/ENGLISH/Statisticaldata/AnnualData/>, accessed 18 October 2019.

areas (134 yuan) was 209.4 yuan in 1978; nearly forty years after, in 2017, the difference between the family income in urban households (36.396 yuan) and rural areas (13.432 yuan) was 9.532 yuan. In other words, in 1978 the difference between per capita family income for urban and rural areas was more than twice (64 per cent), and by 2017 it had increased to 67,5 per cent, only a 3,5 per cent increase. The difference between urban and rural per capita family income has only increased 3,5 per cent, but urban income is still more than double the average of the rural income.

In 1978 China's GDP was only 364.5 billion Chinese yuan, but it reached 82,712.1 billion yuan by 2017, nearly two hundred thirty times the 1978 figure. Although the Chinese economy growth rate in 2019 was the weakest since the first quarter of 1992, the average annual economic growth over forty years (1978-2018) was 9.5 per cent and overtook the United States to become the world's largest economy according to the purchasing power parity measure in 2014 (Fan, Ma and Wang 2019: 8). Rapid China's GDP growth lifted hundreds of millions of Chinese from poverty, but "the improvement of people's living standards owed more to increased nonagricultural employment than to higher wages" (Garnaut, Song and Cai 2018: 17).

Strong employment growth, due to rapid economic growth, was the key factor in achieving 40-year success toward marketization in China. However, as many scholars suggest, the major significant socio-economic change with reform has been "dramatically increased urbanization and income inequality" (Goodman 2014: 2). The point here is that this finding (income inequality) runs counter to the empirical indicators provided by Figure 2.1 (the difference between urban and rural per capita family income has not increased significantly). Why do many scholars and economic studies indicate that China's dramatic economic growth and liberalization have increased income inequality if the difference between urban and rural family income have remained almost unchanged since 1978?

To be sure, one may raise questions regarding the reliability of the survey prepared and provided by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the PRC. Most obviously, it is possible that the unchanged difference between urban and rural family income is because the "proletarianization of urban farmers in the urban contexts of exacerbating inequalities" (Shin 2015). Despite "a widening income gap in most of the reform period", the increase in employment helped to "disperse the results of reform" and "so helped to win the legitimacy of that reform and opening-up" (Garnaut, Song and Cai 2018: 17) as a "delicate balance between market dynamism and social instability" (Anagnost 2008: 499).

The expansion of labour-intensive industries created numerous jobs outside agriculture. In the period 1978-2015, while GDP and per capita GDP in real terms increased by 29 and 20 times, respectively, real consumption of rural and urban Chinese households, on average, increased by 16 times. For many years, the improvement of people's living standards owed more to increased nonagricultural employment than to higher wages. For example, Cai *et al.* (2009: 220) estimate that in the period 1997-2004 the number of migrant workers-defined as rural labourers who worked in cities for six months or longer-increased from less than 40 million to over 100 million. While there was no significant increase in the real wage rate, total wages grew at an annual rate of 14.9 per cent in real terms. As a result, the share of wages in rural households' income increased from 24.6 per cent to 34 per cent.

(Garnaut, Song and Cai 2018: 17)

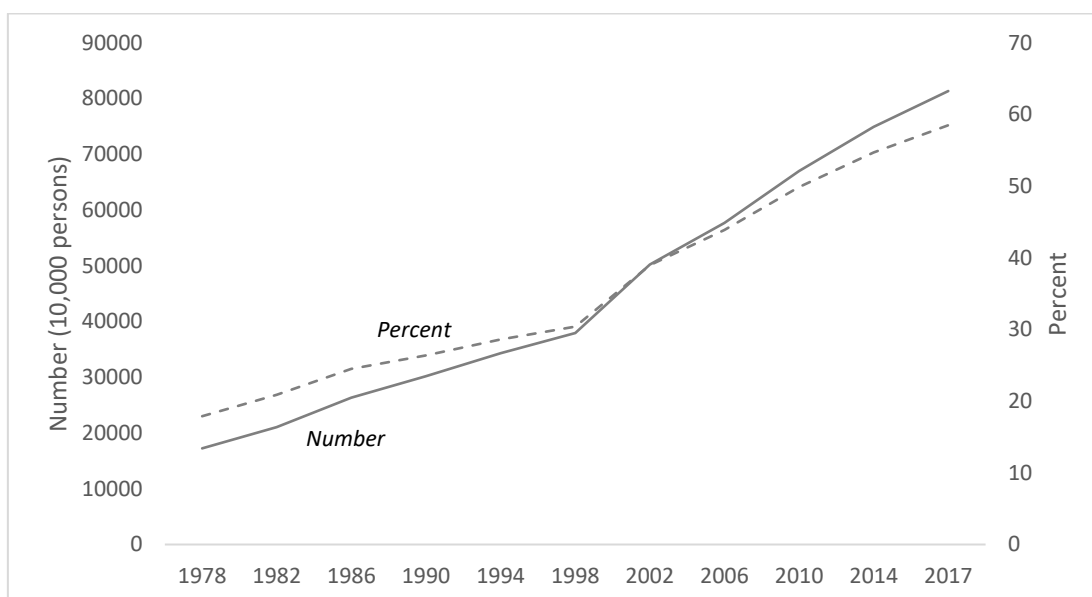
Also, by the 1990s, recruitment quotas for state enterprises were abolished and firms were largely allowed to choose their employees, this was a drastic change from the official policy of full employment (Yueh 2004: 150). In this way the both increased income inequality and unchanged difference between urban and rural family income since 1978 can mainly be explained by coding the *precarization* of urban farmers' wages in the urban contexts as rural income. The growth of RPC's middle class is also part of this dual process of urban expansion and increase of urban population-composed of rural *hukou* holders or new urban *hukou* holders. As Li (2010: 137) noted, "urban expansion and an increase in the urban population afforded favourable conditions for the emergence of a middle class in China."

By 1978 there were only 193 cities in China, in 2019 the number had increased to 662⁵⁸. Figure 2.2 illustrates the urbanization of China during reform era, the urban population increased steadily between 1978 and 2017. It increased from 173 million in 1978 to 813 million in 2017. The table shows that Chinese population is not rural anymore. The size of the middle class boomed with the increasing urbanization, especially since 2011 to reforms by the government in China where the middle class was barely visible, four percent of urban households, about 15 years ago (Davison 2014; *Economist* 2014; Kardes 2016: 708). Today about 42 percent of the PRC's population lives in rural areas. As we have seen, "most of this group have low incomes, low educational levels, and disadvantageous living conditions" (Li 2010: 138).

⁵⁸ According to World Population Review, "the administrative divisions of China designate the cities into three levels. Provincial-level cities include municipalities and the country's Special Administrative Regions, county-level cities and prefectural-level cities. China has a total of 662 cities that fall into these three categories, with Shanghai boasting the largest population with over 22 million residents as of 2016 ... In total, China has over 160 cities that have a population of over 1 million people. China also has metropolitan areas that encapsulate densely populated urban areas with suburban areas and rural areas that are more sparsely populated. According to 2010 data, about 674 million people reside in one of China's many rural areas." *World Population Review* (2019). "Population of Cities in China (2019)." Available at <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/china-population/cities/>, accessed 18 October 2019.

China Statistical Yearbook 2018 estimates placing the number of cities at Prefecture Level and above in 2017 at 298. Guojia tongji ju [NBSC]. *Zhongguo Tonji Nianjian* [China Statistical Yearbook] 2018. Available at: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2018/indexeh.htm>, accessed 18 October 2019.

Also, Song and Deng (2015) noted that number of cities had increased from 193 to 658 during the urbanization process by 2013 (Song and Deng 2015 in Jian *et al.* 2018).

Figure 2.2. Urbanization of the PRC, 1978-2017

Source: Li 2010: 138; NBSC. *China Statistical Yearbook* (2018)⁵⁹.

Other empirical research project shows that “by 2020 the Chinese middle class will roughly double in size, an as much as 60 per cent of the urban population will belong to the middle class. In contrast, the rural middle class in 2020 will remain relatively small” (Gustafsson et al. 2017: xx). In addition, the analysis of the IMF Working Paper on Inequality in China (Jain-Chandra et al. 2018) found that “China has seen a sharp reduction of poverty, but also a substantial increase of inequality” —“income inequality increased since the early 1980s but recently experienced a levelling-off and modest decline”- (Jain-Chandra et al. 2018: 3, 5). In considering Gini coefficient⁶⁰, it would appear that the PRC has moved from the relative equality (20 in 1978⁶¹) and moderately inequality (32.2 in 1990⁶²) to become “one of the most unequal countries” (46.8 in 2018⁶³) (Goodman 2014: 45; Jain-Chandra et al. 2018: 4). The fact that “China has seen a sharp reduction of poverty” but has become “one of the most unequal countries” (see Figure 2.3) might be directly related to the argument mentioned above on income inequality and unchanged difference between urban and rural family income.

⁵⁹ Guojia tongji ju [NBSC] (2018). *Zhongguo Tongji Nianjian* [China Statistical Yearbook]. Beijing: China Statistics Press. Available at <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2018/indexeh.htm>, accessed 18 October 2019.

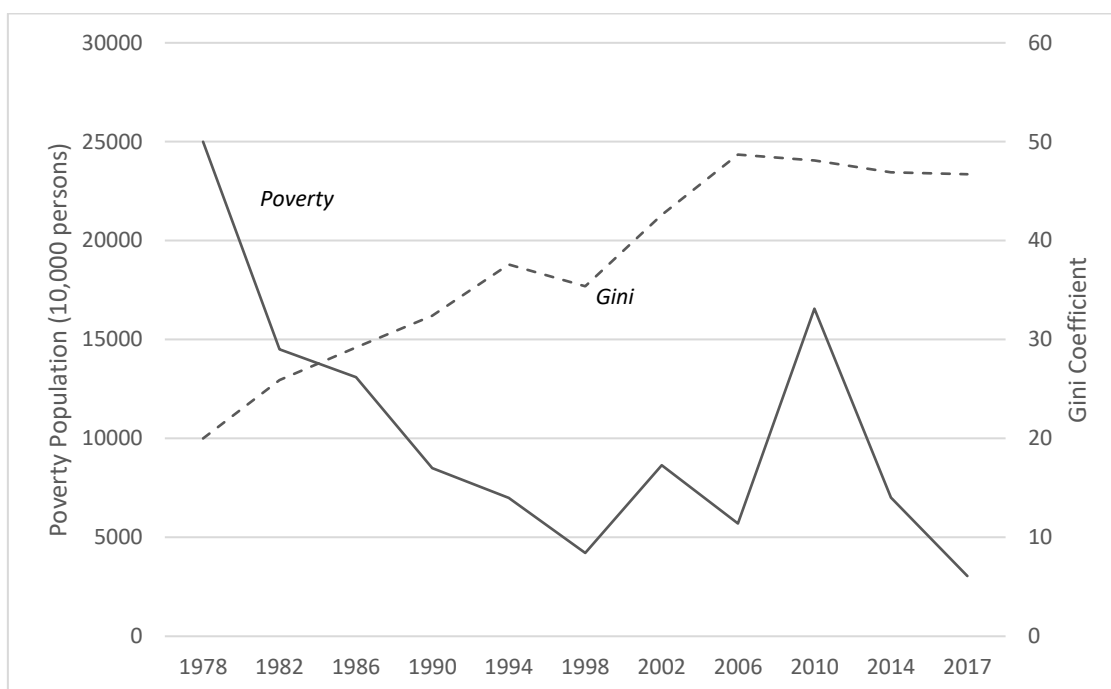
⁶⁰ Although there are no internationally defined standard cut-off values, the Gini coefficient is an inequality measure ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 signifies that everyone has the same income (very equal distribution) and 100 implies that the richest person or household has all the income (very unequal distribution) (Jain-Chandra et al. 2018: 4). However, according to UNICEF, “it’s commonly recognized that Gini index <0.2 corresponds with perfect income equality, 0.2–0.3 corresponds with relative equality, 0.3–0.4 corresponds with a relatively reasonable income gap, 0.4–0.5 corresponds with high income disparity, above 0.5 corresponds with severe income disparity” (UNICEF. *Figure 2.7 National Gini index, 2003-2017*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.cn/en/figure-27-national-gini-index-20032017>, accessed 1 August 2020).

⁶¹ Goodman 2014: 45.

⁶² The World Bank [2016]. *GINI index (World Bank estimate) - United States, China*. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=US-CN>, accessed 18 October 2019.

⁶³ CEIC. *China Gini Coefficient*. Available at: <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/china/resident-income-distribution/gini-coefficient>, accessed 1 August 2020.

Figure 2.3. Poverty population and Gini coefficient of the PRC, 1978-2017



Source: NBSC 2018 table 6-35; Wan and Zhuang 2015; CEIC; The World Bank; Goodman 2014: 45⁶⁴.

In 2010 the World Bank reported that the Gini coefficient decreased in China (see Figure 2.3). While urban, rural and overall income inequality have all “temporarily narrowed” since 2010, “other aspects of the rural-urban difference actually worsened with reform even in the short term” (Goodman 2014: 42), including health and education services for rural residents both in the rural and urban areas (rural residents working in cities, the so-called migrant workers). These indicators are examined according to the official discourse of middle class in China digital media analysed in Chapter III, and the ‘structured habitus’ and subjective social status of respondents produced from our investigations in Chapter IV.

Remarkably, despite earlier disagreements, social scientists both outside and inside China appear to have generally achieved a degree of agreement on the emergence of China’s middle class as a process of urbanization and income inequalities rather than solely in terms of ideas of class based on occupation and stratification drawn from Modernization theories and the historical experience elsewhere. As shown by Hart-Landsberg and Burkett (2004), the Chinese

⁶⁴ *Guojia tongji ju* [NBSC] (2018). *Zhongguo Tonji Nianjian* [China Statistical Yearbook]. Beijing: China Statistics Press. Available at <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2018/indexeh.htm>, accessed 18 October 2019. According to NBSC: 1978 Poverty Population Standard: “it was referred to as the rural poverty standard from 1978 to 1999, and as the rural absolute poverty standard from 2000 to 2007. 2008 Standard: it was referred to as the rural low-income standard from 2000 to 2007, and as the rural poverty standard from 2008 to 2010. 2010 Standard: it was the current rural poverty standard which is 2300 yuan (in 2010’s constant price) per person each.”

CEIC. China’s Gini Coefficient from 2003 to 2018. Available at: <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/china/resident-income-distribution/gini-coefficient>, accessed 18 October 2019.

The World Bank. GINI index (World Bank estimate) – China, 1990-2015. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=CN>, accessed 18 October 2019.

case is witness to the polarization model —growth leads inevitably to stark social inequality - in Marx's *Capital* postulates that the antagonism between capital and labour in production is basic to understanding of the historical development of capitalism and its simplification of class antagonism with two great classes directly facing each other. Alvin Y. So (2005) criticizes this class polarization model by arguing that the Chinese party-state has been decisive in shaping the contours of class formation and class conflict in China. So's statist model shows how class conflict has become institutionalized:

Unlike other class-divided societies, however, the Chinese state has played a decisive role in mediating these class relations, leading to the embourgeoisement of cadres and the patronization of capitalists, the semi-proletarianization and the segmentation of the working class, the depoliticization of the new middle class, and the professionalization of cadres. Although the fusion of political capital, economic capital, and social/network capital has produced an all-powerful cadre-capitalist class that has become the target of attacks by other classes, the mediation of the state has also led to the incorporation of class organizations into the state bureaucracy and the institutionalization of class conflict. ... A state-mediated class-divided society also helps to explain the lack of impetus toward democratization in China. Since class and other civil organizations have been incorporated into the state, they seldom engage in democratic movements to challenge the Chinese Communist Party.

(So 2005:493)

Further, class analysis in China has not escaped from new global perspectives. For example, according to Standing, China's emerging middle class goes hand in hand with the emerging precariat consisting of largely urbanized youth, who have neither a rural economy background and trajectory into the precariat nor the proletarian background (Standing 2017: 167). Hence,

This leads to the contentious issue of imagining and defining a Chinese working class. ... The proletariat differs from the salariat, on one side, which gains from forms of rental income and has access to lifetime private benefits and sources of income denied to the former. The proletariat wants better (decent) labour, more stable labour, or the continuation of past stable labour. More security in a position of disciplined dependency. This is surely false consciousness that comes with habituation. ... In China, millions have flocked into towns and cities to join the emerging precariat, not the proletariat as conventionally defined. The migrants have mostly gone into a wage labour market as what I have called denizens, that is, as workers without rights, put in supplicant positions (Standing, 2014).

(Standing 2017: 166, 168)

Such observations on class highlight, of course, difference and inequality because class in the global market economy is probably "more important as a mobilizing concept than a precise or reliable analytical tool" (Goodman 2014: 7). However, for sociologists, class also draws attention to the fundamental inequalities that constitute society: of power, wealth, social standing, lifestyle, culture and opportunity (Crompton 2006: 658). The meaning and crucial significance of compound inequality is that relations among new elites and new social groupings (including a small but comfortable salaried middle class, small-scale private entrepreneurs, migrant workers and the emerging Chinese precariat) are understood and enacted through a framework of cultural distinctions that interpret-and legitimate-inequality as difference (Hanser 2008: 3). Although many "young educated urban dwellers scurry between short-term income-earning activities and rely on friends and relatives to survive",

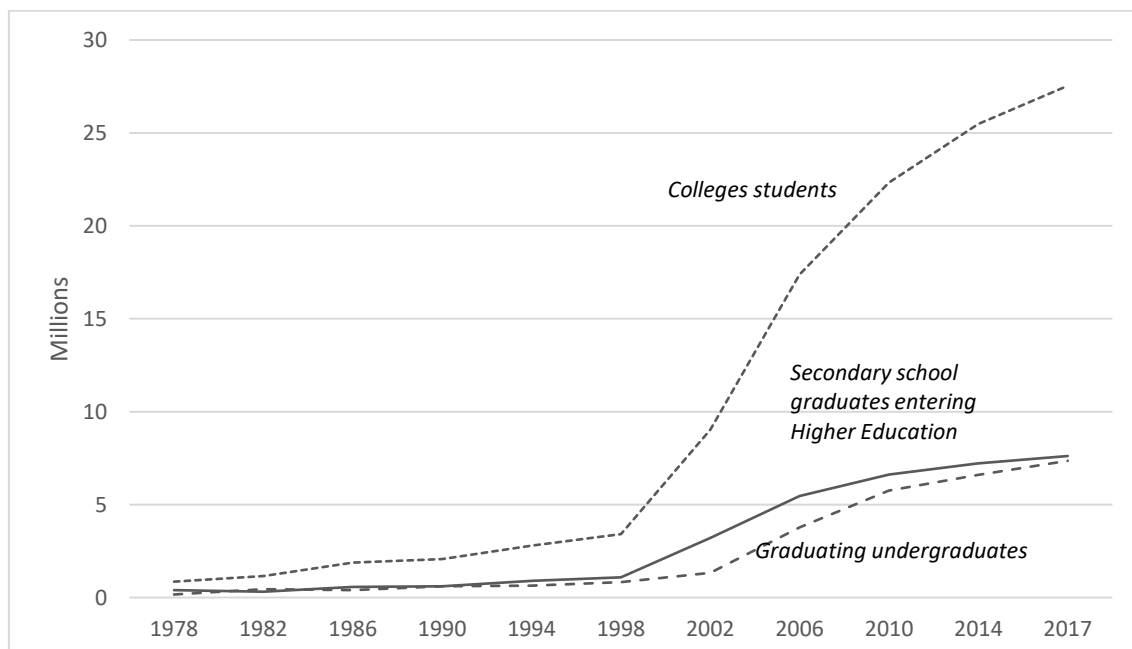
many scholars believe that “a small but comfortable salaried middle class” position is still achieved through higher education in China (Standing 2017: 169; Hanser 2008: 3).

2.2.2 Higher education

Beyond the accounting criteria, some other commentators have defined the middle class based on the acquisition of education and/or organizational assets (Edgell 1993: 81). Based on this starting point, for Zhu Guang (1998), middle class individuals use their brains and are white-collar workers⁶⁵. Due to “the expansion of higher education and the growth in white-collar jobs have also stimulated the rise of the middle class in China”, many scholars use the occupational and educational categorization to study social stratification (Li 2010: 138). Then, having a university degree and a ‘middle class job’ are considered two of the main characteristics of the middle class.

Certainly, after the Tiananmen Incident of 1989, a “new social contract” was established between the Party and the population in which in exchange for remaining the sole ruling force, the Party must keep the promises of the 1950s in terms of improving living conditions” (Rocca 2017: 23). Moreover, Rocca highlights, as a part of this new social contract and in order to fast and consolidate economic growth, “the Party opened up labour markets and eased access to higher education.” In 1999, the government launched “a policy to vastly expand higher education enrolment” and, as a consequence, “the number of college students and the opportunities to pursue higher education increased sharply” (Li 2010: 138) (see Figure 2.4). As a result, Li notes, in the mid-2000s, “the number of college students increased four times, and the opportunity to pursue higher education almost doubled.”

Figure 2.4. Number of college students in the PRC, 1978-2017



⁶⁵ Nevertheless, using high education as a criterion is not without difficulty because the question whether individual entrepreneurs belong to the middle class remains problematic —there is a significant proportion of middle incomers who do not have a middle-class education- (Rocca 2017: 83).

Source: Li 2010: 139; NBSC. *China Statistical Yearbook* (2001 and 2018 editions), tables 2001: 20-2, 20-5, 20-6, 20-7; tables 2018: 21-5, 21-8, 21-7, 21-9⁶⁶.

The increasing number of individuals having a university degree from the mid-1990s, especially from 1999 after policy change (Figure 2.4), constitute the major part of present-day *emerged* urban middle class. Thus, in the labour market of China today, one's education level has become a determinant of employment and, hence, an essential factor in influencing social stratification and the growth of the middle class (Maurer-Fazio 1999; and Liu 2006 in Zhou and Qin 2010: 92).

Simultaneously, labour market reforms and policy initiatives powered middle class's continued expansion. As Meng states, mild urban labour market reforms began in the 1980s, but labour mobility and incentives were not much affected, as we have seen, until two large events: the return in the early 1980s of the majority of the "sent-down youth" to the cities (but few jobs were available and the government responded by encouraging self-employment for the first time), and the state-sector restructuring in the mid-1990s (Meng 2012: 76; Feng 2003).

Although labour market reform "affected China's regional economic growth and cause disparities" (Cai et al. 2002: 211), urban middle-class people saw the greatest benefit from these market distortions launched by the government. In addition, an "increase in the number of white-collar employees" can be observed, "in 1982 about 7% of national population held white-collar jobs and by 2005 this percentage had increased to 12%" (Li 2010: 139). The growth of urban middle class in general and the increase of white-collar jobs in particular "were powered by labour-market and policy initiatives that push wages up, financial reforms that stimulate employment and income growth, and the rising role of private enterprise, which encouraged productivity and help more income accrue to households" (Barton et al. 2013: 1).

The education policies to expand higher education enrolment and labour market reforms illustrate "the state's social engineering to enlarge the ranks of a consuming middle class" (Tomba 2008: 11). As a result of this new class categorization, from the middle of the 2000s, more and more scholars have focused on education background, social mobility, credentialism, occupational activity or family educational patterns in order to define the Chinese middle-class reproduction and composition. Moreover, social scientists believe that "the concept of a middle-class stratum defined by income alone differs essentially from the concept of a middle class" because "that such an income group includes diverse people, for whom it is impossible to develop a shared class identity" (Li 2010: 142).

That is why education background, occupation categorization and employment status are the usual criteria to define this diverse group of people. The rationale for the most used occupational coding among sociologists has been derived from the traditional model developed by neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian theorists based on the divisions between manual labour/employees and mental labour/employers (Li 2009a: 54-58), as well as those between white-collar workers and blue-collar workers (Zhou 2005).

It is worth noting that *Research Report on Social Strata in Contemporary China* (2002) is "the most influential study of the social strata of reform-era China (1978 to the present)" (Cheng 2010a: 64). It is the model of the PRC's contemporary class structure by occupation based on a

⁶⁶ Guojia tongji ju [NBSC] (2001, 2018). *Zhongguo Tonji Nianjian* [China Statistical Yearbook]. Beijing: China Statistics Press. Available at <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/yearlydata/YB2001e/ml/indexE.htm>, and <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2018/indexeh.htm>, accessed 18 October 2019.

series of surveys undertaken since 2000 and developed by Lu Xueyi and his colleagues at the CASS Institute of Sociology. In our case study, the occupational coding used in Chapter IV has been derived from the Lu's occupational categorization.

Lu and his colleagues at the CASS used three resources -education, economic capital and social capital- in order to build up ten *socio-professional* strata or classes (see Table 4.1)⁶⁷. The formal antecedents of the ten-groups typology proposed by Lu Xueyi in 2002 were drawn from the work of Anthony Giddens (Giddens 1973) and Erik Olin Wright (Wright 1997)⁶⁸. This new approach initiated by Lu “owed more to theories of social stratification than conventional Marxist class analysis” because it “highlights class in contemporary society as being derived not only from the means of production, but also from the position in the authority structure and the possession of skills and expertise” (Cheng 2010a: 64-65; Goodman 2014: 58).

Yet, as an explanatory tool focused on occupation, the CASS categorization contributes to institutionalizing inequalities. It also discloses that

this schema has some clear merits, but problems remain. In the first place, in its detail it is very focused on the upper and middle strata of society as well as on urban China. The working classes (urban and rural) and rural China are equally complex — particularly in their interactions with the market, industrial development and each other— and require further elaboration. Second, while the classification contains implicit suggestions about income and wealth, not least through its hierarchical presentation, these aspects are somewhat obscured. Third, and largely because the schema concentrates on occupations, some of the key inequalities that have been highlighted as having emerged during the reform era remain masked. While that is somewhat understandable for regional and ethnic inequality, the result is clearly problematic for gender inequality, which also has an occupational basis, and which requires further consideration. Moreover, the schema draws the boundary of ‘within the system’ too narrowly. There are also people who are not cadres —some managers, professional and technical personnel, and even office workers— who are certainly ‘within the system’ in the sense of having access to privileged benefits.

(Goodman 2014: 61-62)

To solve these problems, scholars decide adding another criterion such as consumption, income, subjective social status, lifestyle or social origin to the definition of China's middle

⁶⁷ In Chapter IV it is pointed out that “the CASS Institute of Sociology team used these three determinants and added a fourth by distinguishing between those “outside the system” (*tizhiwai*) relying on their labour force, their properties and the market for a living, and those “inside the system” (*tizhinei*) depending upon power relations (Li and Sheng 2007) —being within the Party-state system—; the former working in the private sector, the latter in public institutions (Goodman 2014: 58; Lu 2002: 44; Rocca 2017: 85). However, far from jeopardising the conclusions that can be drawn from the sample, the urban-centered nature of the scheme meets the objectives focused on the urbanized lifestyle of the middle class in China (see Chapter IV).

⁶⁸ The typology presented by Lu Xueyi in 2002 was based on the studies of foreign sociologists, especially the work of S. M. Lipset, Anthony Giddens and John Goldthorpe. Whereas Lipset defined the profession as the main indicator of social class in the 1950s and 1960s (Lipset and Bendix 1959; Lipset, Bendix and Malm 1955), the other sociologists emphasized in the 1970s the importance of the occupational class (Giddens 1973; Goldthorpe 1980). In particular, Goldthorpe (1980) highlighted that, in modern societies, social stratification is primarily a categorization phenomenon, rather than hierarchical. In addition, the first report on class prepared by the CASS was also steered by the analyses of the relationship of social class and authority from the Marxist perspective developed by Wright and Perrone (1977) in the 1990s.

class. However, different subjective and objective criteria adopted by different scholars lead to “huge disparities in the estimated size of the middle class” (Li 2010: 143). Rocca points out that

Typically, when several objective criteria or subjective dimensions like lifestyle, moral values and political behaviours are addressed, the numbers [of members of the middle class] drop drastically and confusion worsens. And from the middle of the 2000s more and more scholars have focused on subjective criteria in order to define the class that will change China.

(Rocca 2017: 87)

As Wynne notes in his study on the emergence of the new middle class in British society at the beginning of this century, such analyses on contemporary middle class are “problematic on a number of counts but especially so because of their implicit failure to operationalise adequately the concept of class in relational terms” (Wynne 1998: 19). In other investigations on China’s middle class, scholars refocused their attention from social change in China to examine not just other social criteria such as gender (Chen 2008) and ethnicity (Mackerras 2005; Schein 2000, 2008) but to problematise the very concept of inequality itself.

Further, “the relationship between rural and urban China is obviously central to the examination of inequality as a whole, to some extent limiting any attempt to produce national statistics or statements” (Goodman 2014: 45). Since the “income gap between regions in China widened with economic reform”, China’s emerging middle incomers can be understood as an urban phenomenon from eastern coastal cities as well as from the metropolitan areas of Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai (Cai et al. 2002: 197).

However, it is heterogeneity that characterises Chinese middle class. To assume that middle class comprise a homogeneous grouping simply because income inequality has been increasing in the eastern regions and decreasing in the central and western regions is to ignore three important features: first, the distribution of wealth across the country is extremely varied (Goodman 2014: 49); second, the actual inequality (more or less pronounced) between rural and urban areas within each province and each region (Li, Luo and Sicular 2012); and three, the degree of cultural fragmentation and heterogeneity rather than homogeneity in the everyday social practices of middle class subjects.

Such a discussion is particularly important in any attempt to explore the degree of homogeneity associated with middle class in urban China. Failure to recognise the above points involves a failure to recognise the differing social practices and representations to class categorization and class definition in China today. In order to avoid these deficiencies, more and more sociologists have gone beyond the inherent flaws in subjective and objective criteria by linking subjectivism and objectivism-social structure and practices as Bourdieu’s theory of class suggests (Chapter I).

This holistic approach also indicates the hidden agenda concealed in every definition of the middle class —“the political hopes, economic purposes, business expectations, ideological convictions, [and] vested interests” (Rocca 2017: 4). The analysis on the middle-class criteria and composition supports the thesis that different definitions of middle class can denote quite diverse social groupings as well as their size. Here, it may be convenient to analyse the hidden agenda concealed in major definitions of China’s middle class.

2.3 A HIDDEN AGENDA: THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE CHINESE MIDDLE CLASS

In order to ensure a critical and coherent inquiry into the intellectual debate about class in China, this chapter also surveys the ultimate hidden agendas highlighted by both Western and Chinese scholars of the concept of middle class in the PRC. This section suggests an additional dimension of analysis based, on the one hand, on Rocca's claim that "the normative approach results in confusion because every definition of the middle class conceals a hidden agenda" (Rocca 2017: 4). And, on the other hand, on Guo's brief picture of socio-political background in contemporary China,

The socio-political context and contestation have added a complex political dimension to the description of social groupings and structures, and descriptions have become entangled in webs of theories, paradigms and ideological positions, as well as prescriptions for idealised social configurations.

(Guo 2008: 39)

The ideological orientations behind the middle-class foundation and conceptualizations, together with its capacity for social change, are of crucial significance for understanding this social group and its intellectual debate. Li argues that there is large disparity in the size of China's middle class depending on the definition (Li 2010: 140). But why is the size of the middle class so important? And, what is the size of the middle class in present-day China?

There are, of course, a variety of answers to these questions. In a sense, the spectrum of possible answers corresponds to some of the most important scholarly debates about the Chinese middle class: the first concerns its definition, the second its potential political roles, the third its economic and business expectations, the fourth its ideological values and the fifth vested interests (Cheng 2010a: 12; Rocca 2017: 4). Two considerations, however, are "particularly instrumental in increasing both public awareness of and scholarly interest in China's middle class" as Cheng notes. One is the "Chinese government's decision to 'enlarge the size of the middle-income group';" and, second, "the Chinese business community's drive" to disseminate the image of Chinese middle class as "potentially the 'world's largest middle-class market'" (Cheng 2010a: 8).

On the one hand, it is argued that behind the Chinese government's definitions of middle class's current size and estimated growth, a binomial motive laying the foundation for China to develop a growing middle-class grouping. That is, ensuring social stability in a pair along with the legitimization of the present regime characterize the key concept for Chinese government's decision to 'enlarge the size of the middle-income group'." The government perspective on the middle class's definition is "as inclusive as possible" by promoting that "the middle class will be grown in order to reduce the potential for social instability at the same time as increasing people's standard of living, so the emphasis is on the size of the middle class" (Goodman 2013: 55; Li 2010: 140).

Further, the government invokes an emerging and fast-growing urban middle class as a justification for "the disempowerment of the state socialist working class ... the emergence of entrepreneurial classes ... dramatic changes in rural China including the massive expansion in numbers of migrant workers" —the new working class, and, overall, "the introduction of capitalist categories" (Goodman 2014: *xiii*; Rocca 2017: 5). Goodman also highlighted that as has "happened in other countries (Parker 1972), for variety of reasons the dominant class

existence is masked by the discourse of the middle class” (Goodman 2014: 91)⁶⁹. Scholarly agree that “the middle class acts as a buffer between the ruling elite and the lower classes, reducing the chances of conflict between the two and limiting social inequalities” (Rocca 2017: 3).

By presenting Chinese society as an emerging “diamond-shaped” social structure (literally named “olive-shaped society”) in which the middle class is the most populous, Chinese government “address the specific needs of a stratified society”, “responds to the expectations created among different social groups by China’s economic reform” and underlines “two discourses traditionally behind the CCP’s legitimization: the rhetoric of “serving the people” and that of “strengthening the country and the nation” (Tomba 2014: 60). That is, a middle-class based social structure is a stable, peaceful and almost total equal society and all thanks to the present regime.

On the other hand, scholars and experts working for foreign companies such as multinational corporations (Johnson&Johnson, Coach, L’Oréal, Kimberly-Clark), consulting firms (McKinsey, Merrill Lynch), investment banks/brokerage (BPN Paribas Peregrine) or CEO-led organizations of global private sectors (World Travel & Tourism Council)⁷⁰ regularly publish studies promoting the notion of a very high proportion of middle class in Chinese society. However, most of these studies, especially those commissioned by large multinational banks and consulting firms, “were conducted by groups of economists consisting of local Chinese researchers, foreign-educated PRC nationals, and expatriates based in China” by using methodologies “quite opaque” away from “meeting the standards of rigorous academic research” (Cheng 2010a: 10).

The speech of Tony Blair, the former British Prime Minister, at World Trade & Tourism Council in 2013, can be understood as an example of the variety of studies published by the business community “to assess the current size and project growth of the Chinese middle class” (Cheng 2010a: 10). Blair emphasized that “over the next 10 years, the travel and tourism industry in Asia will expand ... faster than any other region in the world”; “this phenomenal growth will be driven by increasing wealth among Asia’s middle classes, particularly in China” (*Renmin Ribao* 2013).

Such surveys commissioned by private companies are not surprising and correspond to two related reasons. First, it has been widely noted the idea that “an extant middle class in China

⁶⁹ Even Goodman himself exemplified the confusion between elements of the dominant class and the middle class. A decade ago, in his edited seminal book, *The New Rich in China* (2008), “the middle class and the rich seem to be interchangeable notions: the title clearly states that the book deals with *the Rich* but in many parts it appears that the real issue is the middle class” (Rocca 2017: 8). Also, many scholars of contemporary China included people who obviously belongs to the ruling class such as businesspeople leading large enterprises in the middle class (Rocca 2017: 8; Li 2013; Li 2003). Rocca noted that this confusion between elements of the ruling class and the middle class is the result of the resilience of the conception of the middle class that prevailed in UK in the nineteenth century, and the view that of all social groups deemed to oppose the regime are considered eligible to be middle class protesters -that’s because the lack of political change obsesses the PRC’s scholars so much (Rocca 2017: 8-9).

⁷⁰ For example, see: “Johnson&Johnson to Serve Growing Middle Class,” *People’s Daily Online*, 7 June 2013. Available at: <http://en.people.cn/90778/8276955.html>, <http://en.people.cn/90001/90778/90860/7222769.html>, accessed 18 October 2019; and “Kimberly-Clark Targets Growing Middle Class,” *People’s Daily Online*, 24 November 2006. Available at http://en.people.cn/200611/24/eng20061124_324735.html, accessed 18 October 2019.

has often been the primary driver of foreign investment and other business activities in the country” (Cheng 2010a: 8). Second, the foreign business community in China and big companies, such as those mentioned above, “have an incentive to present business prospects in a positive light” (Rocca 2017: 86). In other words, “the possibility of stimulating domestic consumption in the world’s most populous country ... has understandably capture the imagination” of both the business community in China and the experts who work for them, including social scientists and academic economists (Cheng 2010a: 9).

At the same time, the substantial number of research projects on the topic sponsored by the business community in China has helped them to understand the Chinese middle class not only as a sizeable market segment with certain consumption patterns but also as a social group with new desires, new symbols, new young members and new geographical distribution. From a market-oriented perspective, these empirical research studies analysed the most effective way to spread consumerism values on the basis of the needs and preferences of Chinese consumers. To the extent that firms operating in China promote the middle class’ new lifestyle—that is, “a set of practices and/or representations specific to a social group” (Mauger⁷¹)—, “they are also helpful in shaping and promoting the group’s continued expansion” (Cheng 2010a: 9).

As a result, since 2002, interest in the middle class “has evolved into something approaching a fetish” (Guo 2008: 38). This fetishism of the middle class has been reinforced by turning the idea of a Chinese middle class from an abstract academic subject to a hot topic throughout society (Li Chunling 2008: xx). In this respect, sociologists and business community were not the only ones who took the lead. In recent years, “it is important to keep in mind that most of the arguments developed in these articles have been vulgarized in popular media in the form of articles or interviews” (Rocca 2017: 72). Indeed, the Chinese journalists’ fetishism on commercial indicators of the growing of middle class indicates that media in China have also played a fundamental role in this identification process.

In the post-1978 era, the “fusion of Party-state and market power has created a media system that serves the interests of the country’s political and economic elite, while suppressing and marginalizing opposing and alternative voices” (Zhao 2004: 1179). As such, to the extent that media in China is still a means of social control and of the state to inspect “how much people know about public life,” Sandy-Thomas and others argue that “the legitimating role that media performs within the Chinese political system is dual, both in reflecting the views of the leadership and disseminating these views to other groups within society” (Curran et al. 2009: 5; Sandby-Thomas 2014: 54). The official and ideological discourse of the middle class, and the role of Chinese media in this identification process are discussed more in-depth in Chapter III.

Li Chunling notes that there are three major perspectives of the middle class in China that highlight one or two of the main criteria used to define the middle class - income, occupation, education and consumption. These three different approaches are “the public image of the

⁷¹ According to Mauger, “pour fixer provisoirement les idées, on peut définir un mode de vie comme un ensemble de pratiques et/ou de représentations propres à un groupe social. Peut-on considérer que le groupe social (c'est-à-dire les propriétés qui permettent de le délimiter) détermine le mode vie (c'est-à-dire les propriétés retenues pour le définir) ou, à l'inverse, que c'est l'identification de tel mode vie qui permet de définir le groupe correspondant ? Schématiquement, on peut distribuer les recherches en fonction de la réponse proposée.” Mauger, Gérard. “Mode de vie.” Universalis.fr, Encyclopaedia Universalis France Sas. Available at <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/mode-de-vie/>, accessed 18 October 2019.

middle class, sociologists' definition of the middle class, and the government's official description of the middle class" (Li 2010: 140). As the public image of the middle class "was initially derived from advertisements printed in newspapers and magazines, featured beautiful pictures of automobiles, apartments and other expensive commodities and the people enjoying them, expensive commodities thereby became a symbol of the middle class" and consumption became the decisive criterion (Li 2010: 140-141; Anagnost 2004; Chen 2002b: 42-45; Jiang 2001: 4).

Within this perspective, one of the aspects associated to the middle class is "the consumer behaviors and lifestyle of the rich ... consisting of business people, managers and intellectual elites with very high incomes and consumer habits" (Li 2010: 141) as many other scholars have pointed out (He 2005: 50-55; Xiang 2006: 25; Zhang 2006:13; Goodman and Robinson 1996). For example, according to the consumption stratification, Li Qiang argues that China has formed a cultural stratification system since the late 1990s (Li 2004, 2008b). The PRC's cultural consumption began to transform from to a class-convergent "cultural hybrid mode" to a class-differentiated cultural pattern (Li Qiang 2008: 296-297; Hong and Zhao 2015: 17).

In particular, the social science perspective takes into account that "the public's image of the middle class only describes the upper stratum of the middle class," and argues for a more appropriate definition based on occupational activity and employment status. Finally, and in line with the picture presented above, the government's official description of the middle class focuses on being "as inclusive as possible: the middle class will be grown in order to reduce the potential for social instability at the same time as increasing people's standard of living and reassure social stability," so the size of this social group is the prime criterion (Li 2010: 141; Goodman 2013: 55).

As we have seen, however, to the question, 'What is the actual size of China middle class?' has come the response, the estimated size varies depending on the criteria employed. The studies reported on in table 2.1 were published between 2008 and 2018 and relate to the research undertaken in the 2004-2018 period. Table 2.1 is based on Goodman's summary of studies published between 2005 and 2013, but a summary of earlier studies may be found in Cheng's book *China's Emerging Middle Class* (Goodman 2014: 101-102; Cheng 2010b: 67). Three of the sources listed are of studies based on survey work commissioned by and for multinational consultancy companies (Boston Consulting Group, McKinsey, Credit Suisse), three are the approach of the PRC-based scholars (Zhou Xiaohong, Lu Xueyi and Li Chunling), two are the research undertaken by NBSC and two of the sources listed are studies of scholars based outside the PRC, but based on material derived domestically in the PRC (Jie Chen and Teresa Wright).

The surveys that underlie these studies are based on different kinds of research instruments. Lu Xueyi and the CASS schema "sees classes by ideology and classes by occupation as separate issues" (Li 1995; Yang Jisheng 2000; Li Qiang 2002; Li Lulu 2003 in Goodman 2014: 55). Lu and his colleagues at CASS Institute of Sociology identified in a 2002 report "a 'modern' social structure comprising three gradational but otherwise unrelated strata (upper, middle and lower), which were further divided into ten sub-strata or *jieceng* (including Party-state cadres, middle- and high-ranking managers of large and medium-sized enterprises, private entrepreneurs, etc.) (Guo 2008: 48). Although, from 2010 on the broader categories had become less specific, this categorization schema has been the basis for a series of reports since that date.

For example, while the middle class was already 21 per cent of the population in 2001, in 2009 the middle class constituted 23 per cent of China's total (Lu Xueyi 2010: 402-406). In addition, there was "clearly reaction" when Lu Xueyi predicted that the Chinese middle class would constitute 40 per cent of the population -on par with Western economies- by 2025 (Liu 2005) and "some of this would seem to have been generated by those who were more conservative ideologically" (Goodman 2014: 97; Cai 2004). Also, in October 2015, *China Daily* indicated, "the Global Wealth Report by the Credit Suisse Research Institute in Switzerland, said China had the largest middle class, 109 million people, compared with the United States' 92 million" (of course, as a proportion of the population, the middle class of the US, accounting for about 30 percent and China about 8 percent). However, the report defines middle-class people as those with assets of between \$50,000 and \$500,000 (between 350,000 and 3,520,000 yuan), while the PRC's statistics agency puts the figure at nearly 25 percent in 2015, less than a third of the population by defining middle-class household as those making 25,000 yuan to 250,000 yuan (*China Daily* 2015, 2016).

Table 2.1. Size, wealth and definition of the PRC's middle class, 2008-2018

Source	Data of Research	% Total Population Estimated to be Middle Class	Minimum Income Threshold for Middle Class Designation yuan per year	Definition of Middle Class, Research Location
Zhou Xiaohong (2008)	2004	11.9	60,000 per capita	Occupation, income, position, self-ascription. Urban China
NBSC (2005)	2005	5	60,000 per household	Income. All China.
Li Chunling (2010)	2006	10-12	60,000 per capita	Occupation, income, position, self-ascription. Urban China
Lu Xueyi (2012)	2006	23	53,700 per capita	Occupation, income, position, inside/outside system. Urban China
Teresa Wright (2010)	2007	12	60,000 per capita	Income. All China

Jie Chen (2013)	2007-8	24.4	n/a	Self-employed labourers, professionals, managers, office workers. Beijing, Chengdu, Xi'an.
Silverstein et al. [BCG] (2012)	2011	28	68,250 per household	Consumption. All china
Barton, Chen and Jin [McKinsey] (2013)	2012	14 upper middle 54 mass middle	106,000 per household 60,000 per household	Less than 50% expenditure on necessities. Urban China
Shorrocks, Davies and Lluberas [Credit Suisse] (2015)	2015	10,7	350,000 – 3,520,000 per household	Occupation, income and consumption.
NBSC (2018)	2018	28.7	25,000 - 250,000 per household	Income. All China

Source. Zhou Xiaohong (2008: 1); Lu Xueyi (2012: 19-20); Jie Chen (2013: 157); Wright (2010: 7); Li Chunling (2010: 154); Silverstein et al. (2012: 29); Barton, Chen and Jin (2013); Shorrocks, Davies and Lluberas (2015: 115, 122); Goodman 2014: 101-102.

Other scholars, Goodman points, have been “more restrictive in their identification of the middle class. A key point of dispute is whether to include private entrepreneurs in the definition of the middle class” (Goodman 2013: 54). While Zhou Xiaohong (2008: 110-126) does not include managers of large and medium-sized enterprises, private entrepreneurs, professional and technical staff or joint ventured enterprises in his definition of the middle class, Li Chunling (2005: 490-507) does include all these categories.

Further, Li Chunling, a member of the CASS, re-label the five middle-stratum occupational categories from Lu Xueyi’s 2002 report as ‘occupational middle class’. By using the same dataset as Lu Xueyi did, Li Chunling, “later classified as ‘income middle class’ those who had a monthly income ranging from 233.45 *yuan* to 1,250.02 *yuan*”; “the consumption index was the ownership of major durables” scored from 1 to 12 points, such as coloured TV sets, air conditioners, computers, pianos, cars, etc. (Guo 2008: 48). Overall, according to these findings, “24.6 per cent qualified as middle class by income, 15.9 per cent by occupation, 35 per cent by consumption, and 46.8 per cent by status” (Li Chunling 2005: 339-340; Guo 2008: 48).

More recently, Gustafsson, Sicular and Yang (2017) project that if household incomes grow at a uniform average rate of 6.5 per cent per annum from 2013 to 2020, by 2020 the Chinese middle class will roughly double in size, and as much as 60 per cent of the urban population will belong to the middle class (Gustafsson et al. 2017: 33). Based on the household income criteria, they estimated that “the Chinese middle class grew from only 1 per cent in 2002 to 7 per cent and further to 19 per cent in 2013” (Gustafsson et al. 2017: 20). Their estimates of the

size of China's middle class are similar to those reported by Chen and Qin (2014), who reported a middle class share of 13 per cent in 2012; and Kharas (2010) who finds that less than 12 per cent of the Chinese population was middle class in 2009.

Moreover, Gustafsson, Sicular and Yang also write that “the preferred estimate of Bonnefond, Clément and Combarrous for 2009 is substantially larger, however, this reflects their low cutoff for entering the middle class (only 10,000 RMB)” (Bonnefond et al. 2015, in Gustafsson et al. 2017: 23). These three scholars have analysed the complex relationship—rather different from that in Western countries—between changes in the size of the middle class and inequality.

China in 2002 began with an overwhelming majority of households in the poor and lower classes, very few in the middle class, and extremely few in the upper class. Thereafter, the country experienced rapid economic growth that was not equally shared. During the period from 2002 to 2007 average income growth was rapid and the middle class expanded, but the middle class remained a relatively small proportion of the population. At this time, growth of China's middle class was accompanied by rising inequality. From 2007 to 2013 incomes continued to grow and China's middle class continued to expand, however, during these years, inequality began to decline.

(Gustafsson et al., 2017: 18)

A further challenge to definitions of middle class as a local concept without reference to any universal criterion has been only established by Anderson, Farcomeni, Pittau and Zelli (2016) in a study of urban households in six Chinese provinces over the period from 1992 to 2001. This study proposes a new technique for “partially determining class status without resort to artificial boundary assumptions” by determining classes “by similarities in the behavior of agents with respect to economic and social variables.” Anderson et al. (2016: 11) conclude that class membership in contemporary China is significantly influenced by the rapid rate of urbanization, the locational and skill *premia* and enterprise reform in the 1990s, and the One Child Policy.

In short, coinciding with Li Chunling, “multiple orientations coexist among China's middle class today, and it has a long way to go before it forms a homogeneous middle-class identity and culture” (Li 2010: 155). Thus, it becomes crucial to examine the degree to which we may be witnessing the emergence not of a new Chinese middle class per se but rather the emergence of new middle-class practices and representations, and the increasing fragmentation of an anachronistic concept of middle class understood solely in terms of economic indicators.

After having contextualised the intellectual debate about the Chinese middle class in the general intellectual socio-political framework of post-Maoist China, and having completed this contextualization by illustrating (or *re-configuring*) the perspectives on class and the streams that make up the current criteria of its definition and discursive spaces—that is, the hidden agenda concealed and the methodological approaches planned—, in the next chapter we aim to approach the official discourse about Chinese middle class by analysing the constitutional amends, political speeches delivered by Party-state leaders, and news articles published in *Renmin Wang* on middle class in the PRC.

CHAPTER III

CLASS AND DISCOURSE CONSTRUCTION

The objectives that define the specific aims of this chapter are the following: e) to elucidate the Chinese middle class as a *well-founded historical artefact* before and after the establishment of the PRC in 1949; and f) to examine in detail the construction and development of the official discourse of the Chinese middle class through the content of articles on middle class published between 2000-2015 on *Renmin Wang* (人民网), the digital version of the newspaper *Renmin Ribao* (人民日报, *People's Daily*), considered the mouthpiece of Central Committee of the CCP. Certainly, such objectives are related to the validation of the investigative hypothesis, that is: (h5) class in China is best understood in terms of the intergenerational transfer of privilege and disadvantage since the early twentieth century; and, (h6) the *Renmin Wang* (henceforth referred to as *RW*) has become a categorical example of the construction and development of the official discourse of the middle class in this century.

When discussing in Chapter II of the hidden agenda concealed in every definition of middle class both outside and inside the PRC, what we were trying to convey was how variable the criteria for defining class are, since it is constantly being modified by the purposes, hopes, expectations and interests of the different individuals and organizations involved in the social practices and representations of a social group, and the evolution of the discourses that interact within them. Also, in Chapter I, appropriating Weber's formula on the state, we have seen that Bourdieu understands, above all, that the state has a monopoly on imposing classificatory schemes and adjudicate the validity of all such schemes. However, when analysing the process of construction of an official discourse—in this case, the official discourse of the middle class—it is necessarily to identify not only the social actors involved in such discursive phenomenon but also the main discursive spaces in which this discourse acts as an influential element (i.e., its symbolic capital). Although the PRC is not a liberal democracy, the influential capital of the official discourse can be “clearly differentiated from the other discourses that converge upon it, with which it argues, engages in dialogue, and interacts” (Solé-Farràs 2014: 50). Later, the degree to which the vision proposed by the official discourse of the middle class is perceived by the members of the so-called Chinese middle class is an element analysed in Chapter IV by comparing the classificatory schemes implied in the official discourse to our data collected in Beijing.

Since the foundation of the CCP in 1921, class has been and remains central to the understanding of the ideological discourse in the PRC. As is the case in other developing economies⁷², the Chinese state plays a decisive role in creating social classes, such as the new entrepreneurs and the middle class, also in shaping their socioeconomic and political traits, and hence in the process of construction of the discourse of the middle-class discourse (Chen 2013: 17). This discursive process of construction “has developed alongside a striking relationship with contemporary Chinese psycho-social reality, which gives it solidity and future” (Solé-Farràs 2014: 50). As we have seen, leaving aside the ability to highlight difference and inequality, the middle class is probably more important as an ideological and mobilizing discourse than a precise or reliable analytical tool, in particular in one-party states, such as the PRC, that are part of, or draw on, the Marxist tradition.

The analysis of the official discourse of the middle class in the first two decades of this new century, which is developed in this chapter, is based on the definition of discourse provided by Solé-Farràs, the historical-discursive method and the integrative concept of context established by Wodak (1996: 21) and used by Sandby-Thomas (2014) in his analysis of how the CCP legitimizes its authority through stability discourse. In addition, the analysis of newspaper articles about the middle class, published in *Renmin Ribao's* digital version, also considers whether the voice that appears in the articles comes from the elites or from other actors, if the problematic aspects of the privatization process and the new relationship between new social actors and the state experienced in China, and if solutions are proposed. The proposed analysis on media reports displayed in section 3.4 covers a historical period between the year 2000 — when the middle class was first named in relation to Jiang Zemin’s (5th President of the PRC from 1993 to 2003) formulation of the ‘Three Represents’, which showed official support of the Party-state for the promotion of the country’s middle class, something that had not happened before— and the year 2018, the last time the current constitution adopted at the 5th National People's Congress of China on December 4, 1982, was amended.

Alvin Y. So (2007) refers to this new relationship between the state and Chinese society, explaining how Mao created a “statist society” between 1949 and 1978, and how the Chinese state was rebuilt after the reforms initiated in 1978 into a state that mediated within a society divided by classes. It is appealing to claim “that special institutional arrangements from the historical legacy shaped the social inequality and social mobility during the transition” period (Lin 2008: 43). In particular, it is difficult to explain how the pre-reform destratification mechanisms, such as the political mobilization during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) serving toward the goal of egalitarianism (Parish 1984), “transform to special institutional settings that were supposed to contribute to the ‘re-stratification’ during the reform era” (Lin 2008: 43).

However, this paradox between the arguments of destratification and of exceptionalism suggests that the understanding of the Mao-dominated years of China’s politics must be challenged before displaying the findings of the investigation of the ideological middle-class discourse in contemporary China. As regards the section analysing China’s constitutional amendments in depth, this chapter shall identify the ideological principles and rhetoric contribution of the speeches and writings of CCP’s Party secretaries and presidents of the PRC. In addition to being aware of these narratives, and in order to shed light on the paradox between the arguments of destratification and exceptionalism on which the official discourse

⁷² This class formation established by the state is argued by some analysts of social classes in developing economies including the PRC, such as Pearson 1997; Bell 1998; Jones 1998; Shin 1999; Bellin 2000, 2002; Chibber 2003; Dickson 2003a, 2008; Tsai 2005, 2006; Zhou 2004; King *et al.* 2008, in Chen 2013: 17.

on middle class in contemporary China is built, it is essential that we familiarize ourselves with the ideological evolution of the concept of class in the Mao Zedong-dominated era and post-Maoist China. Prior to analysing in detail, the concept of class and the official discourse of the middle class in the PRC, we will first elucidate the significance of this discourse of the middle class as a methodological tool in China's studies.

3.1 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OFFICIAL DISCOURSE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS⁷³

In his research on how Confucian thought, which was the ideological underpinning of traditional, imperial China, is being developed and refined into a New Confucianism relevant for the twenty-first century, Solé-Farràs defines "discourse"

as the result of an incessant process of collective creation that intellectually structures both the determining of diverse desires for living in an ideal way, often employing imprecise conceptions in accordance with certain values, but not others, and the contingency of unintentional actions benefiting this ideal.

(Solé-Farràs 2014: 1)

According to this, the official discourse of the middle class is a collective construction — although perhaps involuntary— to establish a set of symbolic and identity classifications that construct an ideal type. As is evident from Chapter II, the Chinese middle class is the result of a series of cumulative factors that facilitated social engineering through incentives and subsidies —first through the privatization of housing⁷⁴— to make the group a so-called active part of the construction of this discourse (Tomba 2014: 175). Furthermore, the middle-class identity process is related to class differences that arise within opportunities in life, lifestyles and collective identities.

In the case of the ideal of life of the Chinese middle class, the symbolic classifications and the consequent distinctive identities are formed from a series of rhetorical concepts such as *wenming* (civilization, culture), *hexie* (harmony), modernity, patriotism or *suzhi* (quality). As indicated in the previous chapter, a central concept in the construction of the Chinese middle class is *suzhi*, translated as "human quality" (Goodman 2014: 110) and defined as the "minute social distinctions defining a 'person of quality'" (Anagnost 2004: 190) according to various aspects —such as acquired knowledge, self-development or *xiuyang*, respect for social rules, civility, ways of eating, talking, consuming, of being citizens and so on (Rocca 2017: 120)— and "the incitement of a middle-class desire for social mobility" (Anagnost 2004: 190). Thus, "ideology is best understood as the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence" (Fields 1990: 110) that builds these distinctive practices which nourish our everyday life. In the global market, the symbolic construction of class distinctions that represents a quality consumption —the higher the quality of the product, the higher the person's *suzhi*— is also constitutive of the social position of individuals in contemporary China.

⁷³ This introduction references part of an article under review for publication in the *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (REIS), provisionally titled "El Discurso Oficial de la Clase Media China: Ansiedad, Nacionalismo y Populismo" [The Official Discourse of the Chinese Middle Class: Anxiety, Nationalism and Populism] and sent in August 2020.

⁷⁴ As Hai highlighted, "similar to the idea of special economic zone is the proliferation of numerous privately controlled zones through urban real estate development projects" (Hai 2013: 31, 32).

Once an ideology is established, its acceptance is valued on the basis of daily governmental practices. In the case of the Chinese middle class, these practices involve behaving as a person of high *suzhi*, who takes care of his physical appearance, a modern, patriotic citizen, with a harmonious life, and so on. The degree of conformity to the moral discourses and values or ideals —harmony and quality, to mention a few— that justify such internalized practices which are recognized as legitimate (Tomba 2014: 12) and that, in turn, respond to specific needs of identification, differentiation and hierarchy concerning heritage (Matus 2017: 168). With this process, which begins with the construction of a discourse, the state uses the ideology previously developed to legitimize actions —political and legal measures such as constitutional amendment— that it wishes to implement without encountering resistance from the people who themselves participate in said action⁷⁵.

Both the economic reforms and the official discourses promoted in the PRC due, to a large extent, to the media, aim to stipulate and standardize the policies of the CCP that are considered correct and effective, and which are reflected in legal texts such as the Constitution of the PRC. Taking into account that “what is ‘correct and effective’ is necessarily determined by the CCP” —that is, “anything inconsistent with the policy of the CCP is therefore neither correct nor effective”— (Yu 1989: 47), the study of the discourse on the middle class, based on the changes in the Constitution and in a propaganda medium such as *RW*, allows analysing the aspects implicit that come from this discourse, determine its meaning and thus take advantage of its potential as a way to access knowledge concerning a set of social practices (Ruiz 2014: 172).

That is why, by analysing official discourse, as Solé-Farràs (2014: 50) also suggests, it is a great help to know how to identify the main discursive spaces in which the official discourse of the middle class acts as an influential element, clearly differentiated from the other discourses and narratives that converge upon it, with which it argues, engages in dialogue, and interacts. Then, as many indicators, data and knowledge as possible concerning the whole context of these identified discursive spaces and interactions have to be examined in detail, by focusing on the affinities —rather than coherent approaches— which positions the different elements of a discursive space in a relationship with each other, “to enable us to interpret and understand how and why reality is structured in a certain way” —this would not only, of course, be a

⁷⁵ As for the capacities of the state to realize any goal it may pursue, Chen (2013: 14) notes, contemporary state-centered analysts also provide with some very useful insights about resources, dimensions, and strengths of such capacities (Skocpol 1985; Amsden 1985; Tilly 1985; Katzenstein 1985; Evans 1995). According to the contemporary state-centered approach, Chen also notes, state capacities may be examined and gauged along two dimensions: the cohesiveness of the state as a strategic actor in formulating and implementing national policies; and, the ability of the state to mobilize and guide societal forces for the achievement of national goals (Amsden 1989)” (Chen 2013: 15). At present, in terms of the strength of state capacities, “scholars focus on the effectiveness of the state in affecting various areas of socioeconomic and political life”, but in the case of Chinese state, it “is likely to have even stronger capacities to penetrate society in general and to guide economic transformations” (Chen 2013: 15-16). In China’s studies, “a group of scholars who have studied the role of the new private entrepreneurs in political change in China find that, due to their dependent and cooperative relationship with the state, these private entrepreneurs tend to be supportive of the incumbent CCP state and are less likely to be in favour of any political change in the current undemocratic political system” (Pearson 1997, Dickson 2003a, Tsai 2005 and 2006, in Chen 2013: 18) (see also Whyte 2010, 2015, and Chapter II).

discourse analysis task, but also historiographic, political, economic and so on— (Wodak 1989: *xiv*). For instance, as this chapter targets, the exploration of the principal narratives centering on middle class by examining the constitutional amendments in post-Maoist era, the speeches made by the main leaders of Party-state and the news articles published on *RW* in the twenty-first century. This evaluation process first has to be understood as a category of analysis by the social sciences and, then as a representation of a new identity referent promoted by the central party-state.

In general terms, the official discourse can be understood as “the systemisation of modes of argument that proclaim the state’s legal and administrative rationality” (Burton and Carlen 1979: 48, in Gilligan 2019: 114). However, it is obvious to “people and countries all over the world that linkages between official inquiry and representations of truth and governance regarding societal structures are critical to how societies function, and subsequently can have substantive effects on the lives of millions of people” (Gilligan 2019: 114). These linkages occur in legislative contexts —the responses for the state most symbolically valuable, (and therefore amongst the most clearly to see as a legitimation device for the state), “are those that are popularly perceived to be objective, politically independent and of high status, such as, official inquiries,” media reports or constitutional amends (Gilligan 2019: 114).

As noted earlier, discourse analysis is not so much involved in “discovering” the true non-ideological world —something impossible to achieve, as Žižek explains in *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* (Fiennes et al. 2012)— but to go further and reveal the structural narratives that emerge, the position of the central party-state, and to verify the debates that have developed about them. That is, “when people take their own affairs into their hands” (Labov 1982: 195-196, in Wodak 1989: *xiv*). This characteristic is what “makes discursive spaces remarkably flexible, which is why they have become an inexhaustible intellectual source for these discourses” and, simultaneously, “their spheres of philosophical and ideological influence” (Solé-Farràs 2014: 50).

After having established here the definition of discourse that prevails in our research project and presented the relevance of the discourse of the Chinese middle class, the implicit aspects of this discourse are framed below in the political context of post-Maoist China, analysing the discourse that the leadership has elaborated during the last four decades. Before this, the concept of class has been historically and ideologically contextualized since the founding of the PRC in 1949.

3.2 GENERAL IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF CLASS IN MAOIST CHINA

The concept of class has been and continues to be an instrument of utmost importance to understand political and social changes in the PRC during the 20th and 21st centuries. Founded in 1921, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) made revolution explicitly by mobilizing and acting on behalf of China’s workers and peasants (Goodman 2014: 1). When the CCP took power in 1949 and established the PRC, it did so on behalf of the Chinese working classes and, with land reform and the socialist transformation of capitalist industry and commerce, effectively eliminated private property, the basis of “social class” in the Marxist sense. However, what it could not completely eradicate, although still did so to a great extent, were inequalities (Gold 2000). In order to better understand class formation, class narratives and

the official discourse of the middle class in the PRC, this section attempts to follow Bourdieu's suggestion that social scientists must analyse class as "historical artifacts" (1987: 8-9) by reconstructing the historical labour that has produced the class and social divisions (1991b: 248). On that basis, we aim here to produce a genealogy of the Chinese middle class by examining class as a historical phenomenon and contextualizing the historical background of the social structure and the historical track of classes in terms of volume and composition of capital formation, and material and symbolic struggles along the twentieth and twenty-first century in the PRC.

3.2.1 Historical background: The middle class before 1949

The pre-1949 Chinese society, as Chen suggests, may be divided into urban and rural sectors (2013: 45). In terms of population, over 80 per cent of the Chinese lived in the rural areas and less than 20 per cent lived in the cities (Chen 2013: 45). On the one hand, the rural social structure had two major groups: the peasantry (the lowest level in society) and the gentry (the officials and the local gentry). As Chen pointed, the social structure in rural China "was characterized by the dominance of a small number of gentry and landowners over the large number of landless peasants" (Chen 2013: 45). The peasants were "the ruled" and "they paid taxes to support the government and the ruling class" (Chow 2011: 47). On the other hand, the gentry⁷⁶ and landowners were made up of "the families of prestige and power, they allied themselves with officialdom, from which their honours and rewards came, and served as a medium between the government and the common people" (Chow 2011: 279).

In terms of economic development and industrialization, the middle class in China in the first part of the twentieth century, emerged mainly in the cities (Chen 2013: 45). The pre-1949 society in urban China was seen as the dominance of a small number of upper-class bourgeoisie and comprador capitalists over a large number of urban proletariats" (Chen 2013: 45). In this kind of general social structure, and by grouping managers, office workers, and professionals together, the middle class constituted approximately only 3 per cent of the Chinese population right before 1949⁷⁷ (Chen 2013: 45,185). In 1935, only Shanghai had about 28,000 middle-class professional and white-collar workers (Xu 2001: 38, 57-59, 65, in Gross 2011: 122).

However, this urban middle class had grown rapidly during the Republican era, especially in Shanghai: in 1927, a five-person Shanghai household earning 200 yuan monthly was upper class, those earning 100-200 yuan were middle class, and those earning 66 yuan and below were ordinary residents (Xu 2001: 38, 57-59, 65; Gross 2011: 121). By the early 1930s Shanghai

⁷⁶ In the 1940s, Chow Yung-teh, from the Institute for Census Research of Tsinghua University, conducted a systematic investigation of community life in Chinese society with the aid of several assistants, most of it during the Japanese War but some of it as late as 1948. In his seminal book, *Social Mobility in Traditional Chinese Society* (1966), Chow points out that "the gentry at one time had operated well in fulfilling the basic functions of promoting the welfare of the people, but the group had proved unadaptable to the new social needs brought about by the impact of industrialization, with its agricultural mechanization and Western social values. Under the impact of Western social values like nationalism and democracy, science and technology, industry and commerce, the gentry as a status group no longer served as social prop in a changing world. The gentry, which had greatly affected the history of Chinese society, had been doomed for a long time" (Chow 2011: 279).

⁷⁷ By grouping managers, civil servants, professionals, and self-employed labourers together, the middle class constituted approximately 7 per cent of the Chinese population (Chen 2013: 185-6).

had 3.5 million people and was one of the world's largest cities and most important ports -had 40 per cent of China's total investment in modern industries and half of China's foreign trade, 90 per cent of whose funding was funnelled through Shanghai's financial institutions (Gross 2011: 122-3). As a result, at that time, Shanghai had the largest concentration of China's new middle class and was perfectly positioned to develop a sophisticated leisure culture⁷⁸ - Shanghai was relatively insulated from domestic and foreign strife because it was a treaty port far from early Japanese incursions (Gross 2011: 123). China's Republican middle class remained largely urban and concentrated in Shanghai.

Most of the middle class before 1949 learnt technical and managerial skills while working at Western companies established in China. Furthermore, the middle class in Republican China

had gained some economic and/or political independence under the rule of the Nationalist Party and had a greater degree of self-determination in regard to such matters as their lifestyle and occupational advancement, much like their counterparts in Western societies (Davis 2000).

(Chen 2013: 45-46)

The vitality of public life in a partially modernized city like Beijing showed the intensification of political debate and of political participation which took place in Republican China (Bergère 1997: 323). In this framework, the synthesis of old and new political practices and their mutually supportive roles can be considered as underpinning the emergence of a public sphere -gentry, merchants and urban middle-class opinion no longer depended on official power as it was shown by the increasing number of city-wide marches in 1925 and the nationalist mass demonstrations such as the May Thirtieth movement which invited the participation of all citizens (Strand 1989; Bergère 1997: 324). Indeed, the changing Beijing's urban landscape offered new middle-class spaces such as restaurants, bathhouses and public parks in which citizens -including non-elite ones such as middle-class individuals- could gather and develop a growing awareness of public issues (Bergère 1997: 324).

Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, the Shanghai's middle class individuals featured among the pages of middle-class magazines such as *Family Weekly* (*Jiating xingqi*)⁷⁹ was conceived as a young conjugal family in comfortable economic circumstances -the family lived in its own apartment with one servant and one or two children; the husband left for his office in the morning and returned at day's end to share the evening with his family, while the wife remained home to supervise housework and care for the children (Glosser 2003: 142). The magazine articulated businessmen You Huaigao's holistic vision and individualistic approach — based on the idea that if each individual would lead a productive and progressive life, the nation would thrive— until the Communist victory in 1949 forced him to abandon it (Glosser 2003: 139). *Family Weekly* promoted family reform, economic rationalization, improved nutrition, hygiene, and wholesome habits (Glosser 2003: 139-140).

Also, over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, the middle-class woman was conceived as the modern woman that featured in an expanding range of public spaces in urban China. This ideal first emerged in China during the May Fourth Movement as a creature of the intellectual

⁷⁸ The first Chinese-run travel agency, China Travel Service (*Zhongguo luxing she*) and its travel magazine (*luxing zazhi*) marketed the new idea of pleasure travel, the new roles of service industry and client, and the new location of a modern tourist site for middle-class customers in China since 1927 (Gross 2011).

⁷⁹ The annual income for *Family Weekly* budgets often amounted to a "frugal" 1,800 yuan, but worker incomes in the early 1930s averaged no more than 90 yuan per month (Glosser 2003: 142).

reformers' radical challenge to Confucian China and its "traditional woman" among the pages of magazines such as *New Youth* (Harris, 1995: 64, in Edwards 2000: 116). In this framework, the modern middle-class woman was conceived as politically aware, patriotic, independent, and educated (Edwards 2000: 116). However, as Edwards highlights, by the late 1920s and early 1930s, big Shanghai companies used the modern middle-class woman as an enticement to purchase and consume "modern" goods and services (Lee 1999: 78). Consequently, the middle-class ideal of the modern woman was glamorous, fashionable, desirable, and available (Edwards 2000: 116).

At the same time, impressed by the Russian Revolution, Goodman (2014) reasons, Chinese intellectuals seeking to create an agenda of radical change founded the CCP in 1921 in the former Shanghai French Concession. However, a key problem "was the relative absence of industrialization and its associated proletariat, or indeed any significant social base that could be mobilized as such" (2014: 9). As a result, the debate about the ideas of class became an essential issue among communist ranks. Mao's "ideas concerning classes seem to have originated more clearly in his exposure to Marxism-Leninism, although here too he gave the concept a distinctive Chinese twist" (Lieberthal 2004: 73). In practice, Mao believed that "an individual's objective socio-economic class nature could be modified through changed consciousness arising from a learning experience, usually ideological education and training or participation in revolutionary struggle" (Schram 1981: 401). Thanks to these instruments and his experience in the peasant revolts of the mid-1920s, Mao gave the peasantry the revolutionary potential that Marxism-Leninism gave to the nature of the proletariat, a less numerous social actors in China than the peasantry. Although a large part of the CCP elite defended a Marxist-Leninist class ideology, in the end, it was Mao's view that prevailed, thereby confirming the words of Gramsci —as the Bolshevik Revolution that occurred in Russia consisting "more of ideologies than of events," China's revolutionary struggle, which was soon to trigger, may also be considered the "revolution against Karl Marx's *Capital*" (Gramsci 2007 [1917]).

In conclusion, during the Republican Era, the process of social mobility at that time was usually slow due to the dramatic economic inequality (with intense local variations) (Esherick 1981), but "the social ladders identified were the school, medical practice, the army, government, commerce, and marriage" (Chow 2011: 282). Although the Nationalists (GMD), and the Communists subsequently, were both authoritarian Leninist parties that shared a dream of rapid industrialization led by state monopolies, were both tutored by Soviet advisers and enforced policies of political control and repression (Davis 2000: 252), middle class individuals had gained some economic and/or political independence under the rule of the Nationalist Party (Chen 2013: 45-6). Further, they had a greater degree of self-determination in regard to such matters as their lifestyle and occupational advancement, much like their counterparts in Western societies (Davis 2000, in Chen 2013: 46). Consequently, and despite the slow pace of social mobility, this small but gradually rising middle class had "its own standards and ideals" that might also "encourage its members to be diligent, but a perfect gentleman worked with his brain rather than with his hands, and conspicuous leisure was the very core of their existence" (Chow 2011: 280). Here the past offers a clue to the future.

3.2.2 A middle class in Maoist China

With the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in October 1949, after 22 years of conflict with its nationalist rivals domestically (1927-1949), and with Japanese invaders (1937-1945), the new Communist government's main aims were to revive the war-ravaged economy by developing capitalists' industries as a prime requisite for the development of a modern economic structure that would then be ripe for socialist transformation, and to eliminate the remaining domestic opposition by following the orthodox Marxist ideology, committed itself to the elimination of class differences in order to create a classless society (Saich 2015: 32-34; Chen 2013: 46). Despite the CCP had been involved in peasant mobilizations, the Communists had little experience in urban administration and leadership, and none in national government, while its relations with the (urban) working class was weak (Blecher 2009: 38). As "victory returned the CCP to the cities, in many of which they had been forced to abandon following repression by the GMD," CCP leaders now had to return the revolution to these cities, "build an industrial base and a working class whom they were supposed to represent" (Saich 2015: 32), evolve urban CCP policies and socialist structural institutions —educational, administrative, etc.—, and train, hire and promote civil servants and new technical and managerial employees working in such new public administrations and enterprises (Davis 2000).

For this purpose, as Andreas points, the Party-state developed enterprises in "a two-pronged offensive," empowering workers under CCP leadership at factory level through state-regulated work-units (*danwei* 单位), "and bringing factory owners and entrepreneurs under closer control through national political campaigns, in which it appealed to the patriotism of the capitalist class on the one hand and was prepared to use more force on the other" (2012: 108, in Goodman 2014: 17). Consequently, "this foreclosed the immediate introduction of a full-scale socialist transition strategy," as it was summed up the "moderate" slogan "three years of recovery and ten years of development" (Saich 2001: 28). In addition, the CCP established a practice of forging broad class coalitions and limiting class struggle (Blecher 2009: 38). Indeed, right after winning the civil war, the CCP had to rely inevitably "on the support of the poor peasantry and the local elites," including not only the workers and peasants, but also the petty bourgeoisie and those capitalists who had supported the CCP during the civil war —while landlords, unsympathetic industrialists, those with foreign interests, and those connected with the GMD that were to dealt with harshly" (Saich 2001: 28).

Although the new leader, Mao Zedong (1893-1976) described the newly established Chinese state as "a people's democratic dictatorship", named the new state "People's Republic" as an emphasis on reconciliation, moderation and class collaboration. Political leadership went to the workers, with the support of the peasants, but the new regime was officially led by four classes: the workers, the peasants, the urban petty bourgeoisie or service class, and the national bourgeoisie; the latter was composed of local native entrepreneurs —as opposed to foreign entrepreneurs— who decided to stay in the PRC —unlike those who migrated to Hong and Taiwan⁸⁰ (Goodman 2014: 13; Davis 2004). In one of his first speeches as a chairman of the PRC, Mao stated that the national bourgeoisie would be "allowed to be part of 'the people' but were warned that, because they remained exploiters, they could, if their behaviour warranted

⁸⁰ As Diane E. Davis indicates, "a large proportion of the KMT [or GMD] exiles who came to the island [Taiwan] were themselves small farmers or holders of variously sized rural properties from agricultural provinces in the mainland" (2004: 192).

it, find themselves redefined as enemies of the state” (Mao 1961 [1949], in Goodman 2014: 13).

Thus, during the so-called “Liberation”, from 1950 to 1952, the CCP allowed, under its supervision, “capitalists deemed sympathetic to the revolution ... to develop their industries as a prime requisite for the development of a modern economic structure that would then be ripe for socialist transformation” (Saich 2001: 29). However, right after winning the civil war, the CCP “not only stigmatized the bourgeoisie ideologically but also implemented policies that blocked the reproduction of a distinctive upper middle class” (Davis 1999; Davis 2000, in Wang and Davis 2010: 158). Indeed, during the Liberation period, “the communists undertook a series of mass political campaigns (Land Reform, Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries, Thought Reform of Intellectuals, Three Anti Five Anti) in which they determined the class status of each and rural inhabitant” (Lieberthal 2004: 75). Starting in 1952, “the ‘Five Anti’ Campaign (launched against bribery, tax evasion, fraud, theft of government property and the stealing of state secrets) led to struggle sessions, confessions of economic crimes and ultimately the collectivization of business” (Goodman 2014: 17) in an equivalent way as the rural collectivization established in 1956 the formation of higher-stage Agricultural Producers’ Cooperatives and a “12-Year Plan for Agriculture that proposed socialization as the necessary prerequisite for a rapid increase in production” (Saich 2001: 34). Hence, “[w]ith private property eliminated, the issue of class identity became potentially murky and confused” (Lieberthal 2004: 75).

Moreover, during the Liberation period, class categorization —emerged within the CCP as a useful instrument in highly concrete processes of organizing peasant revolution during the war decades— became generalized throughout the country “into a rigid bureaucratic system of political control through naming and classifying social identities” (Wu 2013: 209). During the early years of the PRC, every citizen was assigned a “class category” applied to the entire Chinese populace that appeared on their household registration documents (Wu 2013: 209). This elaborate system of over 60 class categories was determined by person’s socio-economic position —mainly based on the family’s employment status, income sources and accumulated capital— and political loyalties as implied by behaviour at the time of the “liberation” of the local community, or during 1946-49 (Goodman 2014; Wu 2013; Walder and Hu 2009).

As Walder and Hu (2009: 1401) notes, “the class label was assigned to an entire household based on the designation of the male household head, and in subsequent generations it was inherited through the male line (Kraus 1981)” according to three broad categories. In particular, those from the ‘red’ backgrounds, people who had fought or died on the CCP side in the revolution or who were from “red proletarian” or “exploited” backgrounds (some 86.4 per cent of the urban population) —that is, “social classes of the prerevolution social order such as industrial workers, poor urban residents, the landless poor, and “lower-middle” peasants;” also included in this red category were households headed by men who had joined the CCP before its victory (Walder and Hu 2009: 1401-12)— were highly favoured, while those from the ‘black’ class backgrounds (totalling some 3.4 per cent of the urban population) associated with the rich or resistance to the CCP —i.e., exploiting classes, defined by their property ownership such as capitalists, landlords, and rich peasants; also included in this category were those who had joined the Nationalist Party or served in the Nationalist government or army” (Walder and Hu 2009: 1402)— were discriminated against, and often seapegoated in later campaigns (Kraus 1981; Goodman 2014: 15-6). The rest of the population, which was referred as “petit bourgeois” (some 14.3 per cent of the urban population) in Marxist terms, was judged to be

neither inherently loyal to the party nor reactionary (Walder and Hu 2009: 1402). As a “middle” or “ordinary” category between the above-mentioned two extremes (the ‘red’ and the ‘black’ categories), “[t]his group included urban and rural middle classes: white-collar workers, professionals, small peddlers and shop-keepers, and self-sufficient “middle peasants”” that in prerevolution society were higher social statuses due to their relatively high levels of education, income, and property ownership; “because they were not directly involved in the exploitation of others in the production process,” after 1949 they were not assumed to be disloyal and reactionary by their very nature and “did not suffer the worst kinds of discrimination. However, they were not to be favoured like those in the red category” (Walder and Hu 2009: 1402). Certainly, in terms of class analysis, Mao addressed the issue of class identity “in an un-Marxist fashion” since he determined that “political attitude (rather than relations to the means of production) could determine class status” (Lieberthal 2004: 75)⁸¹.

In short term, during the Mao Zedong-dominated period of the PRC’s politics, from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s, class categorization was an essential part of the process by which the CCP established social control and collectivize property relations with the establishment of the new regime and a new mechanism of intergenerational transfer of privilege and disadvantage that most Chinese faced and understood in their own experience (Goodman 2014: 1, 15, 16, 33). Indeed, “it rapidly became clear that class background as identified at this time was to become the main determinant” (Goodman 2014: 15) of the three major aspects of an individual’s and their family’s life chances, namely: admission to the CCP, a key credential for rapid advancement into positions of authority and privilege even for those with modest educations (Kraus 1981; Unger 1982; Lee 1991); access to education and careers —i.e., school admissions, job assignments, promotions, etc. (Unger 1982; Walder and Hu 2009)—, and to marriage partners (Brown and Johnson 2015).

Within just three years of the CCP victory, Davis notes, as “the new regime urgently needed the highly educated to fill the many new technical and managerial positions created within the state sector,” the Republican-era “professional and managerial strata had been totally incorporated into the party-state’s civil service” (2000: 255-6). This was “a necessity imposed by this need of the new regime to rely initially on” an estimated 400,000⁸² “former employees of Nationalist organizations to carry out day-to-day administration,” (2000: 261) and “resignation was impossible, and professionals and managers had stepped onto a single escalator for career advancement” (2000: 253). This group of state workers was comprised by managers, office employees, and liberal professionals, who learnt technical and managerial skills while working at Western firms, which were established in urban China during the Western imperialism in the pre-1949 period⁸³.

⁸¹ Marx’s approach to class “created permanent pariah groups —those people who had received a bad class status (landlord, rich peasant, capitalists, and so on) in the early 1950s, and their descendants ... regardless of wealth or position” (Lieberthal 2004: 75). Although these negative labels were removed from personal records at the start of reforms (January 1979) and the “class categories” fell into disuse, they were still in force when it came to accessing university and public service or joining the CCP (Goodman 2014). As early as 1984, a new national standardization system was developed to identify class history based on the same class descriptors as above. This new system remained operational until 2004 but, as a model of social classification, it remained an essential part of the process by which the CCP established its social order.

⁸² *Zhongguo laodong renshi nianjian 1949-1987* (1989: 872, in Davis 2000: 272).

⁸³ As Lu indicates, the dependence on Western models, in the Republican Era, “also fostered a community of interests between the ruling GMD and the West. Government economic policies

As we have seen, in pre-revolution society, this group was higher social statuses before 1949—they had relatively high levels of education, income, and property ownership although owning no means of production—and, in the absence of active political discrimination, would normally be expected to transfer their status to subsequent generations at high rates (Ganzeboom et al. 1991; Walder and Hu 2009: 1406). Indeed, this “small but gradually rising middle class” of that time, which constituted only 3 per cent of the population right before 1949, “had gained some economic and/or political independence” under the rule of the GMD (Chen 2013: 45-6). As Deborah Davis notes, despite “the Nationalist and Communists were both authoritarian Leninist parties” (2000: 252), “the GMD leaders were not in an overtly adversarial relationship those,” such as professionals, “who sold their skills and services directly to customers or those who moved between private and public practice” (Davis 2000: 269). As a result, they “had a greater degree of self-determination in regard to such matters as their lifestyle and occupational advancement, much like their counterparts in Western societies” (Davis 2000; Chen 2013: 45-6).

Once the institutional transition to socialism was complete in 1956, “opportunities outside the collective sector had virtually disappeared, and state employment was the norm” as the Party-state needed again to fill the many middle-level professional positions created after the socialist transition (Davis 2000: 255). However, this time the central government allocated state jobs for graduates who had been post-1949 enrolled—as Davis points, graduates of the early 1950s tended to be idealistic and patriotic by stressing their enthusiasm to “serve the nation” regardless the post they were assigned (2000: 258, 260). Also, the social class background of these new professionals and in particular managers included a broad range. It was clear, since the first year after 1949, “that the new state was already recruiting university students from among more social strata” (Davis 2000: 265). Consequently, by the late 1950s, the technical and managerial positions created within the state sector was comprised by part of pre-1949 middle class and by those trained in accordance with the egalitarian ideal promoted by the Party-state. This social “stratum of the salaried civil servants [or workers]” (Davis 2000: 272) emerged “as only somewhat resembled the pre-1949 middle class or a middle class by Western standards to the extent that some of the professions in this stratum were similar to, if not the same as, those in a typical middle class in the West” (Chen 2013: 48). For lack of a better term for this unique social group, let us call this social stratum the “Maoist middle class” as Deborah Davis suggests (1992).

By the end of 1956, as noted above, almost all urban citizens were assigned to a *danwei* “so that housing, welfare (including education for children and medical care) and security were provided at the point of employment” (Goodman 2014: 17) based on different principles following two trends. On the one hand, there was a detailed list of occupations, each with different salaries (in the cities it was called “workplace segmentation”) with which not only was the location of a *danwei* within the city, and each worker’s hierarchical rank within the *danwei*, but the unit’s status in the planned state-owned economy which also imposed inequality (Gold 2000; Bian 1994). For instance, “influential work-units had the connections and funding to construct more and better housing for their members and to secure privileged access to rationed goods” (Tang and Unger 2013: 93). By this stage, as Korzec and Whyte (1981) highlight, “and from 1955 on there was a wage system for state staff and workers with twenty-

supported favourable conditions for those foreign forces which had benefited under the old regime. In particular, the Western powers gained as many privileges and benefits by ostensibly supporting the GMD regime as they had once gained by pressuring the Qing government” (2000: 26).

six grades of officials, seventeen grades of technician and eight grades of workers” (Goodman 2014: 17).

On the other, all full-time employees in state industrial enterprises benefited from the issuance of the Labour Insurance Regulations (LIR) in 1951. “They would receive free medical care, lifetime pensions, and disability pay,” so “it became clear that urban Chinese who found LIR-protected jobs would be privileged” (Davis 2000: 267). Subsequently, Davis also notes, “in 1955, this same group began receiving subsidized public housing and favorable access to day care and schools for their children” (2000: 267). Despite the set of privileges of the urban workers, the *danwei* system has been the fundamental social and spatial unit of urban China under socialism due to its double function: on the one hand, as social control by absorbing individual identity within the collective, creating cities inhabited by *danwei(s)* rather than individuals (Bray 2005: 157), and instilling a “correct” lifestyle consisting of “hard work and simple life” (*jianku pusu*) (Bin 1997: 46, in Beltrán 2018: 138); and on the other, this *danwei* lifestyle acted as a means to accumulate capital while the government maintained the provision of goods at the basic level in order to ensure the reproduction of workforce (Beltrán 2018: 138).

Moreover, both economic and social capital were monopolized by CCP leaders —they acted quickly and deliberately to monopolize them after 1949—, and the accumulation of both capitals ended up restricted to the professional field in the realm of *danwei*. Once the CCP launched campaigns of class struggle that used style of dress or home furnishings as evidence of bourgeois “crimes,” urban residents could not even risk displaying symbolic capital or distinctive lifestyle in terms of patterns of consumption and “made their families vulnerable to censure rather than signalling membership in a desirable social class” (Davis 2000: 271). As a result, “without these opportunities to accumulate and display cultural refinement and social networks” beyond the *danwei* assigned, the Maoist middle class “lost important resources with which to define and reproduce themselves socially” (Davis 2000: 271).

In this manner, almost all economic activities taking place in the PRC “were either under direct or indirect state control as (respectively) state-owned enterprises or collectives” (Goodman 2014: 17). At the height of the Mao-dominated era of China’s politics, economic growth and reduction in the number of hardship cases went hand in hand with a striking demographic growth —as a result of basic hygiene and health measures, and a more equal redistribution of wealth through land reforms⁸⁴— that almost doubled population and GDP per capita despite remaining comparably low (Beltrán 2018: 138). However, cadres and Maoist middle class’s sons at age thirty did not only achieved less, but they also experienced greater inequality and a clearly upward occupational trajectory.

These outcomes can be only partially explained by the centrality of age-biased institutions of Chinese socialism and CCP rule, but in addition, as Davis suggests (1992), core elements of the late Mao blueprint for industrialization were equally important. First, the decision to close universities for four years between 1967 and 1971, “and create the undifferentiated (and abbreviated) secondary schools of the early 1970s eliminated the opportunity for young urbanities to move as quickly into managerial or professional roles as had secondary school graduates of the 1950s” (1992: 417). Second, Davis also notes, “the pervasive hostility to

⁸⁴ Although land reform was designated, Goodman notes, “less to redistribute wealth than to eradicate the power and influence of the local ruling class and to establish the new regime’s structures of social control [c]ertainly there was land redistribution” (2014: 16).

entrepreneurship and commodity markets increased the likelihood of skidding among those born during the 1950s because it eliminated self-employment as an alternative path to bluecollar wage labor” (1992: 417). During the Mao-dominated era, “the CCP created a political underclass to manage public opinion” composed of “capitalists and other politically undesirable elements such as landlords” that were used by the CCP as the negative examples —“publicized as anti-socialist devils, parasites, and self-seeking (Mamo 1981; So 2002; Watson 1984)” — in its effort to model the masses into socialist citizens” (Zang 2008: 60). In contrast, the “new socialist man” was honoured and exemplified by state workers and model citizens such as Lei Feng⁸⁵ and his exemplary character dedicated to service to the people and the CCP —Farquhar describes him as “the socialist Everyman whose distinguishing characteristics made him a pure synecdoche of the collective” (1996: 214, in Edwards 2010: 28). Consequently, the new socialist person had to be unconditionally committed to communist ideology and put these values before any other bond of family or friendship that had historically been essential for Chinese society (Vogel 1965).

And finally, Davis (1992) adds, “the consistent preference for heavy industry and bias against service trades and commerce reduced not only the growth rate of nonmanual jobs, it even reduced the proportion of nonmanual jobs in the economy” (Parish, 1984, in Davis 1992: 417). As a result, after 1965, it became increasingly unlikely that new entrants, from rural areas and sons of those from manual origins in cities, “to the urban job market would enter managerial or professional positions at the same rates as had their predecessors of the 1950s” (Davis 1992: 417). Thus “the three institutions, *cadre*, *danwei* and *hukou*, founded the impervious social boundaries and the basis of the redistributive power of the party-state” (Wu 2001, in Lin 2008: 44) while “the anomalous predominance of skidding, even among sons of Party functionaries and professionals, becomes understandable as an integral part of the Maoist blueprint for economic development” (Davis 1992: 417). The PRC’s drive for openness and further industrialization and modernization after 1978 appealed to and to some extent relied on the Maoist middle class. Indeed, “the transformation of class structure and mobility patterns in the PRC is an ongoing process, highly contingent upon the extent and direction of the incremental economic reform” and openness (Naughton 1995; Rawski 1999; Wedeman 2003, in Lin 2008: 67), as illustrated by the case of the anomalous predominance of skidding among new entrants to the post-Maoist urban job market.

At the end of 1978, the CCP decided to adopt a more market-focused strategy and, as part of this change, those class identities began losing their previous formal role regarding access to public goods, employment and lifestyle (Goodman 2014). In contrast to Maoist ideology and the politics of class struggle, Deng Xiaoping’s motto was “do not argue” and thus prohibited debate about the direction of reform in terms of socialism versus capitalism (Chun 2015). However, during the era of reforms, the social structures that were organized during the 1950s and 1960s have continued to influence social mobility and the life expectations of subsequent generations (Goodman 2014), as will be discussed in the next chapter. As a result of this stratification in a hybrid mixed economy, the new individualistic values are regulated and limited within the still existing sovereignty of the nation’s power, as shown by the limitations currently existing in politics and freedom of expression in China. The neoliberal principles that represent private accumulation and individual interests have not yet invaded the basic areas

⁸⁵ Lei Feng (1940-62) is the paramount “heroic and model serviceman” in the PRC, the benchmark of all subsequent “soldier celebrities” (Edwards 2010: 26-7), and his influence on later icons and generations cannot be underestimated as we analyse in Chapter IV in more detail.

that are still firmly under the control of the state (Zhang and Ong 2008), hence the importance of an instrument of control, such as ideological discourses.

3.3 CLASS IN POST-MAOIST CHINA: THE OFFICIAL DISCURSIVE SPACE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

Having sketched out a general ideological framework of class in Maoist China, further on this section shall analyse how the construction of the state-sponsored discourse of the middle class can also be unequivocally identified in the specific context of post-Maoist China in global economy. Indeed, this study shall now broaden the scope of the time-line of the discourse analysis based on the amendments of 1982's constitutional version and the voice of political leadership. This is justified by the need to situate the further revisions of the current version of the PRC's Constitution adopted in 1982 within the context of contemporary Chinese politics and the understanding of middle class as an ideological concept and/or discursive phenomenon.

3.3.1 Discourse formulation, 1978-2000

The changes observed during the PRC's market transition must be gauged in order to understand class locations today. The first obvious finding is that the party-state's development strategy started to change at the end of 1978 when the decision was taken, on the one hand, to promote reforms that would reduce the role of government in economic management, introduce marketization to the domestic economy and the domestic economy to global interactions; and, on the other hand, to remove the negatively discriminating class label from the families of the former exploiting classes from personal records on 29 January 1979 (Goodman 2014: 16, 23). However, at that time, Walder and Hu notes, "the black households still were not disadvantaged in professional careers relative to ordinary households." These households compensated denied access to political careers "by moving into the elite professions, which required education but not party membership." The Maoist middle class thus became "the only elite group to transfer status across generations during the Mao period—an advantage attributable in large part to parental education" (Walder and Hu 2009: 1420) as we have seen in the previous section. This should not be surprising: despite removing discriminating class labels, and despite market transition and the adoption of economic openness, the PRC, unlike most other transitional economies, remained a one-party state.

In this respect, the value of political connections increased in the new economic environment and the new socialist elite resumed the process of consolidation of their privileges, despite a temporary interruption due to the Cultural Revolution (Walder and Hu 2009: 1421). During the PRC's market transition, while the politically connected new elite households were entering elite administrative posts at higher net rates than others—although again, this advantage was restricted to the revolutionary-cadre households—(Walder and Hu 2009: 1420), urgent unemployment issues in urban areas compelled the party-state to permit private entrepreneurship in 1977 as a transitory arrangement (Zang 2008: 61). Consequently, the state economy was doubly weakened during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76 because the party-state was unable to continue to function effectively as an urban employment agency, and because "this problem was compounded with the return to the cities of nearly 18 million

‘educated youth’ whom the CCP had sent to rural areas during the Cultural Revolution” (Bernstein 1977; McLaren 1979, in Zang 2008: 61). As “urban employment threatened social stability and the political legitimacy of the CCP,” Zang notes, “the government thus modified its policy toward private businesses to create a new labour market for urban unemployed youth” (2008: 62). However, “lower status people such as ex-criminals, workers with a low-paid job, and rural peasants took advantage of this policy change” —designed to combat unemployment among young people— “since they could not otherwise find a better job elsewhere in the cities (Gold 1990; Szelenyi and Kostello 1996, in Zang 2008: 62).

Unexpectedly, Zang points out, “in the early 1980s, these low status people became the backbone of a small or ‘individual business’ sector (*geithu*)” and managed to survive since “starting an individual business was not a popular career choice because the small-scale enterprises operated outside the state sector.” That meant that “these individual business people were marginalized” not only because of their humble origins and poor educational attainment, but also because “neither owners nor workers were entitled to welfare provisions such as grain and cloth rations,” nor “had career prospects, job security, medical insurance, subsidized housing, fringe benefits, or pensions” as state workers had. Further, “individual businesses were also not respected because they often relied on trade speculation in making profits,” which was a business behaviour not accepted by the Confucian belief. However, they had no choices due to state monopoly on all other urban economic activities (2008: 62).

In the early 1980s, unemployment fell significantly because “the CCP had managed to place most unemployed urban youth in either the state or collective sectors,” and some economic measures were launched to boost “industrial production and quickening the pace of market growth” (Zang 2008: 63). Nevertheless, although a series of policy measures launched from 1978 to 1982 “and the private sector was developed, there were still no explicit economic and political guarantees” that gave solidity to these ‘modernizing’ changes” (Toshiki and Zhao 2004: 8). To alleviate this lack of economic and political guarantees, a constitutional amendment was passed at the Fifth Meeting of the Fifth National People’s Congress in December 4, 1982. While this constitutional amendment “maintained the basic idea that the economic foundation of the PRC was the socialist public system” —by stating that “the whole people own the system collectively”—, the private sector was also positioned as a “supplement to the socialist state-owned economy” in rural and urban areas under the regulations and guidelines of the party-state (Toshiki and Zhao 2004: 8-9).

But before we analyse the emergence of a new group of private entrepreneurs after 1985 based on the amendments of 1982’s constitutional version of the PRC from a discursive construction approach, it should be borne in mind that the first constitution of the PRC (1954), as Mo notes, “was deeply influenced by the constitution of the Soviet Union and was regarded as a socialist-style constitution” (2009: 141). The principal similarity of the Chinese constitution to that of the Soviet Union seems to lie, Jones points out, “in the presence of ideological statements and the prominence of economics, in other words, the clear recognition of Marxism as the official doctrine of the state —both define themselves as socialist states” (1985: 707). Consequently, “the preambles in both constitutions refer to the struggle to overturn capitalism and to establish socialism” (Jones 1985: 707).

Subsequently, four versions of the constitution were promulgated: that of 1954, 1975, 1978 and 1982. The latter is the current version and was adopted at the 5th National People’s

Congress of China on December 4, 1982 with subsequent amendments⁸⁶ in 1988, 1993, 1999, 2004 and the last, in 2018. If the 1978 constitution reflected a softening of unresolved conflicts in government and a call for class struggle compared to the previous version, the later version and its future revisions would also significantly reflect the political and ideological aspirations of the moment.

Most of the language and the compromise of the 1978 version are the same as in the 1975 constitution, but some changes have been made (Jones 1985: 722). For example: “the rural people’s communes is no longer defined as an organization which integrates government, administration and economic management,” but they are defined as “‘a socialist sector’ of the economy” (1978 Constitution art. 7) (Jones 1985: 723). In this 1978 text, the explicit mission of the proletariat, which was to exercise dictatorship over the bourgeoisie in the superstructure, was also eliminated, while other structural changes were added, as well. However, it is striking that despite the changes in language of this version of the constitution, they did not affect the measures taken by the government. Therefore, it is not surprising that, as Jones points out, before the 1978 version was approved, the political situation in China “changed radically” (1985: 724).

Indeed, the report of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee Meeting of the CCP, which was held in December 1978, announced the end of the class struggle and made the Four Modernizations the country’s main objective (Jones 1985: 724). In addition, Jones argues that

This meeting signaled the basic victory of Deng Xiaoping and his group in the struggle for control of the Party —though mopping up operations still go on. In August 1980, the Central Committee of the Communist Party recommended the establishment of a committee to revise the constitution. Soon thereafter the National People’s Congress established a constitutional revision committee. The 1982 constitution is what they came up with. In June 1981, at the Sixth Plenum of the Central Committee, Hua Guofeng resigned as Party Chairman and Hu Yaobang, a follower of Deng, was selected to replace him. These events indicated that the Deng group was in firm control of both the Party and the government, at least at the top levels.

(Jones 1985: 724)

Moreover, as we have seen, the constitutional amendment passed in 1982 promoted the individual economy in rural and urban areas under the control of the administration. These were activities of the private economy that were defined as a supplement to the economy of the socialist state. As such, through a linguistic crossing between two apparently contrary political concepts, such as that of socialism and that of privatization, “‘a particular articulation of neoliberalism ... that configures new milieus at multiple scales” was formed (Zhang and Ong 2008: 2-3). At that time, as Duckett argues, the state adapted and even contributed to the processes of marketization by facilitating state restructuring (1996; 2001). However, these new activities of the private economy generated two interrelated and mutually dependent underlying phenomena: a new group of private entrepreneurs in large and small ways emerged and became the prime beneficiaries of market reform, and the establishment of an

⁸⁶ The distinction between amendment and revision is foundational to the understanding of formal constitutional change in this analysis, but it is still unclear. Richard Albert (2019) suggested that “an amendment should be understood as an effort to continue the constitution-making project than began at the founding moment,” while a revision should be understood as “the unmaking of a constitution,” that is “an effort to unmake the constitution by introducing an extraordinary change that is inconsistent with the fundamental presuppositions of the constitution” (Albert 2019: 1, 2).

opaque institutional and associational link between, on the one hand, the enrichment of many of these new entrepreneurs and, on the other hand, the shares of power held by government officials and CCP cadres.

For instance, among the new group of private entrepreneurs emerged after 1985 due to the dual-track price structure, only those who were connected to leading officials could have privileged access to valued goods controlled by the government (Zang 2008: 63-4). Similarly, as “the real estate market has a very high barrier to entry since it is capital-intensive and requires access to land,” only those who were well connected to leading cadres were able “to participate in the land market since the state owns all the banks and land” such as local officials’ family members, friends, and others related through various kinds of personal ties; that is why “the twelve largest real estate developers in Guangdong Province are reported to be the children of high-ranking officials” (Zang 2008: 65).

As Goodman notes, despite there certainly were private sector owner-operators who had developed their businesses from nothing based on an innovative idea or perceived market opportunity (Young 1995; Garnaut and Song 2003; Dickson 2003a, in Goodman 2008: 29), “it is clear that a large proportion of the new companies either have emerged from the Party-state or have become subject to close local government involvement as they have grown” (2008: 34). Broadly speaking, the new enterprises that have emerged during the last four decades “have emerged in one of four ways, differentiated by source of the initial capital and resources” (2008: 28). Historically, as the studies conducted by Duckett (1996, 2001) on the “entrepreneurial state” and the “bureaucrats in business” illustrate, the first way to enrich themselves, and therefore to move up the new social ladder, was through collective enterprises located in rural as well as urban China. The introduction, Goodman also points, “of greater measures of market determination and the development of new types of enterprises started in the rural areas, or more accurately the sub- and peri-urban rural districts of cities” (2008: 28). These companies, the Town and village enterprises (TVEs), were run by local leaders, and they looked for new ways to use the assets under their control. Through the 1980s and 1990s, Goodman argues, TVEs

became the mainstay of the collective sector of the economy, and grew out of rural economic activities and perceptions of spare labour or other forms of underutilised capacity (Oi 1989; Henriot and Lu 1996; White 1998; Oi 1999; Whiting 2001; Yep 2003). ... These enterprises and their development were led by local individuals, often the former workshop manager or some other level of local leadership who was able to mobilise their fellow villagers. Though technically managers and not owners of the TVEs, many behaved economically, socially and politically as if they were.

(Goodman 2008: 28-29)

With the corporate reform of TVEs, the subsidiary companies began to operate in activities that were previously in the hands of the public sector. Thus, the second group of new enterprises emerged as a result of similar processes at work experienced by the state sector of economy.

The previous system of state socialism had been characterized by large-scale production and inherent economic inefficiencies. Increasingly after 1984, economic reform inevitably resulted in managers seeking economic efficiencies and partly in consequence new opportunities to use the assets they controlled. In a variety of ways, state assets were developed or built on to produce an economic return. Often subsidiary companies operating in the collective sector of the economy were

established by the state owned enterprises or department of the state administration (Blecher 1991: 265; Duckett 1998; You 1998).

(Goodman 2008: 28-29)

In addition, the state provided some or all of the equity financing to these start-ups, often using its facilities and the public budget.

The size of the new enterprises varies greatly, from the large department store with its many staff, to the more common small trading companies employing half a dozen people and operating from a room belonging to their bureau ... For the larger ventures, bank loans were secured by the departments, sometimes on good terms, to be paid off after a period of usually two years, and staff in one bureau had also invested personally in a new enterprise. Although most of the investment was made by the bureaux, the enterprises were often registered as 'collectives', rather than as state-owned enterprises.

(Duckett 1996: 183-184)

The foreseeable economic success of these companies generated many members who would swell the ranks of the emerging middle class. As a result, "the expansion of the private sector gave birth to an old middle class (petty-bourgeoisie *getihu* employing fewer than ten workers) and to a capitalist class (entrepreneurs employing ten or more workers)" (So 2005: 484). These new companies were classified as "collective", but as Putterman (1995: 1052) states, "collective ownership is also a tricky category⁸⁷," since even in the case of traditional collective properties subject to state control, information about the owners or managers and on the management structures of these companies is limited (Duckett 1996). Their management which was technically "collective" —"the state businesses are only semi-legitimate" notes Duckett (2001: 24)—, was assigned to the former managers. In order to survive, these new business owners ended up participating in the national market and the distinction between manager and owner was blurred⁸⁸.

⁸⁷ Putterman notes that "a collective is a group of individuals who hold joint and indivisible ownership over property, perhaps through the pooling of formerly private assets or by virtue of joint production. But Chinese collective ownership was fictitious, with state and Party exercising real control over the management of 'collective' assets, and the distribution of proceeds from their sale generally proscribed. It is true that collectives shared with producers' co-operatives the attribute that their members were to some degree residual claimants. This characteristic was in turn associated with harder budget constraints, greater labour intensity and wages more closely linked with productivity than those of counterpart SOEs, conditions thought conducive to economic efficiency. But even in the reform era the property of townships and villages has remained under the control of local officials, so it makes more sense to think of 'rural collective property' as rural local government property. Most urban collective property is also quasi-state-owned property controlled by various supervising bodies, not enterprise personnel. In increasing the autonomy of both kinds of collective enterprise, reform has increased the power of managers, not that of the nominal owners." As a result, "ownership reform in China has indeed been much less radical than have been the changes in the role of markets, international trade and other aspects of the economic system, less radical than the proposed privatizations of most EFSU nations" (Putterman 1995: 1052).

⁸⁸ This brings to light that "the difference between the public sector and the marketized sectors of the economy, which is so noticeable in terms of gender inequality, points to a further, more general inequality. Chinese people talk about the inequality between those who work and live 'within the system' (*tizhinei*, 体制内) or 'outside the system' (*tizhiwai*, 体制外). The 'system' in question is essentially the Party-state, though it might more usefully be described as the wider public sector. It includes all the institutions (and employees) of the government, the CCP and their associated

Thirdly, as Goodman (2008) notes, “there certainly are private sector owner-operators who have developed their business from nothing based on an innovative idea or perceived market opportunity” (Young 1995; Garnaut and Song 2003; Dickson 2003a, in Goodman 2008: 29). This type of entrepreneurs, Goodman adds, can be

found in all industrial sectors and activities, including mining and heavy industry, as well as light industry, processing, retail and service industries. In general, most private sector owner-operators remain small-scale. As their business grows and they wish to scale-up the pressure for access to factors of production —investment capital, land, labour and political permission— essentially dictates that the successful private entrepreneur has to surrender part of their equity to local government and incorporation as a collective sector enterprise. As with TVEs and those companies that have developed from within the state sector and state administration, the potential for confusion over ownership and control is often high.

(Goodman 2018: 29-30)

Finally, the fourth way that new enterprises and new entrepreneurs during the last four decades have been established in the PRC was through foreign investment. As an example of this, Schein (2000) analyses the Miao minority and explains how through the *joint ventures* promoted by Deng Xiaoping in Guizhou, the explosion of the tourism sector in this Chinese province was favoured, which came to generate sizeable benefits, although they were not reinvested locally.

The scope of foreign investment has been episodically increased since the mid-1980s leaving relatively few areas of the economy totally restricted though regulation remains high. From milk production in Shanxi Province, to luxury wool production in Qinghai Province, to manufacturing in Jiaocheng (Shanxi) and Hangzhou, and retail and services in Qionghai (Hainan Province) foreign investment has occurred where there are economic opportunities and known relations to the local economy. Somewhat confusingly, state sector enterprises, TVEs, collective sector enterprises, and private companies have all established joint venture operations with external partners. There is equally a variety of ownership relationships attending these foreign funded enterprises. Though all have entrepreneurial managers, in many cases they are not the originator of the idea leading to cooperation.

(Goodman 2008: 30)

Returning to the analysis concerning the revision of the 1982 constitution, it is evident that the political measures collected by this revision support the emergence of new Chinese businesspeople and, therefore, represent the seed for the subsequent appearance of the Chinese middle class. In addition, it can also be said that it will be the post-constitutional revisions that will slow down the emergence of this social group and the privatization process,

administrations (including ministries, the military, the police and civil defence forces, transport and communications, education and health services) and at different levels of territorial administration (central, provincial, city, county and town), as well as all state-sector economic enterprises and all enterprises owned or controlled by SOEs or by Party-state agencies. Altogether, there are about 74 million people employed in the public sector: just short of 10 per cent of the working population (Wang 2012). In many ways, the inequalities between inside and outside ‘the system’ are almost by definition impossible to quantify, especially in cash terms, though economists and social scientists all agree they exist (Gao and Riskin 2009: 21, see Chapter IV). Indeed, it may even be that in cash terms the distinctions are barely visible (Li Gan 2013)” (Goodman 2014: 51-52; see also Tang’s explanation in Chapter IV).

as previously stated. One more example of this is the amendments to the constitution approved during the First Session of the Seventh National People's Congress on April 12, 1988, whose main purpose was twofold, as Mo highlights, “to legitimize the private economy and increase the productive use of land by legalizing its transfer” (2009: 144).

With these amendments, “individual enterprises” were legalized and protected by law⁸⁹. Thus, “under the 1988 Act, private enterprises were regarded as profit-making economic units invested and established or controlled by natural persons and using more than eight employees” (Toshiki and Zhao 2004: 10). However, with this new constitutional amendment, the Party-state strengthened the PRC’s economic transition to a market economy that would soon be deeply questioned within the Party “following the suppression of demonstrations in Tian’anmen Square during June 1989, in which some entrepreneurs and business organizations were implicated” (Goodman 2014: 26). As a result, business people were once again banned (in theory) from Party membership (Dickson 2008: 36), while confusion and reluctance was experienced on the part of some in the CCP to proceed further with private business development and even to the role of foreign investment in developing joint-venture enterprises in the PRC (Goodman 2014: 77).

After the Tian’anmen Incident of mid-1989, “those who have predicted collapse and democratization rightly noted the challenges facing the regime, but wrongly discounted its ability to adapt to changing conditions” by combining “carrots and sticks” (Dickson 2016: 2). Indeed, in order to remain in power, the Party has developed a strategy for survival including a combination of repression, legitimation through a new social contract, and the co-optation of new elites (Dickson 2016: 7). This triple strategy developed by the Party reinforced at the same time its transformation process, “it abandoned the political campaigns and ideological debates of the past and adopted economic modernization as its key task. It no longer described itself as a revolutionary party but instead characterized itself as China’s “ruling party” (*zhizheng dang*)” (Dickson 2016: 6). Certainly, the CCP moved “towards identifying and privileging the middle class and encouraging the development of a middle-class society” (Goodman 2014: 25) based on “the feverish pursuit of an auto-oriented lifestyle” (Zhang 2016: 3), but “without abandoning the legitimacy afforded by its historical mission and commitment to the working class” (Goodman 2014: 25).

On that basis, a few years later, “in 1992, Deng Xiaoping published his famous *South China Remarks*, clarifying the Government’s position with respect to the differences between socialism and capitalism. The socialist market economy was affirmed as the necessary economic form for socialist construction” (Mo 2009: 144-145). On that basis, during the First Plenum of the Fourteenth Session of the Central Committee, the doctrine elaborated by Deng was adopted, and it was provided with a constitutional basis that would lead to the amendment of the 1993 Constitution. According to Deng’s approach, and among other amendments, the “state-run enterprise” was replaced by the “state-owned enterprise” in the text of the Constitution, and the traditional “planned economy” of the 1954, 1975, and 1978 Constitutions was replaced by the “socialist market economy” (Mo Jihong 2009: 145). Thus, the economic objective of this new socialist market economy approved in 1993 was to accelerate

⁸⁹ The first legal document on the individual economy was the regulation on the development and management of the urban non-farm individual economy announced by the State Council on July 7, 1981. This regulation “clarified the management framework of the individual economy. Subsequently, the Central Committee and the State Council repeated their policy of developing the individual economy in order to explore the employment opportunities and revitalize the economy” (Toshiki and Zhao 2004: 9).

economic reform and the opening of the market to the rest of the world (Toshiki and Zhao 2004). As a consequence, six years later, the Fifteenth CCP Congress changed the position of the private economy —from a “supplement to the state-owned economy” to an “important component of the socialist market economy”— in order to strengthen the crucial role of the economy as provider of “the diversified needs of the people, increasing employment opportunities and promoting national economic development” (Toshiki and Zhao 2004: 11). This vision of the private economy is reflected in the CCP’s amendment of the Constitution of 1982, which was carried out in 1999.

However, behind decentralization, enterprise reforms, the success of TVEs, and the rise of private developers, corporate professionals and entrepreneurs, “one must not overlook the profound transformations in the production sphere and ownership relations, as well as the reemergence of classes and class conflict” (So 2005: 484). Indeed, despite new CCP leaders’ attempts to downplay the language and politics of socialism and the dictatorship of proletariat, and thus class struggle, the rapid economic growth experienced by the PRC during the 1980s gave rise, on the one hand, to a rich peasant class that capitalized on the abundant supply of surplus labourers in the countryside, splitting the relatively homogeneous peasant stratum in the Maoist era into a rich peasant class and a poor peasant class; and, on the other, a relatively homogeneous urban population was split into a capitalist class (entrepreneurs employing ten or more workers), a petty-bourgeoisie *getihu* employing fewer than ten workers, and small employers, and a working class subdivided into permanent urban workers and temporary migrant workers. The latter, in many cases, “have to work very long hours, get only minimum wages, obey strict work disciplines, are hired on day-to-day basis, ... are not allowed to form labour unions to protect their interests,” and are easily controlled in terms of “gender (like paying female workers less than male workers), ethnicity (like hiring out-of-province migrant workers rather than local workers), and kinship ties (like recruiting workers from the same village as that of the foreman)” (So 2005: 484-5). In short, the increasing socio-economic complexity that has resulted from economic growth raises “the question of whether ownership of the means of production is as important as control and management as a defining relationship to the means of production (for the ruling class),” and “questions about class structure, and especially the role of the middle classes” (Goodman 2014: 7).

As we have seen, the middle class played a key role in the Party’s survival strategy including a combination of repression, legitimation and co-optation developed through the implementation of three initiatives. Firstly, the Party-state sponsored the construction of a discourse of middle class in the 1990s —most of sociological research on middle class in the PRC was directly sponsored by official organizations (see Chapter II). However, we must bear in mind that discourse is “the result of an incessant process of collective creation,” including not only the government and social scientists but also the Chinese people, “that intellectually structures both the determining of diverse desires for living in an ideal way, often employing imprecise conceptions in accordance with certain values,” classificatory schemes, social distinctions, identity ideals and symbolic categorizations, “but not others, and the contingency of unintentional actions benefiting this ideal” (Solé-Farràs 2014: 1).

Secondly, Dickson (2016) notes, “as the Party shifted its political agenda from class struggle to economic modernization, it also shifted its recruitment strategy.” The CCP replaced “the officials appointed in the Maoist era who had more ideological zeal than practical skills” with “those who possessed the necessary professional skills to foster economic growth, which in turn was intended to produce popular support.” Further, “it recruited new members from the

social group it relied on for support, in particular, college students, urban professionals, and private entrepreneurs” in order to create “institutional links between the Party and the beneficiaries of economic reform” (Dickson 2016: 14) and, consequently, support the status quo (Dickson 2014).

And third, the Party developed a process of social engineering through selective incentives and subsidization in order to sustain and promote an official discourse of the middle class that justify granting to certain groups in Chinese society, in particular those traditionally employed by the state, of privileged access to significant private assets (Tomba 2014: 175, 12). As mentioned above, both Deng Xiaoping’s Southern Inspection Tour in 1992, and the constitutional amendment in 1993 re-energized economic reforms to make the government’s position clear with regard to the doubts raised, following the suppression of demonstrations in Tian’anmen Square during June 1989, within the Party about whether or not to proceed further with private business development.

The position of the government went hand in hand with a new ideology, according to which what is good for Chinese society is supposed to be good for all Chinese individuals. Thus, as we have seen in Chapter II, Rocca argues,

a new social contract was established in the 1990s between the Party and the population. In exchange for remaining the sole ruling force, the Party must keep the promises of the 1950s in terms of improving living conditions. In order to stimulate economic growth, but also to provide the population with new opportunities and hopes after two decades of economic and social stagnation, the Party opened up labor markets and eased access to higher education. What the Chinese economy needed then was not only low-paid workers but also a skilled and well- educated labor force. In the wake of these reforms, social representations changed. Alongside political and social capital, money, occupation and level of education became determinant elements of social stratification. By contrast with the socialist period, to have money, to find a non-physical, intellectual (*naoli laodong*) and skilled job, and to get a university degree became the objectives of most people.

(Rocca 2017: 23)

The new social contract would benefit, on the one hand, the CCP’s legitimizing strategy by increasing economic role of the middle class as the Party-state needed a middle class “to reorient China’s economy from one overly dependent on exports to one driven by domestic demand” (Cheng 2010a: 4). On the other, “the increasing economic role of the middle class may in turn enhance the group’s political influence” (Cheng 2010a: 4). Thus, “since the beginning of the 1990s, living standards have risen markedly throughout the country,” and “consumerism is now deeply entrenched in all areas of Chinese society, giving rise to urban middle level consumers who enjoy ‘small prosperity’ (*xiaokang*) and a modest degree of comfort” like their Western counterparts (Rocca 2017: 23). Therefore, was born, for once, the genuine “Chinese middle class.”

Certainly, “after the planned economy system was abolished in the 1980s and the work unit system was abandoned in the 1990s,” a broad range of new ‘middle class’ occupations arose —i.e., managers, office workers, professional and technical staff—, while private and foreign enterprises linked to technology and industrial engineering, IT, media, design, knowledge industry and services, “but also the new public sector, demanded specific and high skills” (Rocca 2017: 24). Indeed, at that time, employment became education-driven and employees in public administrations units were recruited “on the basis of examinations and educational

credentials” (Tomba 2004: 10-11). By the 1990s, recruitment quotas for state enterprises were abolished, and firms were largely allowed to operate according to a profit-driven logic. Also, state enterprises had a greater independence in terms of hiring and management policies, and they were also allowed to choose their employees. As a result, “in the latter part of the 1990s, the attempts to resolve the problem of inefficiency of the state sector include downsizing and the layoff of workers by a quarter or more within four years (1997–2000)⁹⁰” (Yueh 2004: 150).

This emerging middle class was, “of course, a complex mosaic of groups of individuals.” In terms of the class’s occupational and sociological composition, Cheng notes, its members fall into three major clusters.

- An economic cluster (including private sector entrepreneurs, urban small businesspeople, rural industrialists and rich farmers, foreign and domestic joint-venture employees, and stock and real estate speculators).
- A political cluster (government officials, office clerks, state sector managers, and lawyers).
- A cultural and educational cluster (academics and educators, media personalities, public intellectuals, and think tank scholars).

(Cheng 2010a: 5)

In addition, as we have seen in Chapter II, “[t]he number of higher education institutions has exploded since the end of the 1990s, providing a large part of the urban youth with university education” (Rocca 2017: 24). As Lin and Sun note, “from 1990 to 2005, a mere fifteen years, China’s higher education enrolment increased by almost 800 per cent” (2010: 221). The number of people able to gain access to higher education in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing and Hangzhou increased tremendously. The vast majority of university students would meet their future partners among their fellow students and then settle in the city where they graduated since job opportunities for young recent graduates as well as entertainment facilities, centres of consumption and the largest housing markets tend to be highly concentrated in cities.

For many young recent graduates, “urban families and individuals, regardless of their class status, the desirable sequence is to get married and buy an apartment as newlyweds” (Zhang 2016: 8). In addition, a striking characteristic of the emergence of Chinese middle incomers is the liberalization of housing markets. In the early 1990s, Rocca notes, “the government increased house rents to pressure workers to become homeowners” (2017: 27), and soon 40-50 per cent of urban workers become homeowners⁹¹. At the same time, Rocca also notes,

⁹⁰ As Yueh also notes, “[t]his was a drastic change from the official policy of full employment. In 1996, an estimated 5.25 million urban state workers were officially registered as unemployed. By the end of 1998, the official figure of laid-off workers was 15.7 million, which included 8.8 million *xiagang* workers (see Yang and Xin, 1999; Lee, 1998; NBS, 2000). *Xiagang* workers are laid-off workers who are officially registered as part of their enterprise or work unit, but do not go to work or receive a wage. They are registered as *xiagang* by their work unit and are officially entitled to minimum income support, although they often do not receive any such support in practice ... There are other forms of unemployment not captured by official statistics” (Yueh 2004: 150).

⁹¹ By allowing public employees to buy houses, Cai (2005) notes, at drastically discounted prices, housing privatization has been the most important factor in increasing the number of homeowners in urban China—in the early 2000s, about 60 per cent of public housing sales went to public employees (2005: 779).

in 1991, a commercial housing sector was created. Due to a real estate market boom, the value of the flats the workers had bought increased greatly, making many of them “at ease.” Some owners sold at high prices what had cost them nearly nothing. Others continued to live in their flats but bought another one and rented it out, or used as a money reserve.

(Rocca 2017: 27)

Thus, Chinese middle class grew out of the housing reforms of the 1990s that “removed a large amount of urban housing from the ownership of work-units and in many cases provided former residents with significant subsidized private housing” (Goodman 2014: 38). Indeed, the housing reforms “heavily favored the employees of government offices and state enterprises, which owned most of the China’s housing during the Mao period and rented apartments to their employees” (Nathan 2016: 10). As Goodman highlights, housing reform in the second half of the 1990s commercialized housing, “but the better placed ‘within the system’ work-units were able to provide housing and subsidies that were not available to those outside (Tang 2013)” —“those within the system have gained substantially more than those outside the system from the housing-cost inflation of the last decade (Li 2013)” (Goodman 2014: 52). During these housing reforms, as Nathan points out,

government and state-enterprise employees became property owners at low cost through three channels: Existing work-unit housing was privatized; work units built new housing and sold it to their employees at subsidized prices; and work units subsidized loans or purchase prices for employees to buy housing on the market. Employees who received these low-cost apartments were often able to trade up later as the housing market took shape. As a result, public-sector employees “today form what is popularly known as the *fangchan jieji* (propertied class).” Government employees also have superior medical insurance and pension funds, and (in recent years) a faster rate of salary increases than employees in other sectors.

(Nathan 2016: 10)

Under this new reform launched in 1998 by the State Council to privatize public housing, Li Zhang argues,

Families were encouraged to buy their apartments from their work units at a discounted rate significantly below market value. Initially many urban residents were skeptical about the privatization scheme. Their main concern was whether private homes would be protected by law, since at that time the Constitution did not recognize private property ownership. Under these circumstances, the Chinese government launched several campaigns to ensure its urban citizens that privatized housing would be treated as a form of commodity and protected by the state. It urged people to abandon the welfare mentality and adopt a commodity-oriented perspective. As one slogan put it, “Housing is no longer a welfare item; it is a commodity.” By 2000 most *danwei* based public housing had been privatized in Chinese cities.

(Zhang 2008: 27)

Another relevant middle-class measure, in this case to increase consumption among the urban middle level consumers, was the post-1995 policy to provide additional leisure by progressively extending major national festivities. With the declared aim of increasing consumer spending, Tomba highlights, “in May 1995 a compulsory five-day work week (*shuangxiuzhi*) was introduced, which suddenly brought the number of non-work days in a

year among urban employees to 115, while major national festivities were progressively extended to week-long holidays” (2014: 99). In addition, these measures promoted feelings of national identity by linking major national festivities to the building of a common past according to an orthodox Han-centred historical view and a specific set of ideological values. As a result, this not only “move jump-started both domestic and international tourism” but also “the average amount of leisure time available to urban employees had already surpassed actual working time in 2003” (Tomba 2014: 100), which has allowed them to diversify their consumption practices (tourism, cultural consumption, body care, sports, and so on).

In addition, as it is explained in greater detail in Chapter IV, the gated community become the most obvious step towards consolidating the process of social engineering through incentives and subsidies in the PRC. As Tomba notes, “after *danweis* began to sell their housing stocks to employees at very low price,” and banks were allowed to offer mortgages to Chinese citizens⁹², a real estate market in the Chinese cities emerged progressively in the 1990s (2014: 8, 91). At that time, “large number of new houses were built by commercial property developers for the emerging urban housing market” (Wang 2010: 845). Consequently, new patterns of residents such as the “newly civilized young middle class” have emerged. At the same time, “housing areas of different standards for different social groups became a dominant feature of large Chinese cities at the end of the 1990s” (Wang 2010: 845). Though all of the new housing was advertised to potential buyers in terms of comfortable lifestyle, it was “the gated community—with security and the variable provision of other services— which is presented as the epitome of middle-class living” (Goodman 2014: 115).

Among the urban middle incomers, indeed, “the status of the gated communities is crucial, the number of guards, the sophistication of the security system and the magnificence of the garden being among the criteria of judgment” (Rocca 2017: 126). In fact, more than their monetary income, what made the early residents of “first gated communities a homogeneous group was their (or their families’) ability to access valuable resources from the public system and their ability to maintain this privileged relationship until these resources could be turned into private assets” (Tomba 2014: 114). Although, Goodman (2014) points, “some of these gated communities can be extremely luxurious, with detached villas standing in their own ground,” at the same time “there are many more gated communities with more modest blocks of apartments and townhouses.” Homes in these lesser-ranked gated communities were “bought on the open market by private purchasers or supplied by state agencies and enterprises to their employees as subsidized housing” (Goodman 2014: 115).

As the commercialization of housing has led to new gated communities, a whole new set of social practices and representations—in other words, a new lifestyle with new distinctions—, and new practices of everyday interaction between the state and society have emerged in the PRC. As Tomba illustrates, gated communities are “not simply the result of public planning,” they are “both facilitated and regulated by the state in three different ways. First, the residential space is institutionalized, as rules and systems of self-government are put in place by the state in accordance with the need to maintain social order under different conditions” (Tomba 2014: 171). Indeed, the expansion of residential areas since the 1990s towards the suburbs concurred with the Community Building campaign (*shequ jianshe*) to reorganize urban

⁹² Bank mortgages did not exist in the PRC until the second half of the 1990s. As Tomba notes, “[a]lready in 1996 the People’s Bank of China had lifted the limit of five years on mortgage lending, but the 1998 housing reform regulations can be taken as the beginning of the mortgage market in China” (2014: 91).

residential communities through a new paradigm of representativity between urban dwellers and the state.

Secondly, “through the public control of urban land and an explicit support for residential *segregation*.” The active intervention of local bureaucracies in the real estate market is not only a consequence of both the financial and speculative interests of local officials, but also a consequence of the willingness of the state “to contain governance costs by privatizing service provision and governance functions inside residential spaces” (Tomba 2014: 172).

Third, consequently, “the state promotes a discursive rationalization of such structural segregation by disseminating the language of ‘security’ and (human) ‘quality’” or *suzhi*, “which is re-broadcast through all other involved players, from real estate developers to individual citizens, from local cadres to urban governments, in order to advance or protect their vested interests,” social positions and ultimately maintain their privileges (Tomba 2014: 172). On that basis, the gated communities build the middle-class (distinctive) class consciousness through a process of “spatialization of class” that surpasses the idea of creating accessible urban spaces unique for certain urban dwellers (Zhang 2008; see also Chapter IV). However, when seen from the vantage point of the community, such process of “spatialization of class” and “discursive repertoire becomes part of the process of community building and is reproduced by residents and private and public players alike” (Tomba 2014: 172). Regulations “have encouraged those with private resources to build walls and hire guards in their residential compounds to insulate residents from the increasing dangers of urban life,” Tomba (2009: 598) states. He presents the essence of one of his theses in *The Government Next Door* (2014) thus:

From the official discourse we can infer that the preconditions for “harmonious communities” (*hexie shequ*) and successful self-government are a sufficient economic base, a sufficient moral base among residents, and a willingness among high-*suzhi* residents to act as exemplars in the construction of harmony.

(Tomba 2014: 148)

In other words, gated communities are markers of different social groups that are seen as distinct “objects” of government: on one end of the spectrum are those who present limited risks for social order and can govern themselves —social stability and nation building mark a step forward in the civilization of urban China—, like the middle class such as professionals and the “high *suzhi*” upper middle class; at the other end are those who need governing because of their lack of social capital or deficient social situation, such as migrants and downwardly mobile ex-workers; governance practices, thus, change accordingly (Tomba 2014: 16, 151). Thus, Goodman argues,

The middle-class fundamentally positions itself in society in this way and in the process also clearly differentiates itself from others considered not to have the appropriate *suzhi*, for example, by establishing themselves in gated communities where the lower orders only have access in service. Interestingly, as Anagnost also highlights, the very difficulty of defining *suzhi* (as with the difficulty of identifying the middle class more precisely in structural terms) is an advantage: it is this very insubstantiality of *suzhi* that allows it to stand in for a differential.

(Goodman 2014: 110)

These elements are usually intertwined and are part of the state-sponsored discourse of the middle class and their new designs —i.e., privacy, security, comfort. In the contemporary

context, these urbanizations represent the phenomenon of fortress and privatized cities (Lama and Martín 2016) as a reflection of the increasing economic inequality. Gated spaces in the PRC also provide an environment of self-discipline and “responsibilization” of private stakeholders in the management of society —security, education, high-*suzhi* behaviour, etc.— that will contribute to social stability and, therefore, legitimize the status quo established by the CCP (Tomba 2014: 151, see also Chapter IV).

In conclusion, as we have seen, the reforms of the 1990s led to economic growth, a dramatic increase in living standards, the appearance of a set of social practices pertaining to a consumer society and the emergence of new social representations and middle-class narratives. While “the social stratification was questioned deeply,” a process of social engineering through incentives and subsidies was consolidated in the PRC. In addition, “[t]he liquidation of the socialist working class and the increasing migration of farmers to new industrial regions” —namely, the emergence of migrant workers— went hand in hand with the reformulation of traditional values and the introduction of capitalist categories (Rocca 2017: 5). At the same time, the gated communities have radically changed the landscape of the cities and have “become the dominant feature of the contemporary urban built environment” in the PRC (Tomba and Tang 2008: 186). Those residential areas are inhabited by a new group of people—middle incomers— that has emerged in urban China. By the late 1990s, the state-sponsored discourse of the middle class emerged and it was also “clear that entrepreneurs, far from being banned by the CCP, were beginning to be feted, and with Jiang Zemin’s formulation of the ‘Three Represents’ in 2002 were actually being welcomed into the CCP” (Goodman 2014: 39) as it is explored more fully in the next section.

3.3.2 Discourse presentation: The Three Represents Theory, 2000-2001

As the new century begins, the earliest official representations of middle class in the PRC went hand in hand with the announcement made by Jiang Zemin, then President of the PRC (1993-2003) and General-Secretary of the CCP (1989-2002), “that business people were welcome to apply for CCP membership, though it would still be necessary for the CCP to ensure they were ‘educated and guided’” (Jiang 2001: 169, in Goodman 2014: 26). The re-entry of businesspeople into the CCP was justified by President Jiang “in terms of his Three Represents Theory, seen as his major contribution to CCP ideology” (Goodman 2014: 26). In his speech at the Celebration of the Eightieth Anniversary of the Founding of the CCP on July 1, 2001, Jiang Zemin explained in depth the Three Represents Theory by stating that the CCP “must always represent the requirements of the development trend of China’s advanced productive forces, the orientation of the development of China’s advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China,” in addition to the working class (Jiang 2001).

However, when President Jiang introduced the Three Represents Theory in February 1997⁹³ at the PRC’s Fifteenth CCP Congress, China commentators “quickly condemned his theory for its hypocrisy: The Communist Party of China could now, in essence, represent “progressive forces” —such as capitalism— yet still maintain its traditional role as guardian of the proletariat” (Chai 2003: 163). Indeed, The Three Represents Theory was based on the following three factors

⁹³ Indeed, “Jiang first presented his Three Represents at the 1997 Fifteenth Party Congress.” However, “in March 2000, the party’s propaganda and organization departments began to circulate the Three Represents as Jiang’s latest contribution to a unifying ideology for China” (Chai 2003: 169).

which must be represented by the CCP: advanced productive forces, an advanced culture and the Chinese people. Certainly, as Guo argues,

Once the advancement of productive forces becomes its overriding objective, the CCP is freed from the shackles of socialist relations of production, or the basic principles of Chinese socialism, as productive forces, or the ability to use tools to act upon nature, define individuals' relations with nature instead of class relations and are ideologically neutral.

(Guo 2004: 41)

Neutralizing class relations allowed the Party to sever its ideological bond with the Chinese working class, embrace non-socialist forms of ownership, open its doors to private entrepreneurs and businesspeople and, indeed, prioritize their interests (Jiang 2001, in Guo 2009). As "the advancement of productive forces becomes its overriding objective," class is not only relevant to the CCP, but it has also become the new focal point of contention (Guo 2009). As a consequence, the Party must be attentive to the interests of the Chinese society as a whole. As Jiang argues,

In a word, we must always represent the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China ... The general interests of the people are always composed of specific interests of different circles ... people from different social strata and circles. However, what is the most important is to give top priority to and satisfy the interests and demands of the overwhelming majority of the people ... Apart from the interests of the overwhelming majority of the people, the Party does not have any special interests of its own.

(Jiang 2001)

One year later, apart from emphasizing again how important are the interest of "the overwhelming majority of the people," in his report to the 16th National Congress of the CCP, Jiang stated that "major efforts should be made to develop socialist culture and spiritual civilization while building a well-off society in an all-round way in China". He said that "measures should be taken to keep the orientation of advanced culture firmly in hand" (*People's Daily* 2002b),

We must uphold Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory as our guide in the realm of ideology and have the important thought of Three Represents in command of the development of socialist culture ... Basing ourselves on the practice of reform, opening up and modernization and keeping abreast of the latest developments in world culture, we must make innovations in content and form so as to enhance the attraction and appeal of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics"

(Jiang 2002)

Accepting Jiang's theory, the CCP "amended its constitution at the Sixteenth National Congress in Beijing in November 2002 to include the Three Represents Theory as a guiding ideology of the party together with Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and Deng Xiaoping Theory" (Chai 2003: 163). As a result, the CCP officially represents "China's progressive forces" such as capitalism, "China's advanced culture," and "the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people" yet still maintain its traditional role as guardian of the working class (Chai 2003). In other words, by emphasizing the idea that "the Chinese have never followed a strictly Marxist-

Leninist interpretation of communism,” Jiang justifies one additional ideological shift in Chinese Communist theory in a long tradition of paradigm shifts (Chai 2003: 163). This is what Jiang’s concept of “advanced culture” consists of, as stated in an article published in *People’s Daily*, the online English-language version of *Renmin Ribao*.

For more than 5,000 years, the Chinese nation has evolved a great national spirit centering on patriotism and featuring unity and solidarity, love of peace, industry, courage and ceaseless self-improvement, he [Jiang Zemin] said, stressing that confronted with interaction of different thoughts and cultures in the world, it is a crucial task in the cultural development to carry forward and cultivate the national spirit and incorporate it into the national education and the entire process of building spiritual civilization so that the entire people are always filled with an enterprising spirit. Jiang called for the promotion of ideological and ethical progress, saying that ruling the country by law and ruling the country by virtue complement each other. It is necessary to establish a socialist ideological and ethical system compatible with the socialist market economy and the socialist legal system and consistent with the traditional virtues of the Chinese nation, he said. "We must intensify education in social and professional ethics and family virtues and especially intensify the ideological and ethical improvement among youth," Jiang added ... Playing a vanguard role and having an overall bearing on the modernization drive, education must be placed on our development agenda as a strategic priority," he said ... Jiang said the state supports and protects public cultural undertakings and encourages them to enhance their vigor for self- development.

(*People’s Daily* 2002b)

The incorporation of Jiang Zemin’s thought of the Three Represents Theory and his concept of “advanced culture” into the doctrinal corpus of the CCP is justified by the argument that this thought has actually always existed — “For more than 5,000 years”— in the Chinese nation and the ideology of the CCP and has always guided its praxis (Solé-Farràs 2014: 64). In fact, this methodological element has a key role in the theoretical construction of the discourse of middle class. Further, the discursive and conceptual construction of this Chinese middle class begins with the idea of an “advanced culture” implicit in Jiang’s speeches in 2001 and 2002.

We have consistently developed socialist culture, and the cultural life of the Chinese people is getting richer and more colourful. Upholding Marxism as the guiding ideology, we have educated the people in patriotism, collectivism and socialism and done much to promote socialist ethical and cultural progress. We have persistently carried forward the fine cultures of all ethnic groups of the country and actively absorbed what is advanced in other civilizations in order to make our socialist culture increasingly flourish. The ideological and ethical standards and the educational, scientific and cultural qualities of the people have kept improving, displaying to the world a new mental outlook of the Chinese nation.

(Jiang 2002)

Since Jiang urged that capitalists, entrepreneurs and other economic elites be allowed to join the Party, “explanations that the CCP would change its proletarian nature have abounded both in the media and academia” (Jia 2004: 261). Indeed, during the 1970s, as Goodman highlights, “Chinese society was described by the CCP, strictly using the conventions of Marxism-Leninism, in terms of two classes and a stratum: workers, peasants and intellectuals” (2014: 3). However, Jiang’s measure shows that, currently, “the key players in China’s socialist market economy are those who generate material wealth by producing, providing and consuming goods and

services” (Guo 2008: 40). Rocca goes further and considers the Three Represents Theory as a point of inflection that manifests that “the Party no longer represents the working class or the masses, but rather three forces: the people, cultural circles⁹⁴ and the ‘progressive productive forces’ (that is, economic circles)” (Rocca 2017: 22). Those explanations, Jia notes, “continue to dominate academia as the new CCP leadership headed by Hu Jintao further promoted the Three Represents Theory after it took power at the 16th National Party Congress in November 2002” (Dickson 2003b; Mulvenon 2003, in Jia 2004: 262). However, a cautious approach should be adopted, Jia Hepeng suggests,

But a prudent reflection on the speeches of Hu and Jiang, a critical analysis of the development tracks of the Three Represents Campaign, and a systematic observation of the CCP's new policy orientation will lead political students to reach somewhat different viewpoints. It is clear that the Party's ideological role has not been reduced at all. Indeed, Zhang (1996:2) has shown that since the CCP launched its economic reform movement in late 1978, ideology has become an important vehicle for communicating regime values to the Party rank and file and to the whole population. The logic is continued as the CCP adapts its traditional ideology by assimilating new elements of China's modernizing society through the Three Represents Campaign.

(Jia 2004: 262)

In summary, “[a]s the Party shifted its political agenda from class struggle to economic modernization, it also shifted its recruitment strategy” by replacing “the officials appointed in the Maoist era who had more ideological zeal than practical skills” with “those who possessed the necessary professional skills to foster economic growth, which in turn was intended to produce popular support” (Dickson 2016: 14). That is why, Jiang, in line with the Party's strategy to generate regime support, “recruited new members from the social groups it relied on for support, in particular, college students, urban professionals, and private entrepreneurs” (Dickson 2016: 14). It should also be noted that “[t]he admission of entrepreneurs to the Party after 2002 was recognition that many Party members were already in private enterprise” since, in the 1990s, many businesspeople “aligned closely with local Party officials whose permission was vital to business expansion” (Pearson 1997: 115, in Benson 2016: 80). In addition, as Dickson (2003a, 2008, 2016; Chen and Dickson 2010) previous research showed, co-opted elites support the *status quo*. As a new century arrived, the Party's survival strategy was formalized under Jiang's Three Represents Theory and legitimized due to two major political and economic successes of the Party-state in 2001: the PRC's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the announcement that the International Olympic Committee awarded the 2008 Summer Games to Beijing —“Both events have been touted as symbolizing China's rise to the world stage” (Lee 2003: 5).

⁹⁴ In Jiang's report to the 16th CCP Congress in November 2002, former President said that “the state supports and protects public cultural undertakings and encourages them to enhance their vigour for self-development.” Jiang stated that “it is essential to improve policies toward the cultural industry, support its development and enhance its overall strength and competitiveness.” Jiang also pointed out that, in order to “arousing the initiative of cultural workers, encouraging innovation and bringing forth more top-notch works and more outstanding personnel,” China should deepen “the internal reform of cultural enterprises and institutions and gradually establish a management system and operational mechanism favourable” (*People's Daily* 2002b).

In the next section, we see that President Jiang was also responsible for referring for the first time to the middle class or “middle-income group” in 2002⁹⁵ by stating: “[b]earing in mind the objective of common prosperity, we should try to raise the proportion of the middle-income group and increase the income of the low-income group” (Jiang 2002). After the naming of this group, “[t]he media played an important role in this identification process, but the official discourse and policies, and the emergence of new spaces where social interactions create new rules, such as residential compounds and protest movements, are equally crucial sources of subjectivization and normalization” (Rocca 2017: 6). Consequently, a certain fetishization of the middle class, as Guo (2009) notes, “has been apparent in the various official statements made about its development” (Goodman 2014: 27). At the same time, middle-class society became “an aspiration rather than a carefully thought-out idea ... Individuals are being encouraged to pursue new social norms of middle-class identity often defined around consumer practices. The new model citizen is someone with high cultural capital, and the economic capacity to consume” (Goodman 2014: 27).

3.3.3 Discourse development: The *Xiaokang* Society and the new patriots, 2001-2004

The PRC’s formal political system, as Lieberthal indicates, has been consistent in its structure, but “has time and again confounded expectations about its strength and stability” (2004: xv). With the turn of the century, due to “sectoral changes, population movements, and environmental developments” in the PRC, “the institutional and deregulatory arrangements of the early 1990s no longer suffice to meet the requirements of large sectors of population” (2004: xv). Beyond the different problems that the CCP must face to maintain its leadership and the “vast new demands on China’s political system” (Lieberthal 2004: xv), “Jiang Zemin’s formulation of the Three Represents in 2002 was actually being welcomed into the CCP” (Goodman 2014: 39) and set out a line focus on “a combination of economic achievement and socialist dogmas” (Jia 2004: 266) to be followed by later Chinese leaders. Meanwhile, “a growing portion of the population sees the political system as no longer responsive to its own needs and interests” (Lieberthal 2004: 204).

The constitutional amendments in 2004 have “been explained mainly —both by researchers and the official media— as a way to protect the property of average people, as most urban middle class residents now own their housing and other valuable belongings” (Jia 2004: 263; see also Song 2004; Zhao 2002). However, an appropriate comparative analysis between three significant records —namely, Jiang Zemin’s speech at the 16th CCP Congress in November 2002 in which he raised the idea of the Three Represents Theory and the *Xiaokang* Society, and the constitutional amendments of March 1999 and March 2004— is required in order to understand the development of the official discourse of the middle class through the Three Represents theory.

Firstly, in the preamble of the constitutional amendment of March 2004, “the important thought of the ‘Three Represents’” was added to the other ideological guidelines that already existed in the 1999 amendment —namely, “Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping’s Theory.” These ideological guidelines, under the leadership of the CCP, would continue to guide the Chinese people in their adherence “to the people’s democratic dictatorship and the socialist road, and the uphold reform and opening to the outside world.”

⁹⁵ Based on the occupation as a criterion for defining the middle-class members and “noting that the middle class does not contain the concept of ‘property’” (*People’s Daily* 2002a).

With this constitutional amendment the principles of the Three Represents Theory are ideologically equated with Maoist principles and, although Jiang Zemin's policies are given the same historical significance as Deng Xiaoping's reforms, Jiang's historical figure is not comparable to that of Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping given that Jiang Zemin's name does not appear in the constitution (Saich 2015).

Second, the concept of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" was revised to "Chinese-style socialism." Also, seventh paragraph of the Preamble: after "... to modernize the industry, agriculture, national defence and science and technology step by step..." was added in 2004: "... promote the co-ordinated development of the material, political and spiritual civilizations..." —which are concepts extracted from the Three Representations Theory. In other words, the constitutional amendments of March acquired not only the Three Represents Theory among its ideological axes, but also its dialectic approach.

Thirdly, and yet another example of the Three Represents Theory's ideological importance was that the constitutional amendments approved in March 2004 further expanded the components of China's "patriotic united front that is composed of the democratic parties and people's organizations and embraces all socialist working people..." by adding "... all the builders of socialism." As such, the middle-class groups and entrepreneurs were included among the rest of traditional socialist builders —that is, the working class, the peasants and the intellectuals. Jiang Zemin, in both his 2001 and 2002 speeches, insisted on the importance of the union of the Chinese people as a national basis for the PRC's success in all its aspects, and encouraged them to

[c]ontinue to unite with all forces that can be united with and increase the cohesion of the Chinese nation. We should hold high the banners of patriotism and socialism, strengthen the great solidarity of the people of all ethnic groups, and consolidate and develop the broadest possible patriotic united front ... We should handle well the work relating to ethnic minorities, religions and overseas Chinese. We should adhere to the principle of "one country, two systems" and bring into full play every positive factor in a common endeavour to accomplish the grand cause of national reunification and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

(Jiang 2002)

Certainly, such idea of cohesion played, according to President Jiang, a significant role in the economic, social and political development of the PRC. Without union, without respect and without solidarity, the leaders of the Party-state considered seriously threatened the status quo and their legitimacy as representatives of the basic interests of "the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people." For this reason, Jiang (2002) was not only addressing the party when he stated that "we should unite with the people of all social strata who help to make the motherland prosperous and strong, encouraging their pioneering spirit, protecting their legitimate rights and interests and commending the outstanding ones" in order "to create a situation in which all people are well positioned, do their best and live in harmony."

As we have seen, Jiang highlights in his speech of November 2002 that the new social groups that emerged during the reforms, such as

entrepreneurs and technical personnel employed by non-public scientific and technological enterprises, managerial and technical staff employed by overseas-funded enterprises, the self-employed, private entrepreneurs, employees in

intermediaries, free-lance professionals and members of other social strata are all builders of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

(Jiang 2002)

That is why it is essential, Jiang points out, that

[w]e must respect work, knowledge, competent people and creation ... We need to respect and protect all work that is good for the people and society. All work that contributes to the socialist modernization drive in China, physical or mental and simple or complicated, is glorious and should be acknowledged and respected.

(Jiang 2002)

As a result, the class struggle, which was claimed by the leaders of the Party-state as the leitmotiv since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, had ended. The restoring exploitative mechanism of capitalism, the “free” labour market and the private property rights reshaped the institutional arrangements of private property rights and the other ownerships. Despite of economic distribution became relatively unequal due to the exploitative/accumulative capacity of capital was largely enhanced after Jiang’s legitimization of the private property rights, ownership eventually was proclaimed the new guarantor of socialism in the PRC.

All legitimate income, from work or not, should be protected. It is improper to judge whether people are politically progressive or backward simply by whether they own property or how much property they own. But rather, we should judge them mainly by their political awareness, state of mind and performance, by how they have acquired and used their property, and by how they have contributed to the cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics through their work.

(Jiang 2002)

In addition, as Jiang argues, “bearing in mind the objective of common prosperity, we should try to raise the proportion of the middle-income group and increase the income of the low-income group” (Jiang 2002). This speech represents the first explicit and official support of the Party-state for the “middle-income group” and their economic interests. After proclaiming the end of class struggle, the question of the middle class as an ideal of the only social class in China—that is, a classless society—arises in the official speeches. Nevertheless,

Until 2002, consistent with Marxist-Leninist ideology the Party-state did not acknowledge any social, economic or political role for a middle class at all. Even though since that year there has been an emerging state-sponsored discourse encouraging the development of the middle class, it often rests uneasily with the CCP’s ideological formulations.

(Goodman 2014: 4)

Furthermore, to achieve the key goal of common prosperity that Jiang Zemin had set, the concept of *Xiaokang* Society⁹⁶ was the key element of his management of inequality as a social

⁹⁶ As Lu Hanlong points out, “the concept of *xiaokang* first appeared in the classical Record of Rites (Li Ji) from the Warring States period (475 B.C.-221 B.C.), where it identified the society that followed the era of “great equality” (*datong*). In the age of “great equality,” heaven and man were in harmony, people cared for one another as if they were kin, and there was neither hoarding nor theft. But when the Great Way was lost, the world was (divided into) families (*tianxia weijia*). Everyone loved only his family and his own children, and each accumulated wealth and exerted himself for his own benefit. This society of

concern in China. Hence, attaining a Xiaokang Society “meant that China must proceed with changes at an accelerated pace or face falling behind” (Lewis and Xue 2003: 939). As we have seen, Jiang Zemin (2002) announced his objective of controlling the growth of the upper stratum of society, extending the middle and reducing the lower strata. Hence,

China’s social scientists are emphatic that a stable society is an olive-shaped structure rather than a pyramid-shaped distribution and that the middle classes should be the mainstream of a modern society ... Similarly, the CCP believes that the ideal model of society is an olive-shaped, harmonious and well-off society, with the majority of the population situated in the middle reaches. There are hundreds of articles in the PRC’s academic publications which expound the pivotal importance of the middle classes and the causes of their importance.

(Guo 2008: 50)

In fact, as we have seen when analysing President Jiang's speech at the 16th CCP Congress in November 2002, he described the centrality of the middle-property stratum —“control the growth of the upper stratum of society, expand the middle, and reduce the bottom” (Jiang 2002, in Goodman 2014: 26)— while developing in depth a “state-sponsored discourse of the harmonious middle class” (Goodman 2014: 27). This official discourse focused mostly on two key aspects of the concept of the middle class: its role in the elimination of social inequality (Lu 2010) and its perceptible emergence in social life due to the success of market reforms. Indeed, after decades of economic reforms, economic development and dramatic improvement of living standards, China’s spectacular rise to global prominence “have been hailed by the CCP and many commentators in the international arena as the most spectacular achievement in the history of humanity” (Sun and Guo 2013: 1). “In the first half of the twentieth century, millions of rural and urban Chinese lived in poverty, struggling to survive in a country that was continually torn by war and domestic upheaval,” but since that time, the country “has embraced the technological advances of recent decades and provided new opportunities for millions of Chinese to improve their lives” (Benson 2016: 1). Despite “[t]he route to China’s success has been as tortuously uneven as it has been rapid,” the Asian country “has become the world’s largest economy, and, as a result, China’s future holds unprecedented prosperity for 1.4 billion Chinese” (Benson 2016: 1). Such “self-congratulatory voices have been the ‘main melody’ in the official Chinese media,” however, “what belies this narrative of miracle is the often inconvenient fact that economic reforms have also transformed China from one of the world’s most egalitarian societies into one of the most unequal in Asia and the world” (Harvey 2005; Anagnost 2008; Zang 2008; Davis and Wang 2009; Whyte 2010, in Sun and Guo 2013: 1) (see also Figure 2.3, Chapter II).

In this discursive space, the concept of *xiaokang* re-emerged. *Xiaokang* (小康) is a difficult term to translate, it has a meaning between “comfortably well-off” and affluent, although it also “implies social health” (Goodman 2014: 27). As we have seen in the previous chapter, *xiaokang* is related to a competitive society in which its members and their families have their own private resources and live according to the law and the government of the elites (Lu Hanlong 2010). However, the concepts of *xiaokang* (小康 ‘well-off’), and *Zhongguo tese* (中国

“relative comfort,” where people pursued private interests and gave priority to advancing family interests, was therefore considered morally inferior to the society of “great equality.” Nevertheless, the concept of “relative comfort” or *xiaokang* came to represent an accepted middling sort of society where family interests were paramount, inequality persisted, and government imposed laws to regulate people’s behaviour” (Lu Hanlong 2000: 124-125).

特色 ‘Chinese characteristics’) can also be linked to traditional Chinese thought. With respect to the *xiaokang* standard of living, this notion “has clearly Confucianist connotations: ‘attach equal importance to both material and spiritual civilization and run the country by combining the rule of law with the rule of virtue’; a formula that the report qualifies as ideological and ethical progress” (Solé-Farràs 2014: 65). Also, the report presented by Jiang Zemin to the Sixteenth CCP Congress in November 2002, links the role of culture in contemporary China to traditional Chinese thought by stating that “we must keep to the orientation of serving the people and socialism and the principle of letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend” (Jiang 2002).

By doing this, CCP leaders aim to highlight the “ideological resemblances between Confucianism and communism, the issue —also present in the discourses of Socialist Confucianism and Confucianist Socialism— of the Sinification of Marxism in China (in point of fact, one of the most obvious features of Maoism)” (Solé-Farràs 2014: 63). In addition, Party-state leaders resorted to concepts borrowed from the Chinese cultural tradition in order to develop a new socialist culture that could fit the national conditions of the PRC and, at the same time, create a model of modernization that could differ from the hegemonic Western model (Solé-Farràs 2014: 61). On that basis, it should be noted that

[i]n respect of the discourses shared by this discursive space centred on politics and political power, around which a good part of the attraction caused by the process of political transition in the PRC is generated, there are some that stand out especially. (1) On the one hand, there is a series of discourses which, with different emphases, support a socialist type political system that is based, however, on the philosophical and ideological foundations of Confucianism – or at least under its inspiration. Briefly, in the PRC, there are those who, from an eminently Confucianist perspective, defend the idea that the future of Chinese culture must go through a Confucianism that has incorporated Marxism – we could call it ‘socialist Confucianism’, and there are those who, from an eminently Marxist perspective, defend the need to incorporate into Socialism all the elements of the Confucianist legacy that are still considered valid – which could be called ‘Confucianist Socialism’. The difficulty that is often involved in differentiating clearly between these two perspectives never refrains from being an example of the versatility of the discourses that discursive spaces share. (2) And, on the other hand, there is a unitary discourse which, under the name ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’, structures the ideological principles of the CPC’s general plan for China in the twenty-first century. The coexistence of this discourse alongside the discourses that we have cited earlier – all of which, totally or partially, are acceptable to the general discourse of New Confucianism – oscillates between coexistence and confrontation, depending on the specific aspects discussed. This ambiguous relationship makes a lot of room for manoeuvre when it comes to speculating on the degree of backing provided by the Chinese government to Confucianism.

(Solé-Farràs 2014: 60-61)

Indeed, in the case of the state-sponsored discourse of middle class, the ambiguous relationship of coexistence and confrontation of this discourse alongside other discourses offer the Party-state much room for political maneuvering, as the case of the paradox between the two opposing arguments of destratification and of exceptionalism —i.e., “how the pre-reform destratification mechanism transform to special institutional settings that were supposed to contribute to the “re-stratification” during the reform era” (Lin 2008: 43).

In the report presented by Jiang in 2002, the middle class in general and the entrepreneurs in particular, take centre stage and become the new desired and desirable class in China's model of development while replacing the working class as the core of the Chinese society. Indeed, Jiang's initiative "furthered the process of distancing the CCP from sole reliance on the proletariat which the party had created 50 years earlier" by consigning the proletariat "to the past as the CCP claimed a broader constituency of representation" (Saich 2015: 58). In addition, as Guo argues,

From the Party's viewpoint, it does not matter at all whether the proletariat loses its status as the most progressive force of history; it is all the better that the poor working class no longer constitutes the core of society. For the Party's new mission is economic development, which requires advanced productive forces and consumers with ample purchasing power rather than revolutionary forces ready to wage class struggle. The mission has therefore entailed a fundamental shift from a primary concern with the working class to the principal creators of wealth.

But it remains important for the CCP to pretend that it has not betrayed its own class base or abandoned its ideology. In this regard, it has been plagued by a couple of remarkable contradictions, namely dissynchronised structures of value and a dissynchronised value-environment nexus. The former is exemplified by glaring ideological inconsistencies and the latter by the ideology's failure to legitimise the trial-by-error arrangements by which the Party-state has been adapting to the socio-economic environment.

(Guo 2008: 41)

Here again, remarkable contradictions can be found in the official discourse of the middle class. Instead of revamping the Party and state constitutions in response to new realities, Guo adds, "the CCP has chosen to paper over the inconsistencies by redefining key concepts by a sleight of hand" (2008: 41). This fact may reflect "[t]he debates between the liberals and the New Left, which broke out in the middle of the 1990s" in the PRC that "have been a phenomenon rarely seen among mainland Chinese intellectuals since 1949" (Li 2015: 126). Generally speaking, Li He notes, "during the Jiang Zemin era (1989-2002), the liberals held considerably more influence" (2015: 126). Moreover, Jiang's attempt "to transform the CCP from a vanguard revolutionary party led by the proletariat to a governing party representing the majority of the people" was claimed by the liberals "as a victory because it legitimized the inclusion of members of the business class, that is capitalists, into the Party" (Li 2015: 24).

Indeed, if in 2001, Jiang Zemin recognized the value of the members of the new social groups that emerged in China due, in large part, to the economic and political reforms developed during the previous two decades, the amendment of the Constitution carried out three years later, in 2004, it would make this recognition official. Indeed, the 1999 constitutional amendment defined the "broad patriotic united front that is composed of the democratic parties and people's organizations and that embraces all socialist working people, all patriots who support socialism, and all patriots who stand for the reunification of the motherland." Further, from the 2004 amendment, and after the Three Represents Theory presented in 2001 and 2002, this united and patriotic front would include a new entity —namely, "All builders of socialism"— in addition to all the socialist workers, the patriots who support socialism and the patriots who want the reunification of China already mentioned in the 1999 revision. Therefore, the new patriots who would form the united front they would be "all builders of socialism" that, according to the Three Represents Theory, could be built through private

economic activity. In this way, the ideals of privatization and the activities that can be carried out from it will be considered as activities that build socialism. Jiang's initiative "suggested that the CCP wanted not only to welcome new constituencies but also to exert leadership over the new burgeoning sectors of the economy" (Saich 2015: 58).

Fourth, and following the comparative analysis of these three texts —Jiang Zemin's speech at the 16th CCP Congress in November 2002 in which he raised the idea of the Three Represents Theory and the *Xiaokang* Society, and the constitutional amendments of March 1999 and March 2004—, the recognition of private property that emerges from Jiang's speech continues to be present in other amendments approved in the constitutional revision of 2004. For instance, the third paragraph of Article 10 of the Constitution of March 1999, "The State may, in the public interest, requisition land for its use in accordance with the law" had revised in March 2004 to: "The State may, in the public interest and in accordance with the provisions of law, expropriate or requisition land for its use and make compensation for the land expropriated or requisitioned." Therefore, the state, according to this constitutional amendment of March 2004, offers nominal protection to the "medium" properties of citizens and recognizes private property rights, connecting them, again, with the Three Represents Theory (Jia 2004).

And finally, in Jiang Zemin's speech at the 16th CCP Congress in November 2002, the statements about the importance of certain economic activities, which could be considered clearly liberal, become more obvious. For example, the role of the CCP in the implementation of the "strategic plan for socialist modernization" (Jiang 2002) represents an extensive political development in the liberal direction. Further, with its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), the PRC has entered "a new stage in its opening up" and "new steps have been taken in political restructuring" which will lead to "new ideas ... and new ways to promote the progress of the advanced productive forces and culture, ... new trends in the economy," and "new prospects for China's economic, political and cultural progress" (Jiang 2002). As evidenced by the accession to the WTO, "the official Chinese discourse on globalization has evolved from a simplistic emphasis on international linkages for national survival" such as the statements in Jiang's speech in 2002, "to a more nuanced analysis for the stakes of cooperation and competition at the global level" (Li 2015: 157), as the following sections explore.

This "New China" —after the country "successfully resolved the questions of Hong Kong and Macao"— explores "a new path to accelerated development in reform and opening up" and embraces "the new situation characterized by the development of a socialist market economy" with "the new situation" and "new jobs" (Jiang 2002). This discourse is based on novelty and rejuvenation as liberal ideals of progress, well-being and consumption. Indeed, "[w]ith the spread of liberalism, since the late 1980s, the Chinese party-state has increasingly embraced globalization, enabling the country to propel itself" (Li 2015: 157) into a new position of modernization, national unity, progress, and a new prominent position in the international economy. Despite the official discourse assert repeatedly the significant impact of the Leninist Marxist legacy and Mao Zedong's Thought upon the Party-state's political ideology, in practice, it is clear that Marxist theory and the 'modernization process' are no longer compatible in the "new China."

To recapitulate, "in the first two decades of the reforms, China's uppermost elite still came from the *gaogan zidi* or children of high-ranking cadres" who, by the 1990s, many of them

“chose new careers in business, benefiting directly from their family connections⁹⁷” (Benson 2016: 79). As Rocca argues,

By the end of the 1990s, the break with Marxism, and more precisely with the idea that there are only two classes in capitalist societies, was complete. Not only was there no trace of a “bourgeoisie” in China, but most scholars also argued that Marx was wrong when he said that as capitalism developed the “petty bourgeoisie” would decline. In so-called developed countries, the petty bourgeoisie disappeared but another “middle class” appeared between the working class and the bourgeoisie.

(Rocca 2017: 77)

After 2000, as we have seen, the liberal turn left behind “the Maoist goal of creating one vast classless society,” and middle class professionals, “entrepreneurs and investors become the most highly regarded segment of the population as China’s class structure increasingly mirrored that of states with market-driven economies” (Benson 2016: 79). Simultaneously, “newly generated wealth in the coastal cities created the new elite of business leaders and entrepreneurs” (Benson 2016: 79). In fact, Jiang Zemin had worked in the developed metropolis of Shanghai—in 1985 he became Mayor of this city (Saich 2015: 59). In the new China’s social structure, the growing middle class constituted a new element, in particular after 2000, when its growth accelerated sharply—despite “definitions of middle- and upper-class status varied” (Benson 2016: 80; see also Chapter II). In this way new social groups with new social practices and representations emerged in a new century under a new political ideology and in a new world (the WTO). However, beyond “concerns over efficiency of the Deng-Jiang era (1978-2002) were gradually replaced with concerns over equity” (Li 2015: 75), the efforts of Jiang Zemin and, subsequently, Hu Jintao to strengthen the traditional Party line through the Three Represents Theory and the *Xiaokang* Society, were the result of “the rising need to maintain the legitimacy of CCP’s rule” (Jia 2004: 264) and the survival of a socialist ideology eventually readapted. As Tancredi Falconeri says in *Il Gatotopardo*: “If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change” (Lampedusa 2018 [1958]).

However, the Three Represents Theory stressed the Party’s reform and proved that the CCP is flexible, it “can adjust itself to changing times because it represents the development trend of China’s advanced productive forces and the orientation of China’s advanced culture” (Jia 2004: 267). Hence, “it seems that the move to allow private entrepreneurs—who are playing an increasingly important role in the Chinese economy—to join” the “New Party” “can be explained as the CCP’s reform measure to advance economic development” (Jia 2004: 267-8). Despite the diffusion of liberalism, the “New China” no longer only needs people to produce and contribute economically to the public purse, what is necessary in this new stage are individuals who have the ability to behave as conscious and modern citizens. In particular, what the New China needs are “two kinds of people: first, technicians and managers working in foreign and private enterprises, and more specifically in transnational companies; and second, intellectuals, people with a very high level of education, that is the so-called talented people (*rencai*)” (Rocca 2017: 77).

⁹⁷ Some *taizi* or princes, that is children of the highest leaders in the PRC, Benson adds, “chose to pursue high Party, government or military positions, or kept one foot in the government and another in private business” (2016: 79). In fact, Xi Jinping enjoys a special place within the ‘princelings’ group since “[h]e is son of Xi Zhongxun who was one of the ‘eight immortals’, the key founders of the PRC” (Saich 2015: 66).

In conclusion, since reform policy is based on liberal theory, in particular on marketization and privatization, Deng Xiaoping's reformist theory had not been sufficient to satisfy the socio-economic demands of the PRC's liberal development in the new century, the Three Represents Theory came to stress market allocations and privatization as the constitutional amendments of March 2004 clearly exposed. In turn, the constitutional amendment enshrined the Three Represents Theory as one of the most influential theories in Chinese politics from the first quarter of the century until the 2018 amendment, when "Xi Jinping Thought" was elevated to a similar status. In addition, Jiang's initiative aimed to update the new ethical framework and reinforce the previous ideological line. In practice, the Three Represents Theory facilitated the wealthy Chinese who had created their fortunes under the reform could now access positions with political power (Lieberthal 2004). This has revealed a collusion between political and economic power in the PRC, as He Qinglian argued in 1996. The elite, previously selected on a political basis, is now also being recruited on the basis of 'wealth' and 'merit' —profoundly affecting the underlying social structure" (He 1996: 150)⁹⁸. Thus, business success "has become an official route to political influence; included among the delegates to the Congress of the Communist Party in 2012 were 160 multimillionaires" (Rocca 2017: 22). Dickson (2008) goes further and shows that 90 per cent of Chinese millionaires (including these 160 billionaires who are part of the CCP Congress) are children of high-ranking officials. In short, class in the PRC, as Goodman points, is again "best understood in terms of the intergenerational transfer of compound inequalities of wealth, status, power, rather solely in terms of ideas of class and stratification drawn from the experience of socio-economic development" in both the Mao-dominated era of China's politics and the post-1978 re-emergence of business activities (2014: 7).

3.3.4 Discourse aspiration: The Harmonious Society, 2004-2013

The socio-political ideology credited to President Jiang not only "attempted to transform the CCP from a vanguard revolutionary party led by the proletariat to governing party representing the majority of the people" (Li 2015: 24) but also "China's economic reforms accelerated probably irreversibly" (Mitter 2004: 289). Despite during the Jiang Zemin era (1989-2002), the liberal approach to socio-political policies held a clear influence, and the liberals' voice "had been much more prominent than the New Left" (Li 2015: 126), at the end of his term in office, President Jiang showed greater concern about social inequality and the potential threat it could pose to the stability of the country and to the construction of the *Xiaokang* Society. On the contrary, President Hu Jintao (President of the PRC from 2003 to 2013) and his Premier Wen Jiabao "administration's emphasis on harmonious society echoed the New Leftists' concern for peasants, social justice, and welfare issues" (Li 2015: 126). It is fair to say that while the PRC, "or at least its "golden coast," had largely prospered during the thirteen-year

⁹⁸ According to He, "if a middle class has had difficulty emerging in China, it is partly because so many of the resources necessary for one have already been cornered" following the "transferability between political, economic and cultural capitals in China" (He 1996: 150-151) (See Chapter IV). He's assertion is related to Chow and Yang's analysis on social mobility in traditional Chinese society conducted in the 1940s, "after the Communist victory in 1949, the gentry as a status group was eradicated. If the gentry group has disintegrated, however, its functions must have been taken over by some other group. ... The CCP and the Communist Youth League are functionally comparable to the traditional gentry, in the sense that both Communist membership and the gentry had national political consciousness based upon a single ideology, both were intimately related to the national bureaucracy, and both served as the extended arm of the formal national political power (Yang 1959: 255)." (Chow 2011: 279-280).

stewardship of ex-president Jiang Zemin, the *Shanghaibang* (Shanghai Faction) although did not exactly impress domestic or foreign observers with this visionary statecraft or commitment to thoroughgoing reform” (Lam 2006: 3). Certainly, “China’s new wealth was also unevenly distributed in geographical terms” as “[t]he country’s richest were concentrated along the ‘Gold Coast’ which stretches from Guangdong in the south to Liaoning province in the north” —the rest of Chinese “provinces and regions lagged behind in terms of per capita incomes as well as in economic development” (Benson 2016: 80). In fact, a 2005 report, Li notes, “found that President Hu Jintao and his team were tacitly supporting the New Left and using it to attack former President Jiang Zemin and his Three Represents Theory, which was widely blamed for the growing inequalities that plagues China” (2015: 126). Significantly, “[i]n the run-up to the Party Congress, a number of Chinese reports played up the fact that both Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao had spent significant phases of their careers in poorer western provinces” as an implicit message that suggests “that the new leadership would show greater concern for those who had not benefited as well from the reform programme was deliberate” (Saich 2015: 59).

It was in March 2003, a year before the 2004 constitutional amendment, when “the first peaceful leadership transition in CCP history” was completed and Hu Jintao was named President of the PRC and Wen Jiabao “Premier” with a new and essentially technocratic cabinet (Saich 2006: 38). The new leadership “inherited a booming economy but a society that was increasingly concerned about corruption and the rising inequalities and insecurity many felt because of the erosion of workplace welfare support” (Saich 2015: 58). Although the new leadership “has been criticized for allowing economic reforms to stall and projecting no clear vision for China’s future development path” (Saich 2015: 58), “[t]he Fifth Plenum in October 2005 recognized the significant shift in development strategy away from an obsessive focus on gross domestic product (GDP) growth toward focusing more on the expansion of “the welfare reforms that began in the late 1990s to include those who had not benefited so well from reforms,” and the extension the “benefits available to urban dwellers to the countryside” (Saich 2006: 37, 2015: 58) under the cumbersome phrases of the “Scientific Outlook on Development,” “putting the people first” and “building a Harmonious Society.” Hu had mentioned these slogans in 2004 but it wasn’t until the Sixth Plenum of the Sixteenth Central Committee of the CCP in October 2006 that he introduced them with content.

These policy preferences of the Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao leadership displayed three significant discontinuities and one continuity with those of the Deng-Jiang era.

First, Hu is more orthodox in the political realm than Jiang. There is no doubt that the political atmosphere has tightened over the past year [2005]. Hu has reaffirmed his credentials as a strong Leninist leader who has sought to clamp down on dissent and to limit the range of ideas expressed in the public sphere. Second, policy is more people-centered and populist. There has been a noticeable shift in the discussion of economic policy, with a greater emphasis on sustainability, the quality of growth, and how to deal with the significant inequalities that exist. Third, Hu does not share Jiang’s essentially pro-U.S. disposition in foreign affairs. Hu seems more suspicious of U.S. intentions and has tried to build alliances with other countries, including those not close to the U.S. The one continuity is the belief in the party’s paramount position in the political and economic systems and that only the party can be trusted to carry out reforms.

(Saich 2006: 37-38)

The adoption of the “discontinuity” policies “by the fourth generation⁹⁹ of the CCP leadership under Hu Jintao to “build a harmonious society” (*guojian hexie shehui*) to quell dissatisfaction over worsening socioeconomic inequality and rampant official corruption” (Chen 2013: 21) provoked suspicions among those who described the orthodox policies promoted by Hu as populist and authoritarian. However, it was clear from the outset that “[t]he policy of the Hu-Wen leadership reflected the influence of the New Left” (Li 2015: 130). Indeed, Hu's formulation of building a Harmonious Society (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) involved a series of ideas related to social justice and equality “mainly in response to the many non-harmonious phenomena that occurred as a result of rapid economic development” (Min and Jie 2015: 52). This program was “designed to confront rural-urban income disparities, to develop the state welfare net and to boost spending on health and education” (Li 2015: 130).

In the Communiqué of the Sixth Plenum of the Sixteenth Central Committee of the CCP held from October 11 to 8, 2006, the construction of the Harmonious Society was mentioned on numerous occasions as one of the objectives of the CCP. Defined as “the intrinsic nature of the socialism with Chinese characteristics¹⁰⁰ and an important guarantee of the country's prosperity, the nation's rejuvenation and the people's happiness” (Hu 2006). Meanwhile, President Hu “proclaimed that China is committed to reforming and opening itself to the outside world” (Li 2015: 130). In addition, the Harmonious Society initiative had a series of objectives to be achieved in 2020 such as “the socialist democratic and legal system is further improved”, “administering the country according to law”, “people's rights and interests enjoy concrete respect and guarantee”, “widening of gap between urban and rural development and development between different regions”, “a reasonable and orderly income distribution pattern takes shape in general”, “wealth of households increase universally and people lead more affluent lives”, “the ideological and moral qualities, scientific and cultural qualities and health qualities of the whole nation are improved” and all this always “in a scientific way” (Hu 2006). Moreover, “[a] large number of these policies reflected the concerns of the New Left and/or liberals” (Li 2015: 130).

The ubiquitous idea of “adhering to development in a scientific way” that appears in Hu's speech during the Sixth Plenum is associated with the rational and positivist ideal of social organization in which everything is perfectly organized to avoid problems and discomforts. As Tomba highlights, in this speech Hu pre-empted accusations of idealism by reaffirming that “realizing social harmony, and building a happy society are the social ideals constantly pursued by the whole of humankind and the social ideal of Marxism, including the Communist Party of China” (Tomba 2009: 600; Hu 2006). Therefore, as Chapter II notes, “China began to transform from the communist goal of establishing a utopian *datong* (commonwealth) society to the pragmatic approach of building “a moderate prosperous society” or *Xiaokang* Society (Lu 2010: 108). In fact, as Seán Golden highlights, “it is the term *xiaokang shehui* (modestly well-off society) that has been strengthened the most from the discourse of Hu's [Jintao] report, to the

⁹⁹ Hu represented, Benson notes, “the ‘fourth generation’ of leaders since the 1949 revolution. The first generation was that of Chairman Mao and Zhou Enlai; the second, Deng Xiaoping; and the third, Jiang Zemin” (2016: 98).

¹⁰⁰ Although the concept of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” was revised to “Chinese-style socialism” in the constitutional amendment of March 2004, it should be noted that the concept *Zhongguo tese* (中國特色 ‘Chinese characteristics’) can also be linked to traditional Chinese thought. Consequently, as we have seen, “there is a unitary discourse which, under the name ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’, structures the ideological principles of the CPC's general plan for China in the twenty-first century” (Solé-Farràs 2014: 60-61).

detriment of the term *hexie shehui* (harmonious society),” which “implies a limitation of the aspirations of the new left and a defence of the liberal postulates” (2008: 128).

Furthermore, the concept of Harmonious Society is directly involved with the notion of “harmonious communities” and middle-class homeowners. Indeed, during the Hu-dominated years of the PRC, it is clear that ideas of class often shape the ideas of housing ownership. As we have observed, the question about the relationship between state policies and access to housing is, therefore, that despite increasing deregulation and privatisation, those “within the system—even those with low incomes— have done better than those outside the system in obtaining access to quality housing and, in turn, higher social status” (Tomba and Tang 2008: 175). In 2003, a “nationwide survey found that 78 percent of urban residents have partial or total ownership rights over at least one apartment, and that about 13 percent also own more than one” (Tomba and Tang 2008: 175). They are also discursive spaces, as Tomba suggests,

From the official discourse we can infer that the preconditions for “harmonious communities” (*hexie shequ*) and successful self-government are a sufficient economic base, a sufficient moral base among residents, and a willingness among high-*suzhi* residents to act as exemplars in the construction of harmony. These elements are commonly intertwined.

(Tomba 2009: 601-602)

Further, since “the leadership was set back initially by the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in late 2002-2003 ... the fear of a pandemic reinforced the view that the public health system in the countryside had eroded drastically” (Saich 2015: 59). Indeed, the policies of the Hu-Wen leadership came to be interpreted as an instrument of efforts to fight against the crisis of the SARS epidemic, putting the basic interests of the majority of the population first (Jia 2004). In addition, “[f]or the first time since the reform era began in 1978, economic growth was not described as the overriding goal of the Chinese state” (Li 2015: 130). Instead, their policies, which were pulled together at the Sixth Plenum of the Sixteenth Central Committee held in October 2006,

talked about introducing some aspects of a welfare state and promise of a 20 percent year-on-year increase in the funds for pensions, unemployment benefit, health insurance, and maternity leave. For rural China, they promised an end to arbitrary taxes and to improve on health and education systems. They also pledged to reduce energy consumption by 20 percent. More recently, the Chinese policy-makers has signaled a shift from a no-holds-barred growth to a more sustainable model that would boost social and economic equality and enable low-income and underprivileged groups to have more access to employment opportunities, basic education, primary health care, and social security.

(Li 2015: 130)

From a perspective based on class formation, the aforementioned objectives of the construction of the Harmonious Society attempt to eliminate economic barriers and increase access to basic needs in the rural areas and for the most disadvantaged people; in this way, the population would have basic needs covered and the surpluses of their income could be dedicated to consumer practices just as the practices of the middle classes are perpetuated since capitalism needs consumers. Therefore, the creation of a Harmonious Society would integrate workers in the group that have an average salary by extending the members of the

middle class. This would transform the polarized Chinese society into a “diamond shaped social structure” with a minority of wealthy and poor.

In addition, the objectives of President Hu’s political measures were part of the “civilizing process” based on conception of Elias (1969) that would amount to a gradual standardization and sophistication of the ways and opinions of the population. As Romero-Moreno states, Elias described the civilizing process “as a historical social phenomenon that derived in the pacification of bodies, that is, the moralization of bodily expressions and self-containment through ritualized actions, what today is commonly known as “manners, etiquette or courtesy” (2018: 24). However, in the case of the PRC, the civilizing process “cannot be disassociated from classical thought” (2018: 26). This *wenming* process¹⁰¹, thus, “as an epistemic frame of power relations,” has “found a synthesis through explicit political campaigns and legislations” (Romero-Moreno 2018: 35, 31) such as the normative campaign of the Harmonious Society. On that basis, Rocca argues,

As far as “practices and representations” are concerned, post-Mao China is undoubtedly undergoing a “civilizing process,” that is, a gradual standardization and sophistication of manners and opinions among the population. The main subject of this process is the middle class. The media and the state have promoted the idea that the Chinese must adopt new patterns of behavior and moral values in order to be modern and respectful consumers, autonomous subjects and conscious citizens, exactly the qualities associate with the middle class.

(Rocca 2017: 120)

Hence, Hu insists that “the ideological and moral qualities, scientific and cultural qualities and health qualities of the whole nation are improved” and “wealth of households increase universally and people lead more affluent lives” as the qualities and homes of the middle classes (Hu 2006). In the construction of this ideal and harmonious process of society and social class in the PRC, three concepts interact with each other: the aforementioned concepts of Harmonious Society (*hexie shehui*) and civilization (*wenming*), and that of quality (*suzhi*), which has been discussed in the previous chapter.

China studies have provided a wide variety of definitions of these terms. Above all, Chinese scholars have assimilated the terms *suzhi* and *wenming* with notions such as cultural capital — both acquired academic and non-academic knowledge—, personal qualities, the ability to learn, personal development (or *xiuyang*), respect for social norms, good manners —at lunchtime, of talking, consuming, being citizens, etc. Since such formulations aim the improving of the quality of the Chinese population, “China’s educated wealthy, and mildly conservative middle class has become a useful agent for the development of Hu Jintao’s idea of “harmonious society”” (Tomba 2009: 610) and the implementation of the values of *suzhi* and *wenming*. As a result, this set of concepts and the official discourse of the middle class are dialogical related and epistemological interdependent. On the one hand, *suzhi* and *wenming* constitute the narrative that “allows the middle class to distinguish itself and to be distinguished from the other social groups by imposing norms on the other classes” (Rocca

¹⁰¹ The concept of *wenming* (文明), Romero-Moreno notes, translated into English as civil, civility, civilization or culture, has been popularized by the Chinese government in the past decades through its political and practical use in the public space (2018: 23). “[H]istorically formed as a historically formed ideology,” the notion of *wenming* “has its roots in fundamental aspects of traditional thought and the emergence of national identity in China” (Romero-Moreno 2018: 24, see also Chapter IV).

2017: 124). On the other hand, the increase in *suzhi* and *wenming* is an indispensable requirement for the appearance of a harmonic society in China, that is, a middle-class society.

As Rocca explains in his seminal book *The Making of the Chinese Middle Class*, there are several interpretations of why the government promotes these values.

According to many researchers, notions such as *suzhi*, *wenming* and harmonious society are in tune with traditional Chinese political thought. References to moral qualities, self-cultivation and a civilizing state can be linked to the Confucian legacy. Other scholars point also to the Marxist/revolutionary legacy, and to “social Darwinism,” as key elements. Andrew Kipnis insists on a connection with the one-child policy and the education reforms. He argues that this discourse is also congruent with a new wave of nationalism and authoritarianism that is contemporaneous with the entry of China on the world scene. Borge Bakken sees *wenming* and *suzhi* as tools for implementing scientific management of the population. This biopolitics aims at adjusting the Chinese to the new economic processes and more efficiently controlling individuals ... Noto Yuumi [2011] perceives the discourse and practice of *suzhi* as a “spider-web,” reinforcing and reproducing the structures of social domination. For Sigley the notions of quality or civilization have their roots in the emergence of a technoscientific reasoning that can be traced back to Liang Qichao [was one of the most important Chinese political thinkers of nineteenth century], to the bodily transformation promoted by the Nationalists (*Guomindang*) and even to the socialist plan. Technoscientific reasoning is “all those knowledges concerned with shaping human conduct based on modern claims to ‘scientific truth’” in order “to create certain human subjects” and more precisely “autonomous citizens” ... Each of these analyses shed light on an aspect of the issue.

(Rocca 2017: 120-121)

The Harmonious Society formulation also enabled “to combat the moral vacuum that many see in China” (Saich 2015: 59). Indeed, the Chinese leaders called for a “‘socialist core value system’ and the ‘socialist sense of honour and disgrace’ that would lay down ‘moral and ideological foundations’ underpinning the policies to build the ‘harmonious society’” (Saich 2015: 59-60). Hence, President Hu attempted to combine, “timely and popular”, a moral regeneration to neo-Confucianism with the re-emergence of a “Sinicization of Marxism” (Saich 2015). In practice, the middle class has become a useful agent for the development of Hu Jintao’s orthodox and conservative approach. At the same time, the official discourse of the middle class became not only a moral mechanism to regeneration, but also a legitimization mechanism to co-optation of the middle-class groups. Clearly, the Party-state has dedicated three decades to create

the acquiescence and co-optation of the middle class ... not only through moral indoctrination, but also through generous programs of subsidization of homeownership, the reduction of working time for employees, and the constant improvement of working conditions and salaries for skilled state employees.

(Tomba 2009: 610)

First, with the slowing of the world economy in the late 2000s, the Chinese “leadership realized it would have to promote policies to boost domestic consumption as a major engine of growth while ensuring macroeconomic stability” (Saich 2015: 62). On that basis, a large middle class would provide “the backbone of a consumer society” that would become “crucial to the economic development of the country” (Tomba 2009: 611). Second, due to the fact that

the plenum also recognized the need to establish a “moral and ideological foundation” in Chinese society, the middle class would also boost “support for the central campaigns on national strengthening entrenches the values of civility and responsibility that are necessary to the legitimacy of the present regime” (Tomba 2009: 611). In addition, the discourse on the role of a “civilized” and “self-disciplined” middle class converged “with the perception by members of the middle class that they are the vanguard in the struggle to build a ‘quality nation’” (Tomba 2009: 611). As a result, the official discourse of the middle class became a very useful tool of co-optation of the middle-class groups, of political legitimation, of social control, and of moral and ideological foundation.

3.3.5 Discourse consolidation: the Chinese Dream, 2013-

It was a surprise when Xi Jinping “emerged as the most likely candidate to be general secretary at the Seventeenth Party Congress (2007)” (Saich 2015: 71). However, the only mild surprise when Xi Jinping was confirmed as president and Li Keqiang as premier was the appointment of Li Yuanchao as vice president (Saich 2015: 73). Xi Jinping’s inauguration in November 2012 “marked the beginning of a new era in China’s domestic and international goals” (Benson 2016: 105) and the resurgence of neo-authoritarianism (Li 2015). While his immediate predecessor, President Hu, “had followed the reformist model of a gradual and peaceful transition for the country, Xi signalled that the time had arrived for China to assume its rightful place in world affairs” (Benson 2016: 105) by exuding “a confidence that was lacking over the previous decade” (Saich 2015: 74). And confidence is necessary to achieve the Chinese Dream, President Xi’s slogan.

In terms of lifestyles, the Chinese Dream is to achieve “Western living standards without being shaped by Western political standards” (Li 2015: 27). However, in the constitutional amendment approved on January 11, 2018, the concept of the Chinese Dream does not appear as the ideological contribution of President Xi. Instead, a more personal and global term was added: “Xi Jinping Thought.” Despite its absence in the constitutional text, the concept of the Chinese Dream alludes to the great dream of the Chinese nation—and of each individual—in modern history to carry out its “great rejuvenation” as Xi Jinping stated in his first speech as president (Zhao 2013). This is a very old goal in the Party narrative that has been used by many previous leaders as their presence in the Constitution shows (Zheng Wang 2014). Like the concept of class, Zheng notes, the narrative created about rejuvenation has been an instrument that Chinese leaders have used to mobilize the masses.

Today this rejuvenation aims to restore optimism and enthusiasm about the future, especially among the younger ones (Ferdinand 2016) through a national rejuvenation to promote urbanization, upward social mobility and ideological values. During his first address as General Secretary of the CCP, Xi Jinping “referred to the ‘aspirations for a beautiful life’ for the Chinese people and made a similar reference during his first address as President of China in 2013 at the National People’s Congress, when he asserted that the Chinese Dream is one of ‘strength, prosperity and the happiness of the people’” (Xinhua 2012, in Taylor 2015: 111). This concept effectively suggests “that Xi and the CCP made the right choice in demonstrating that the Party is concerned about the average citizen’s aspirations—and, in particular,” recognizes that the China Dream is likely to be fulfilled through new-type of middle-class life (Taylor 2015: 110-111). The Chinese Dream slogan channels the dreams and aspirations of the average citizen, who yearns for a new type of urban middle-class life. In addition, the Chinese Dream “allows

the average Chinese citizen to believe that their dreams and those of others can be achieved together and shared" (Taylor 2015: 111); that is, their dreams can only come true if national unity is maintained and wealth is shared.

But far from following the "American Dream" model based on individualistic values, the Chinese Dream is about society and the nation (Taylor 2015: 111). In other words, the Chinese Dream is about making China "strong and powerful" again because the great characteristic of the Chinese Dream is to unite the country, the nation and the people in one entity with a common destiny (Xi 2013). Hence, by stressing the importance of the group over the individual, Xi Jinping emphasizes the nationalist and historical component of the Chinese Dream as a discourse. In other words, "what is good for society is supposed to be good for individuals" (Rocca 2017: 23).

Simultaneously, the Chinese Dream is linked to the concept of China's "great rejuvenation" after the "century of national humiliation" that the country suffered from the First Opium War (1839-1842) until the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1945. By doing this, the discourse of the Chinese Dream challenges Chinese people for generating "a 'new national story' or a new narrative to replace the humiliation narrative" (Zheng Wang 2014: 3). This collective dream largely embraces the development of a comfortable middle-class lifestyle for everybody (Goodman 2013). In the closing speech of the Twelfth National People's Congress on March 17, 2013, new President Xi announced to the audience that Chinese people "are in the early stages of socialism, the China Dream means a better life and requires the hard work of all to promote it" (Zhao 2013).

Through the theory of the Chinese Dream, Xi Jinping calls for attention to the power of China at the national and individual level. According to Xi, the people of China must have better standards of living, standards of the middle class. Xi's initiative adds to the tradition of the CCP a collective ideal of future and attempts to convince the Chinese population "that the realization of the Chinese Dream leads to improved housing, education, public health, and social welfare" (Zheng Wang 2014: 7). However, as "Xi's Chinese Dream continues the CCP's tradition of providing the people a rose-tinted picture of the future" —e.g., Hu's narrative of the harmonious or "well-off society" (*xiaokang shehui*), Zhou Enlai's "four modernizations," Deng's "invigoration of China," Mao's realization of socialism and communism in a society without oppression or inequality, with plenty of food and material goods, etc.—, the key message of CCP's narratives promoted since the establishment of the PRC in 1949 "is the same: the Party wants its people to believe that only under the leadership of the CCP can the dream of a better life be realized. As Jiang Zemin said, "Only the CCP can rejuvenate China" (Jiang 1991)" (Zheng Wang 2014: 7).

This attitude of achieving a dream also wants to establish these narratives as the value of all Chinese when it comes to posing challenges of individual self-improvement —again showing the Party's flexibility to establish itself as a political and ethical leader. The new message seems to indicate a new logic of national and individual development based on "work hard and self-reliantly" and on the improvement of the "socialist rule of law" as reflected in the 2018 constitutional amendment. Although this constitutional amendment "attracted widespread attention outside of China, foreign commentators focused on provisions covering presidential term limits, new anti-corruption organs, and the constitutional status of the Party and 'Xi Jinping Thought' ... Chinese commentators characterized this reform as the realization of four decades of efforts to create a specialized constitutional supervision organ" (Hand 2019: 1).

Returning to the analysis of the Chinese Dream, the group's priority over the individual that implicitly transmits the Chinese Dream has been translated, in practice, into coercive neo-authoritarian forms in recent years. Neo-authoritarianism, as Li (2015) notes, “refers to an enlightened autocracy” —that is, “a strong leader adopts undemocratic measures to enforce economic development.” The twenty-fifth anniversary of the events in Tian’anmen Square is a convenient prism through which to examine the re-emergence of neo-authoritarianism in the PRC. Despite “[l]aw and order are maintained, according to the will of the ruler, as crucial conditions for modernization,” neo-authoritarianism “has been in part justified by the economic miracles of the ‘Four Asian Tigers’” —namely Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore. In fact, it “is a subject of hot debate among Chinese scholars in the late 1980s and has been quietly endorsed by the CCP” (2015: 31). In practice, in the case of China’s middle class, the Party-state,

has been trying to deter the middle class from action with a new national-security law and draft laws on Internet security and foreign civil society organizations, as well as by cracking down on rights lawyers, intensifying demands for ideological conformity ... The stress on a “harmonious society” pursued during the previous period under Hu Jintao and the opening of some limited space for small-scale civil-society activity have given way to something more coercive and threatening. This seems to deter the middle class from challenging the regime, but at the cost of increasing that class’s sense of anxiety.

(Nathan 2016: 15-16)

Therefore, most Western scholars consider that the policies implemented in the PRC since 2013, and the constitutional amendment of March 2018, show that

Xi Jinping is taking China back to personalistic leadership after decades of collective leadership. [President Xi] have consolidated greater personal power than Jiang or Hu had ever held. Xi broke precedent by not promoting a successor-in-training at the Nineteenth Party Congress in October 2017. And in March 2018 the National People’s Congress (or NPC, China’s legislature) changed the state constitution to abolish the two-term limit for the president—a clear sign that Xi is planning to stay on beyond 2023.

(Shirk 2018: 23)

However, it must be borne in mind that the very concept of the Chinese Dream must be understood within the global framework of the twentieth century in three, interconnected ways: as a concept of the Chinese tradition that resurfaces with new connotations in “Xi Jinping Thought;” as an instrument to increase the legitimacy of the CCP; and as a method of international dissemination of certain ideals (Zheng Shiping 2014, in Taylor 2015: 109). In this way, the ruling elite, aware of the need to strengthen its legitimacy and of the fact that ending the disparity between the incomes of rural and urban residents will largely determine the success of the Chinese Dream, continues the reform of the economic model launched during the previous period under Hu Jintao “by gradually expanding the urban Chinese middle class through stable domestic economic growth and consumption” (Taylor 2015: 116).

To this end, as discussed in Chapters II and Chapter IV, poverty eradication is a key aspect of government with the aim of stimulating domestic demand, accelerating the transformation of the economic growth model, and promoting sustained long-term development (Beltrán 2018: 140). Thus, the Chinese Dream is sustained on a national scale in the official discourse of the

middle class, not so much as the political ideal of a harmonious society but as an individual dream, which aspires to achieve a comfortable urban lifestyle typical of the middle class. In this way, the Chinese Dream serves as a roadmap for China's middle-class groups. As Cheng Li told Xinhua in an interview in 2013 (see Gao Pan 2013), the Chinese Dream will create new economic opportunities and new sources of wealth, and it will be an opportunity for upward social mobility and achieving a middle-class lifestyle. According to this, the Chinese government must deepen financial reform and thus offer the middle class more opportunities to invest in small and medium-sized enterprises, and in the service sector to make the private sector one of the engines of China's economic development. Cheng Li predicts that the middle class will play a key role for consumption and investment by helping China's economy to stop having an export-based growth model with cheap labour, and to develop a model marked by innovation and focused in the services and consumption sector (Gao Pan 2013). On that basis, Chinese middle class will be defined as the group that can afford the Chinese Dream, but is not part of the upper class¹⁰².

In this article published in *People's Daily*, Gao Pan (2013) explains the clear signs in favour of the fight against corruption, the improvement of the people's living conditions and the use of opening policies to consolidate domestic reforms established by President Xi. This text published in the official mouthpiece of the CCP largely shows the main ideas that the official speech wants to convey about the concept of the middle class and its social purpose in the PRC. In addition, it highlights how the Chinese media, along with other social actors such as the state, has participated in the dissemination of a certain discourse on the middle class that next section analyses in detail. In fact, President Xi admonished his comrades in September 2013 "to work hard on 'consolidating and boosting mainstream public opinion, propagating the leitmotifs [of socialism with Chinese characteristics], and spreading positive energy'" (Lam 2015: 94).

Finally, the amendments to the Party's constitution adopted in 2018, recognize that the legitimacy of CCP is based to some extent on its leadership and its role of the "vanguard of the Chinese working class, the Chinese people, and the Chinese nation" while the PRC's Constitution explicitly affirms that "the exploiting classes as such have been abolished in our country. However, class struggle will continue to exist within certain bounds for a long time to come" (Constitution of the PRC, 11 March 2018¹⁰³). Although the PRC remains explicitly class-based political system informed by the CCP's Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Party's role as the vanguard of both the Chinese proletariat and the Chinese peasants has ceased to become an inter-class entity that represent the Chinese people and the Chinese nation without accentuating class differences. There could be continuous support for Party-state legitimation, if it could assure decrease class differences and growth with stability.

¹⁰² Based on Nunlee's definition of the American middle class (2017: 62).

¹⁰³ The English version can be consulted on Chinalawinfo [The Legal Information Center of Peking University] (2018). "Constitution of the People's Republic of China (2018 Amendment)." Available at: <http://en.pkulaw.cn/display.aspx?cgid=311950&lib=law>, accessed 18 October 2019.

3.4 A DISCOURSE CONSTRUCTION BASED ON DIGITAL MEDIA REPORT: *RENMIN WANG (RW)*

We now complete this chapter on the construction of the state-sponsored discourse of the middle class by analysing how digital media report the social phenomenon of the middle class in contemporary China. Since the start of the privatization of Chinese media in the 1990s, an increasing number of studies have investigated closely the transformation of this sector in the PRC. During this period, Chinese journalists have been aware of the dual role that the newspaper industry “can be like an ordinary factory and generate a revenue (mainly through advertising), but it can also be part of the nation’s ideological propaganda mechanism” (Scotton y Hachten 2010: 50-51). *Renmin Ribao* (人民日报, or *People’s Daily* in the English edition) has been, since its founding in 1946, “the mouthpiece of Central Committee of the CCP, the top decision-making body in China,” and has been “controlled by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee” (Wu 1994: 195). Therefore, the *Renmin Ribao*, and its digital version since 1997 *RW* (*renmin wang* 人民网, *People’s Daily Online* in its English version) represent “the viewpoints of the Chinese leadership” (Wu 1994: 195). *Renmin Ribao*, thus, is central to understanding the government policymakers, and the Chinese propaganda state at all times and, therefore, to analyse, specifically, the official discourse of the middle class during the twentieth century that section chapter aims.

The media play a pivotal role in politics in global societies — “usually as objects of control in authoritarian states and, at least in theory, as government watchdogs and public forums for a plurality of voices in liberal democracies” (Duckett and Langer 2013: 654). Studies published on the treatment of information in different Chinese media confirm that “fusion of Party state and market power has created a media system that serves the interests of the country’s political and economic elite, while suppressing and marginalizing opposing and alternative voices” (Zhao 2004: 179). Further, the influence that the Chinese elite has over the press ensures that it does not deviate too much from the government’s position (Stockmann and Gallagher 2011: 442-3). Taking this premise into account, a considerable number of investigations have examined what was published in the *Renmin Ribao* on different social and political phenomena such as, for example, China’s decision to join the WTO (Zhao 2003), the HIV/AIDS victims (Dong, Chang and Chen 2008), Health Care Reform (Duckett and Langer 2013), homosexuality (Huang 2018) or climate change (Fan, Xue and Xu 2018), among others.

Based on the objectives set out in the introduction to this chapter, this section analyses quantitatively and qualitatively news articles published online in the Chinese digital version of the *Renmin Ribao*. We searched using the keyword “middle class” 中产阶级 (*zhongchan jieji*), one of the most common ways used to refer to this group and with greater significance for the study of official middle-class discourse according to the ideological perspective of the CCP¹⁰⁴. Our final sample of 427 includes every article published in any section of the digital newspaper *RW*. We analysed all the articles published containing the word “middle class” in the title of the news item during a period when the social phenomenon of China’s emerging middle class underwent a major review: from January 1, 2000, when the middle class was first named in relation to the Three Represents Theory of Jiang Zemin and, in this way, the support of the Party-state for the promotion of the middle class in the country was officially revealed, to the

¹⁰⁴ As Goodman notes, “ideas about class and classes are rendered in a number of different ways in Chinese, of which two are most commonly used. One is 阶级 (*jieji*), which refers usually to class in the particular construction which comes from the CCP’s Marxist – Leninist ideology rather than more generally. Thus, workers, peasants and capitalists are all described as classes in this way. The other is 阶层 (*jieceng*), which linguistically denotes stratum or strata” (Goodman 2014: 4).

end of December 2015, the year in which the Fifth Plenum of the Eighteenth Central Committee of the CCP was held, a meeting that represents a turning point between the political decisions developed up to that moment by Xi's administration and the new political measures to be implemented in the PRC during the period 2016-2020¹⁰⁵.

On the one hand, to quantitatively explore the narratives of middle-class across our sample we first looked at the issue attention cycle —the number of articles published each year. We then coded each article according to the nationality of the middle-class group referred: Chinese or foreign, and within the foreign category by country (USA, UK, Japan, etc.). Next, and following the methodological technique used in the studies conducted by Zhao (2003), and by Duckett and Langer (2013), we recoded each article for its overall policy position, defined as "pro-public" (in favour of a greater presence of the state and of distributive measures to favour the middle class), "pro-market" (meaning in favour of a greater marketization or a bigger role for the private sector and market values such as consumption, competitiveness, etc. in the conception of the Chinese middle class), "balanced" (setting out both pro-public and pro-market views or options equally), "none" (expressing neither pro-public nor pro-market views), or "not classifiable."

On the other hand, and following the analytical line pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, this analysis is conceptually based on the definition of discourse made by Solé-Farràs (2014), together with the historical-discursive method and Wodak's (1996: 21) integrative concept of context as Sandby-Thomas (2014) used it in his analysis of how the CCP legitimizes its authority through the stability discourse. We considered it also important, however, to capture qualitatively the principal voices and diversity of opinions across our sample. For this part of our analysis, we coded the actors by taking into account if the voice that appears in the articles comes from the elites or from other actors and, in the case of the pro-public and balanced articles, if the problematic aspects of the privatization process that the PRC is undergoing are explained and if they are proposed solutions. Finally, as Duckett and Langer (2013) also suggest, in order to probe the ideological underpinnings of *RW*'s middle-class reporting, we also examined the language they used —we focused on whether reporting reflected what we have already identified in the preceding sections as an official discourse of the middle class.

In this way, the investigation conducted on the amendments to the PRC Constitution and the discourse of the leaders of the Party-state will be complemented with a journalistic and conceptual analysis of a phenomenon that is receiving increasing attention, not only by the media and academics, but also by the main international economic actors. The results of the analysis on the narratives about middle class in China's digital media are presented below taking into account their ideological dimension, their journalistic representation and the voices or actors quoted assigned by *RW*.

3.4.1 The pan-national narrative of double mobility: the rise of the Chinese Dream and the decline of the American Dream

The fact that more articles on the middle class of other countries (261 articles) than on the Chinese middle class (149) have been published in *RW* is striking, especially at a time when the

¹⁰⁵ These 427 articles have been identified through a systematic search of the database available digitally on the newspaper's website (<http://www.people.com.cn/>).

Chinese government publicly manifests a clear political will to promote the middle class in the country (see Table 3.1). This data reflects the apparently ambiguous and contradictory interaction of "the national" and "the global" present in the Chinese media since the beginning of the 21st century. Nonetheless, nationalism permeates articles dealing with the foreign middle class, responding to the need of the Party-State to compensate for historical inequalities between China and Western states and which is useful in defending the interests of Chinese elites within their frontiers —the same dynamic described by Flint and Taylor (1993: 204) in his analysis of 19th century European nationalism. This pro-Chinese discourse promoted by *RW* and featured in articles on the middle class in other countries is based on three aspects.

Table 3.1 Presence of middle classes' (MC) nationality in news reporting, 2000-2015

	<i>n</i>	%
China MC	149	35
Foreign MC (the US)	117	27
Foreign MC (not including the US)	144	34
None	17	4
Total	427	100

Source. The online articles in our sample, *RW*.

Note. Percentages are rounded so may not add up to 100.

First, there is an anti-American narrative present in almost all the news (94 per cent related to the middle class in the US (117 articles), which represents a significant percentage (27 per cent of the total sample). Anti-Americanism writings appeared in the Chinese press in the 1990s because both the end of the Cold War and the Tian'anmen Square protests in 1989 placed the United States and China in irreconcilable positions of "mutual recrimination" (Lee 2003: 75). The US middle class is described in the articles published in *RW* as a group that is undergoing a precarious process, both in terms of decreasing their income and reducing their size. The quality of life for the American middle class is in danger and not only as a consequence of the economic recession caused by the 2008 crisis, but also due to the slow economic growth of the country prior to the crisis —that is, the increase of social inequality and the crisis of legitimacy of the American leaders to their constituents.

These articles note that "the US infrastructure is in danger¹⁰⁶" and the values on which it is based, such as those related to work, progress, equality and optimism, are "faltering" (*dongyao*) (*RW* 2012). This is in contrast to the growth and enrichment experienced by the Chinese middle-class groups, who are considered to be called to "take over from the American middle class" as repeatedly stated in the *RW*: "The Chinese Dream is booming and the Dream American in decline¹⁰⁷", or what is the same, "when the sun goes down in the US, the light will start for China¹⁰⁸." This type of triumphalist rhetoric, regardless of trends indicated by empirical data on the economy, relates to the Maoist tradition and the Marxist image of

¹⁰⁶ 美国基础设施建设已破旧不堪 (*Meiguo jichu jianshe yi pojiu bukan*) (*RW* 2008).

¹⁰⁷ "中国梦"上升和"美国梦"衰落 (*Zhongguo meng' shangsheng he 'Meiguo meng' shuailuo*) (*RW* 2008).

¹⁰⁸ 当美国的太阳落山时, 中国大的白天开始了 (*dang Meiguo de taiyang luoshan shi, Zhongguo de baitian kaishile*) (*RW* 2011).

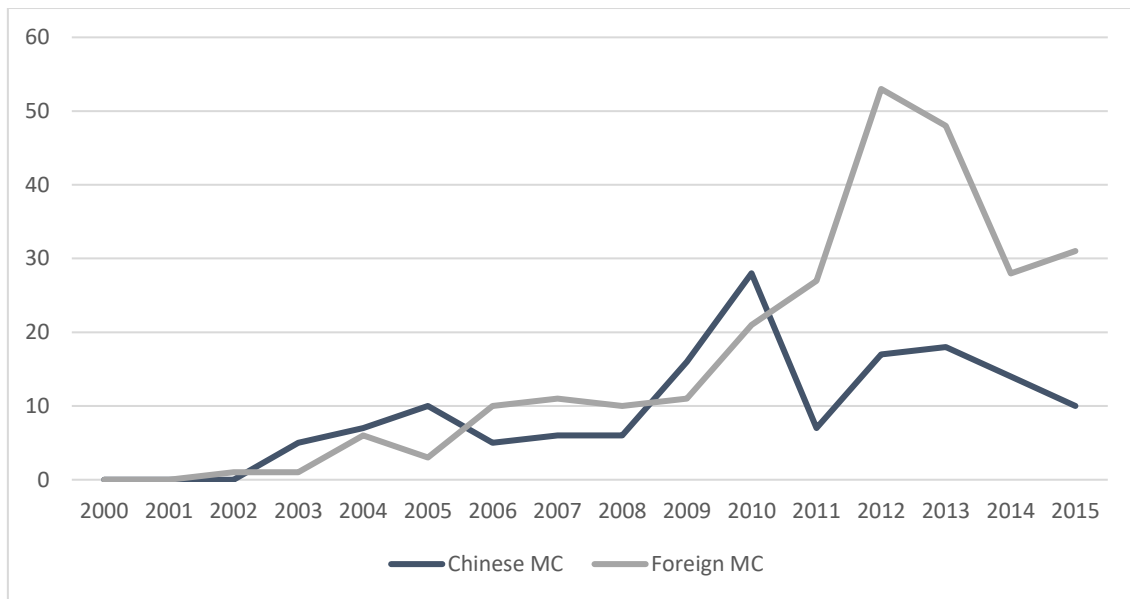
economic “crises.” These anti-American images were usually used by Chinese propaganda to reveal that with each economic crisis, “the American bourgeoisie has tightened the noose further around the neck of the proletariat, and the economy has become increasingly beset with structural ‘contradictions’ for which the American ruling class has no solution” (Shambaugh 1988: 150).

Secondly, the presence of a pan-national discourse that appeals to the shared identity of the so-called emerging economies vis-à-vis the more consolidated economies is verified. Despite the existence of ten articles that question the global growth of the middle class, the rest of them (251) are articulated in what we call the “redistributive mobility narrative.” Accordingly, the middle classes of the liberal democracies —especially the United States, the United Kingdom and Taiwan— are impoverishing and their size is decreasing while the middle classes of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and of other emerging markets are in full growth as if it were an interdependent and redistributive relationship between the two phenomena.

Third, the articles reported celebrate the role of economic locomotive that the middle-class groups of those considered, from an ethnocentric perspective, “developing countries” will play in the future in the global economy. Of all of them, the Chinese middle class is the one that best represents this phenomenon, even holding a redemptive role in the global economy by taking the baton of the American middle class —in 2020 “Chinese consumers will lead world spending” (*RW* 2010c). However, the PRC, the next world leader according to these articles, will not interfere in the national policies of the rest of the countries, nor will its leadership lead to the impoverishment of other regions on the planet. On the contrary, according to our sample of articles, China's economic leadership will benefit everyone, both emerging economies and its traditional competitors. Even “the Chinese middle class will bring great opportunities to the United States” (*RW* 2011) —for example, an article reported focuses on the report on a study conducted in the State of California that notes that “the rise of the Chinese middle class will improve the economic situation in the San Gabriel Valley” both for investment purposes and for the number of tourists (*RW* 2014).

After analysing the nationalist narratives implicit in the articles on the foreign middle class, a question arises: Why does the CCP promote, through *RW*, a nationalist discourse in its articles on the middle class? It could be answered that faced with “the diminishing ideological efficacy of communism” and “the social changes brought about by economic reform” (Hyun y Kim 2014: 766) causing the social conflicts that hatched in the late 1990s, nationalism has become the main instrument of Party-state legitimization to secure public support. It is also revealing to verify the publication dates of the articles on the foreign middle classes (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Distribution of news reporting on middle class (MC) in RW by year, 2000-2015.



Source. The online articles on the Chinese and Foreign middle class in our sample, RW.

There were, however, significant differences in the distribution of news reporting from 2000 to 2015 in our sample of digital articles focused on middle class. Indeed, 61 per cent of them were published in five years (2011-2015) compared to the rest of articles (39 per cent) that were published in a period of eleven years (2000-2010). The number of published articles online increases significantly in 2012, the year in which the initiative of the Chinese Dream was presented, thus establishing a variable between the start of the new ideological program that represents the Chinese Dream and a greater presence in RW of a nationalist and anti-American discourse. This “redistributive mobility narrative” conditions Chinese economic development to the impoverishment of the US middle class and its traditional allies in Asia and Europe. In this way, the concept of the social identity of middle class eliminates its class narratives and acquires a nationalistic discourse.

3.4.2 Anxiety, unspeakable pain, and populism

Articles taking a “pro-market” stance (38 per cent) and a “non-public” stance (37 per cent) in have a practically identical proportion in our sample (see Table 3.2). Only one article, out of the 149 articles on the Chinese middle class, questions whether the model of middle-class society proposed by the government is the most appropriate to end inequality in China. This absence of dissent and criticism of the dominant official discourse is due, not so much to its lack of validity, but to the fact that it calls into question the authority of the CCP. Having accepted the reiterated precept that the middle class must be the majority in Chinese society because it is the backbone of the economy of the country (*Zhongguo caifu de zhongjian liliang*), and because it acts as a social stabilizer (*shehui wending qi*), there are various positions on the most effective way to strengthen and expand this segment of the population. In addition, a populist narrative is also introduced by highlighting the economic difficulties to which the middle class resorts and which affect their economic and emotional stability — as evidenced by some articles that report the loans and mortgages the middle class members have to apply

for— but without indicating structural solutions in order to mitigate the effects of these adversities.

Table 3.2 The dominant policy position in articles on the Chinese middle class

	<i>n</i>	%
Pro-market	57	38
Pro-public	55	37
Balanced	9	6
None	23	15
Not possible to say	5	3
Total	149	100

Source. The online articles on the Chinese middle class (149) in our sample, *RW*.

Note. Percentages are rounded so may not add up to 100.

The pro-market challenge first defended the consumerist role of the middle class, and then elevated it to national need to ensure the PRC's full economic development in the near future. This narrative depoliticizes and naturalizes consumerist practices, normalizes the acceptance of the neoliberal logic implicit in such practices, and neutralizes the concept of social class inherent in the ideological essence of the PRC. Starting in 2009, the articles that invite you to buy products associated with the middle-class lifestyle —such as washing machines, SUV vehicles, tourist destinations, European wine, Japanese branded clothing, etc.— increase considerably and many of them begin by referring to the importance of purchasing power of this group for the Chinese economy and end up directly encouraging consumption: "The middle class must buy (it)¹⁰⁹."

This way, purchasing power becomes the formula to make the PRC the next world power, to make a broad group of consumers that stimulates economic growth, consolidates domestic consumption and allows the country to abandon the economic model based on exports. The middle class, thus, contributes to the modernization of society and is presented as a national necessity. Indeed, domestic consumption is what will keep the PRC as the world's largest economy, and, as a result, will hold unprecedented prosperity for 1.4 billion Chinese. Therefore, the "pro-market" narrative, on the one hand, fosters practices that constitute a new distinctive symbol of Chinese society and, on the other, turns the Chinese economic elite and private sector into the biggest beneficiaries of such consumerist practices.

The official middle-class discourse is not only developed around the need to consume, but also affects determining how to consume, it is about consuming with quality. An article explains that "those economically wealthy middle-class people with superior ideological and cultural quality (*sixiang wenhua suzhi bijiao gao*) will become the essence of Chinese *xiaokang* society" (*RW* 2003). Indeed, as we have seen, *suzhi* or human quality is the trait that distinguishes the middle class with quality from the "new rich" (*baofahu*) who are those "who, despite being economically solvent, have a lower cultural and ideological quality" (*RW* 2003).

On the other hand, not all articles published in *RW* about the Chinese middle class are optimistic about the growth of this group, 37 per cent testify to the difficulties that people

¹⁰⁹ 中产阶级必买 (*zhongchan jieji bi mai*) (*RW* 2009).

considered to be middle class face in the country. The articles taking a pro-public stance allude to the growing inequality that has arisen in the PRC and the difficulties that threaten the expansion of the middle class. An example of this are the headlines such as: "Analyzing the impoverishment of the middle class: why do they have high incomes and indescribable pain?" (RW 2005); "White collar workers or migrant workers? The middle class has a high salary but feels like the ones below" (RW 2006); or "The middle class is blocked: it is difficult to go up and easy to go down" (RW 2010b).

Populist rhetoric permeates the articles taking both pro-public and pro-market stances, regardless of political position. Coinciding with Duckett and Langer's (2013) study on diversity and ideology in the Chinese media's narratives of health care reform, the rhetoric used by RW in the treatment of the middle class is, at the same time, populist and paternalistic because "elites and the media spoke for 'the people' and debated their needs and benefits, but gave them little opportunity to voice their own views and preferences" (2013: 659; see also Table 3.3). The rhetoric, indeed, is more populist than socialist: "it was 'populist' in its concern for the needs of 'the people' and with providing services fairly for all, but it did not use left-wing terminology or arguments" (Dickson 2005, in Duckett and Langer 2013: 659). Although ordinary "middle-class" people were quoted 22 times, and it was the most quoted social actor (represents 31 per cent of citations), this is a stylistic device rarely used in the Chinese media, printed and digital press. Instead, it is preferred to mention what the respondents say non-textually—in this case, the presence of middle-class voices came through in quotations only 7 per cent of all the actors quoted.

Table 3.3 Actors quoted and actors mentioned

	<i>Actors Quoted</i>		<i>Actors Mentioned</i>	
	<i>n*</i>	<i>%**</i>	<i>n*</i>	<i>%**</i>
Government officials	5	7	3	2
Experts / Chinese Institutions	15	21	41	26
Experts / Foreign Institutions	2	3	12	7
MC Individuals	22	31	12	7
Private Enterprises	11	16	50	31
Chinese Media	2	3	12	7
Foreign Media	6	8	20	12
Others	7	10	9	6

Source. The online articles in our sample, RW.

Note. Percentages are rounded so may not add up to 100 because some articles mentioned more than one group of actor and others none.

* Total number of articles in which an actor is quoted/mentioned regardless of whether it is or not in the same article.

** Percentage of articles that quote/mention an actor in our sample.

The difficulties that the Chinese middle class faced were treated in a paternalistic way, the problems of middle-class groups are not exposed in the first person by these social actors. In contrast, RW gave Chinese experts from public institutions, representatives of companies and multinationals—that is, of elite interest groups—and even foreign journalists, who explain the vision of the Chinese middle class, much greater voice. These are the most widely used

voices across our sample, with few resorting to the direct voice of the protagonists, that is, to individuals considered to be middle class (see Table 3.3). Taking into account the political nature of *RW*, the fact that the most mentioned and cited actors are the representatives of the national and transnational business world, suggests a clear market orientation in the sample that indicates the will of the CCP to strengthen and increase power from the private sector to the public. In turn, the voices of individuals considered to be part of China's middle class were weak, and, coinciding with Duckett and Langer (2013), "they were usually quoted only to express personal experiences and feelings rather than politicized opinions" (2013: 671) about the issues they faced. Moreover, the voice of Chinese workers and farmers, called to swell the ranks of the middle class in the near future, does not appear in any article reported in our sample. Their opinion does not appear either regarding the main obstacles that prevent them from accessing the middle-class group and thus achieve, as soon as possible, the desired *Xiaokang* Society.

In the article entitled "The Top Ten Anxiety Disorders Suffering from the Chinese Middle Class¹¹⁰," different experts, psychologists, artists and real estate agents value the lifestyle of the Chinese middle-class groups (see Figure 3.2). Their anxiety is also related to the lack of laws to protect private property in the PRC and the concern about family economic expenses —medical care, education, housing, care for the elderly and so on— that makes middle incomers feel a lot of pressure —they are popularly known as "slaves" (*nu*) of the payment of the mortgage, the car, the education of the children, etc.— and become "addicted" to work. This article has been coded as "balanced" because, although the text supports privatization and partly blames the middle class for their situation —for being workalcoholic—, it also advocates for increased public investment in education and thus freeing up to the families of these expenses. Despite the problems of the Chinese middle class, and other social groups that are not part of the elite, are reported and a greater public investment is claimed, in the end the article the state-sponsored discourse of middle class is legitimized in order to preserve social stability and ensure continued economic growth.

Figure 3.2. 信用卡透支消费(*Xinyongka touzhi xiaofei* [Credit cards use overdraft to consume])



Source: *RW* (2010a).

¹¹⁰ 中国中产阶级十大焦虑症 (*Zhongguo zhongchan jieji shi da jiaolü zheng*) (*RW* 2010a).

These narratives are an example of populism very present in the articles taking a pro-public and a balanced stance. Thus, what could be interpreted as a discourse that advocates economic distribution to end the pressure exerted on the weak middle class, becomes another that justifies further privatization and the protection of the country's economic elites. Although these articles call for a change in government measures to increase the size of the middle class —whose main function is to consolidate domestic consumption—, the final economic beneficiary is the national economic elite as the recipient of the consumption gains generated by the middle class and, simultaneously, achieving a greater presence in an increasingly privatized and less protected social space. As a result, the CCP legitimizes its political and economic authority through “specific interests, which are presented as being in the general interest” (Zhao 2003: 36).

3.4.3 What should be done? Problems, responsibilities and solutions

While 79 per cent of the pro-market articles take for granted the existence of a middle class in the PRC and deepen the economic benefits of this group for the national, and even international, economy, a higher percentage of the pro-public articles (83 per cent) use also economic reasons, but from a very different perspective (see Table 3.4). Indeed, due to the scarce economic capital and the material concerns of middle incomers, the pro-public articles question the growth —even the existence— of an incipient middle class in the PRC. Although the pro-market articles place the rise of the middle class in macroeconomic terms, under the promise of a “superior” lifestyle, the majority position of the pro-public articles focuses on the economic concerns of middle-class households and the emotional difficulties resulting from maintaining their lifestyle.

Table 3.4 Reported problems of China’s middle class (MC) in pro-public and balanced articles

	<i>n</i>	%
MC individuals’ economic capital	18	28
Consumerism, individualism, competition	16	25
Job insecurity	6	9
Lack of universal access (healthcare, education, housing)	24	37
Insecure Housing market (with inadequate regulations)	4	6
Anxiety/Unhappiness/Pressure	13	20
Conceptualization of the MC	8	12
Bribery	3	5
Low Upward mobility / MC is not large enough	30	47
Other	11	17

Source: The online articles in our sample, *RW*.

Note. Articles that did not refer to any problems were excluded. Percentages are rounded so may not add up to 100 because some articles mentioned more than one problem and others none.

RW’s top two most-reported problems of middle-class individuals were “low upward mobility” and “lack of universal access to services.” Close behind the social problem of poor access to services such as healthcare and education, was that of insufficient economic capital or, in

other words, struggling to accumulate economic capital. Also, according to *RW*, competitiveness in the workplace and in the accumulation of cultural capital, the snobbery of the young urban middle class, consumerism —especially the fondness for foreign luxury brands— and the lack of social and political awareness are some of the criticized values that, in turn, are embedded into the middle-class lifestyle everyone wish to achieve anyway. This critical discourse toward neoliberal values is what might be expected in a dominant way in the mouthpiece of the PCC, however, the presence of these “socialist” narratives is reduced to 37 per cent of all articles.

The problems facing the Chinese middle class reveal a simultaneous social transformation in the PRC. On the one hand, it demonstrates that in the PRC’s urban society the ideal of a citizen is based on the concept of the entrepreneurial subject. Additionally, such individual must be “responsible for his/her own ‘profits and losses’ and the anxious manager of his or her embodied capital, whose success is measured in commodified expressions of social distinction, and whose identity as a rights-bearing subject is defined in terms of being a consumer” (Anagnost 2008: 515). On the other hand, this anxious new middle-class citizen, who emerged as a result of globalization and the process of social engineering developed during the 1990s in the PRC, observes with concern as the transfer from the public to the private no longer benefits him or her. A substantial number of articles suggested solutions in line with the narrative of the entrepreneurial subject (see Table 3.5). The digital version of *Renmin Ribao* mainly claimed to alleviate the economic burden that the middle class is dragging through a greater state role (31 per cent), an improvement of existing services (17 per cent) and rising public investment (12 per cent).

Table 3.5 Reported solutions of middle class’s (MC) problems in pro-public and balanced articles

	<i>n</i>	%
More state spending/Increase the size of MC	12	12
Greater public/state role; stronger/more regulation; distributive measures/wider distribution of opportunities	31	31
Improve universal access (with state investment)	17	17
Better (<i>not</i> more) regulation	2	2
Increase/expand market competition/privatization	3	3
More accurate definition of MC	6	6
Change of lifestyle values	10	10
New political order / democratization	4	4
The growth of MC requires more time	6	6
Prosecute corruption	3	3
Other	5	5

Source: The online articles in our sample, *RW*.

Note. Articles that did not refer to any solutions were excluded. Percentages are rounded so may not add up to 100 because some articles mentioned more than one solution and others none.

This ensures, as many articles noted, that China’s middle class would be able to dedicate a larger part of its budget to purchasing goods and services —reinforcing again the

‘consumption-middle class’ binomial. Despite the fact that inequality appears in *RW* as one of the most important social issues, neither the working class, the peasants, the migrant workers, nor the economic elite are mentioned as specific groups in a significant way. It is again striking that the only mention of the upper class in *RW* is through inspirational stories of self-improvement (“success stories”), different approaches to charitable giving, and two interviews with the founders of large Chinese technology companies where they defend the strengthening of the middle class and consider themselves knowledgeable about the social reality of their country.

Such narratives in which the middle-class lifestyle is presented as synonymous with economic growth, social harmony —between two extremes, the rich and the poor— or the backbone of a country, are well established in newspapers around the world. The analysis developed in this section confirms the presence of a discourse of middle class in *RW* by means of multiple narratives based on anti-American, populist, normative, neoliberal, and paternalistic positions, amongst others. So when *RW* addresses the decline of the American middle class, the digital newspaper is not only reporting a global trend in the highest industrialized country, but *RW* is also assuring the Chinese entrepreneurial subject a higher standard of living due to China’s spectacular rise to international prominence. Indeed, the economic leadership of the PRC as the world’s largest economy will hold, according to *RW*, unprecedented prosperity not only for the Chinese population but also for everyone —including both emerging economies and China’s traditional competitors. However, this is not consistent with the anti-American, normative, neoliberal, and paternalistic narratives we have discovered in the articles reported in our sample.

Furthermore, this study has verified the depoliticization of consumerist practices, and the absence of class rhetoric that appeals to socialist values such as equality or solidarity. Thus, socialist narratives were muted in *RW*. In addition, we have observed an increasing elitist trend when presenting economic enrichment as the sole result of individual effort and when it comes to dealing with social issues within the CCP. This has been reinforced by the invisibility of poverty by not giving voice to future members of the Chinese middle class, and the disassociation of the elite with respect to their privileges. To a large extent, this may be consistent with the CCP’s attempt to avoid any mobilization or class consciousness that could threaten social stability and, therefore, their legitimacy in the PRC. As Song and Deng (2015) note, the ideological suppression of politics, class language and the clear intention of “depoliticizing the definition of class” by the Chinese leaders and institutions were the reasons to introduce, in public communication, the Weberian and apolitical language of the *stratum* and *social stratification*, a sign of insecurity and the sense of crisis in which the Party-state constantly lives.

Our findings have also shown the dominant presence of the national and transnational business world in the official discourse of the middle class, and the almost total absence of Party-state leadership when it comes to addressing the issue of the middle class and social inequality in *RW*, which shows an important pro-market view. Thus, *RW*, as well as other newspapers in the PRC, exemplifies the privatization process that is not only experienced by the media, but also permeates the intimate, private and everyday practices of Chinese society.

After elucidating the middle class as a historical artifact before and after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, examining the construction of the official discourse of the middle class in post-Maoist China and the in-depth analysis of the news articles published online on *RW*, Chapter III has set out to contextualize and identify the most representative discursive spaces

of the Party-state. We have looked at the PRC's supreme law, the main texts and speeches of the Chinese leaders and the main means of communication of the PCC, in order to verify the presence, in all of them, of a state-sponsored discourse of the middle class. The degree of this presence and the effective influence that the official discourse of the middle-class exercises on the practices and social representations of this group is one of the elements which the next chapter will gauge from the narratives collected in Beijing in 2017 and 2018.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL PRACTICES AND REPRESENTATIONS OF URBAN MIDDLE CLASS. A CASE STUDY OF BEIJING

We now complete the methodological plan of our study of the construction, and social practices and representations of urban middle-class in the PRC by exploring the fourth, and final, focal point from which we planned to approach it; that is to say, by assessing 20 semi-structured interviews with Beijing's middle-class individuals conducted from September 2017 to December 2018¹¹¹. In doing this, this chapter aims to achieve the final objectives of this thesis: h) to analyse in detail the fieldwork conducted in Beijing between 2017 and 2018; and i) to formulate a critical synopsis of the main features on which the social construction of identity within the Chinese middle class is based within a theoretical context associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In order to confirm the achievement of these specific objectives, we hypothesize that (h7) the conceptualization of the middle class in contemporary China can be considered to relate not only to experiences associated with productive activity, but also, increasingly, to experiences related to social practices and representations; and (h8) by formulating a critical synopsis of the main features on which the social construction of identity within the Chinese middle class is based we can demonstrate together the essential elements of Bourdieu's conceptualization of social class as well as profile its discursive spaces and social dynamics. The analysis results are summarized in the Conclusion section.

The content of this chapter is organized in accordance to Derek Wynne's study *Leisure, Lifestyle and the New Middle Class* (1998)¹¹², and Bourdieu's understanding of the social field as a multi-dimensional space (1985: 723). Thus, for the purpose of organisation, the findings of a case study undertaken in Beijing have been grouped under the following headings:

- Section I: The Social Space of Mobility
- Section II: The Social Space of Lifestyles

¹¹¹ The results of this study can thus be generalized only to the Beijing's urban population. After discarding 3 interviews due to missing values, our final sample included 20 interviews with middle-class respondents.

¹¹² Wynne's book reports the findings of a case study undertaken on a private housing estate, or gated community, constructed in the late 1970s, and located in the Cheshire 'green belt' (UK) in order to examine the social construction of identity within the new middle class within a theoretical context associated with the work of Bourdieu.

- Section III: The Social Space of Gender
- Section IV: The Social Space of the Community

Each of these four sections that comprise Chapter IV explores the social construction of identity within Beijing's middle class by analysing its social practices and representations according to Bourdieu's class theory, while also covering areas as distinct as civil society, the role of leisure in the social construction of identity, patterns of sociability, social mobility, work in the domestic household, national identity, status perception, happiness, consumption patterns or parental expectations and class habitus, among others. First, as Bourdieu's concept of social class has been "inevitably understood in terms that relate it to a series of placements in the occupational structure" (Wynne 2001: 18; Payne 1987: ix), Section I assess the structure, evolution and essential characteristics of the social and geographical trajectories of our respondents. Section II examines the social construction of identity within the PRC's urban middle class by considering the extent to which such social identity can be considered to relate more to lifestyle —that is, social practices and representations— than to experiences related to productive activity, as Wynne's (1998) study raises. Third, as gender processes are conditions of existence for class processes, Section III looks at how individuals understand gendered identities influences what occupational and class positions they will accept or seek (Fraad, Resnick and Wolff 2009: 23). Finally, Section IV examines the degree to which class as a potential social force with the capacity to transform society —i.e., class for *itself*— can be understood as a determinant of middle-class identity in the PRC today.

4.1 THE SOCIAL SPACE OF MOBILITY

As we have seen in the Chapter III the trajectory of the PRC's middle class started with the reforms of the 1990s which led to economic growth, the upgrading of people's living standards, the first manifestations of a set of social practices indicative of the existence of a consumer society and the emergence of new social representations. At the same time, class barriers and social inequality has increasingly become a topic of public concern. Despite the Chinese middle class has begun to receive attention, the social stratification and class mobility has been questioned deeply both outside and inside the PRC (Chapter II). The research included in this chapter has been carefully selected by outlining a series of "boundaries" associated with social origin/social mobility, education and occupation which can be seen to relate to the interests, tastes and leisure preferences of particular social groups, following Wynne's (1998: 94) evaluation model.

Informal interviews and semi-structured interviews conducted in Beijing with middle class individuals reveal the routes taken to their current occupational positions. In most cases, in moving through the social space, the Chinese middle-class informants have had to be geographically mobile, moving to the next niche in the division of labour and the social organization often involves geographical mobility (Bell 2006: 13). Indeed, in China today, geographical mobility is a necessary condition of social mobility. Thus, the inter-relationship between occupational, geographical and social mobility has also been accompanied by significant changes in the nuclear and extended family form of kinship. This is mainly linked to Bourdieu's replacement of "the concept of class structure with that of social space" (Wacquant

1991: 52), and the understanding of social class “in terms that relate it to a series of placements in the occupational structure” (Wynne 2001: 18; Payne 1987: ix).

Hence, social mobility—including geographic mobility—is in fact occupational mobility, and so it is a product of employment processes which have taken place in specific historical and economic circumstances (Payne 1987: ix). It is clear that, in the case of the PRC, what triggered the emergence of a middle class was the role of both the public and non-public sectors in the marketization of the economy. That is why, this section uses in particular two unique features of Bourdieu’s approach to class to assess how *symbolic systems* solidify in *social boundaries*: (1) the significance and role of the analysis of *symbolic systems* in class analysis, and (2) the questions of *boundaries* between classes—including the three main dimensions of class formation: the amount of capital, the proportion of capital formation and the evolution of the historical track of status position (Weininger 2005: 84; Hong and Zhao 2015: 4)—, in which the definition of the social world is at stake in overt or latent class struggle, the struggle for legitimation in social practice and the imposition of the dominant systems of classification (Bourdieu 1977b: 69).

Further, in order to understand the construction of the social identity of middle class in urban China, this section locates in the social construction of the everyday lives the statistical observations that have identified the homologies between social origin, political capital, parental occupational position and cultural capital. Here the primary concern will be to provide an overview of the structural characteristics of the sample, before reporting whether the formation of the Chinese middle class can be primarily understood through a social mobility accounted for by an increasing “meritocracy” or through other forms of social mobility associated with different accumulations of capital.

Finally, by analysing “trajectories of social mobility” it becomes possible to measure the degree to which these different formations of habitus may relate to different forms of normative social practices—the normative effects of popularity endorsed beliefs—and representations of Chinese middle class—including the behavioural heterogeneity involved in the rationalising project of modernity and to what Beck has termed the “individualisation” of the social (Beck 1992: 127-139). But first, we briefly discuss the conceptualization of “new middle class” in the PRC in order to assess the emergence and grouping in trajectories of social and geographic mobility of our respondents.

4.1.1 The concept of the “new middle class” in the social space of the PRC

As we have seen in Chapter II, attempts to define the concept of class lead to long, unresolved controversies on its definition. In the case of the rise of the new-middle-class question is also related to many issues on its definition and to many profound and changing requirements of the economy, the state and society in this process. Certainly, there is a consensus among scholars with the perception that these changes in the contemporary occupational structure of Western democracies that “can be characterised by an increased in non-manual, white-collar and service occupations and a decrease in blue-collar, manual occupations” (Wynne 1998: 9) gave rise to the emergence of the “new” middle class.

For the most part such debate about the new middle class(es), Wynne notes, has focused on two related issues. Firstly, “the extent to which occupational change has affected the class

structure and problematised particularly Marxist but also Weberian theory” (Bottomore 1965; Braverman 1974; Giddens 1973, 1981; Goldthorpe 1987; Roberts *et al.* 1977, in Wynne 1998: 10). Secondly, “the appropriate conceptualisation of a new middle or service class and its potential for either fragmentation or homogeneity” (Goldthorpe 1982, 1987 and 1995, Roberts *et al.*, 1977; Abercrombie and Urry 1983; Lash and Urry 1987; Savage *et al.* 1992; Butler and Savage 1995, in Wynne 1998: 10). To review adequately for such work would require more space than is available here but account briefly the nature of the social phenomenon of new middle class(es) in urban China is essential if this section aims to conduct an empirical analysis of such social grouping.

As Rocca notes, whereas in Europe and North America, the emergence of a new middle class that appeared throughout the twentieth century and developed very rapidly after the Second World War is the consequence of the entry into a new phase of capitalism (Fordism) and the collapse of social groups identified with the previous phase, in the PRC there is a simultaneous rise of old and new middle incomers (2017: 41-2, 48). On the one hand, from the Western perspective, the changes occurred in the socio-occupational structure after the Second World War made possible to define objectively this new group of middle incomers as professionals, technicians and office workers —that is, the “new middle class.” Thus, by observing this new class emerged, a number of interpretations began “when Marxist-oriented social analysts endeavoured to grasp the social implication of a newly emergent stratum of white-collar workers and to incorporate their struggles and interests within their older perspective” (Vidich 1995: 2). To this extent, social scientists¹¹³ discovered that the political significance of this class “could not be explained within the frameworks of Marx or Weber: the new middle classes (for there were more than one) were simultaneously distinguishable from the older bourgeoisie and substantively a new social phenomenon” (Vidich 1995: 3).

Further, the emergence of a vast new middle stratum employed in administrative, service and bureaucratic positions —that is, they were not capitalist but neither industrial workers— was not expected among Marxist-oriented scholars’ who expected an increasing polarization in class relations. These new occupations —not only psychologists, graphic designers or IT experts but also low-level service employees such as supervisors in the hospitality industry as well as the new service professionals— were result of the collapse of occupations identified with the previous economic phase, and the “new middle class” enjoyed a different social position than that of their predecessors. While, Rocca points, “the old middle class was a sort of ‘petty bourgeoisie’ owning means of production but only to a limited degree, the new middle class occupied strategic positions of ‘executives,’ playing a central role in the functioning of big capitalist firms” (2017: 42).

However, in the PRC, the evolution in socio-professional terms was different. As we analyse in the following sections, a large part of “the socialist middle class” took advantage of the new opportunities provided by the commodification of capital and labour (Rocca 2017: 47-8), and for the offspring of this group the receipt of the intergenerational transfer of privilege was even easier. Indeed, “they were in a position to get prestigious and well-paid jobs because their level of education fit with the types of jobs in demand on the labor market and/or their social capital put them in a prominent position in the market” (Rocca 2017: 48). They may look

¹¹³ The first study of these new middle class was written by Emil Lederer and published in 1912 in the German city of Tübingen in 1912 as *Die Privatangestellten in der modernen Wirtschaftsentwicklung* (1937 [1912]), which “was republished in part in an English translation entitled *The Problem of the Modern Salaried Employee: Its Theoretical and Statistical Basis*” (1936 [1912]) (Vidich 1995: 2).

like what Western societies call the “new middle class” because “in socio-professional terms it is possible to define objectively this new group as professionals, technicians and office clerks;” however, “the emergence of a new group of middle incomers did not occur at the expense of the “old petty bourgeoisie” (Rocca 2017: 48).

Indeed, in the PRC, as Rocca adds,

[t]he multifaceted development of capitalism, articulating family business and labor-extensive factories with high technology firms, quality durable goods, foreign industries and powerful real estate companies have created a wider range of new salaried jobs which have joined the ranks of the “new” middle class. But the “petty bourgeoisie” (small merchants, artisans, etc.) who vanished in the 1950s rose from the ashes and developed quickly after the end of the planned economy. Consequently, there is not a phenomenon of replacement, but rather of simultaneous rise of old and new middle incomers.

(Rocca 2017: 42)

In addition, as we have seen in Chapter III, the convergence of class depends on different economic bases, which determine whether the (old and new) middle class’s political attitudes are conservative or liberal in the PRC. Consequently, as Hong and Zhao argue,

The new middle class can be divided into state-owned economic groups and private sector groups (respectively referred to as “endogenous” and “exogenous” middle class). The former has strong intergenerational continuity in close proximity with the government, and it is relatively conservative in political and consumption awareness; the formation of the latter is characterized more by the market economy and is thus more radical in political and consumption awareness [Li 2010]. Zhang (2008) also finds that the “new middle class” is more critical than the “old middle class” and is more skeptical of the government and institutions. However, because the new middle class is one of the biggest beneficiaries of the reform and opening, it is still a strong supporting force of social stability [Li 2011b].

(Hong and Zhao 2015)

In short, as in the PRC there is not a phenomenon of replacement of an “old middle class” by a “new middle class,” but rather of simultaneous rise of old and new middle incomers with a set of new practices and representations. Thus, this study does not refer to the “performers” of this new lifestyle emerged in the PRC as “new middle class.” However, it considers the distinction between “the old middle class” and “the new middle class” in terms of class formation suggested by scholars such as Li (2010; 2011b) or So (2005). As this study aims to prove that divisions around consumption patterns and the social construction of identity may be taking the place of those previously associated with work —or “endogenous” and “exogenous” occupational activities—, and new social groups may be being formed around aesthetic and cultural divisions, located in practices outside of work (Wynne 1998: 146), the social and geographic origin also is analysed in the following sections in order to contextualize the formation of such a set of social practices and representations.

4.1.2 Class reproduction: Converting capitals in post-Maoist China

Since the purpose of this investigation is not to provide a definition of middle class, and in order to ensure comparability, participants were considered middle class if they fulfilled three

objective criteria: education qualifications—including college, undergraduate, and above; age range (between 25-65 years old); and the sociological convention of occupation activity, according to the model of the contemporary class structure by occupation developed by Lu Xueyi (2002: 44) and his colleagues at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Institute of Sociology. They used three resources—education, economic capital and social capital—in order to build up ten *socio-professional* strata or classes (table 4.1). The formal antecedents of the ten-groups typology proposed by Lu Xueyi in 2002 were drawn from the work of Anthony Giddens (Giddens 1973) and Erik Olin Wright (Wright 1997). As Rocca (2017: 35) points out, this typology based on ten strata or classes is a “construction” of social stratification, but it has had an important influence on Chinese research.

The dataset of this study was collected in Beijing by conducting 20 semi-structured interviews¹¹⁴ with young middle-class individuals (10 men and 10 women that were professional and technical staff, white collar workers, professors, civil officers, professionals, managerial staff and entrepreneurs) living in Beijing¹¹⁵. Further, the indication of the social origins of the respondents have been obtained by considering the occupations of their mothers and fathers, which were classified according to the occupational coding described in the above-mentioned surveys undertaken by the CASS Institute of Sociology.

In exploring the social trajectories of our subjects, the notion of habitus is employed to suggest that the middle class must be understood not as a single group but rather as a set of fragmented groupings, fragmented according to the different paths of social (and geographic) mobility “followed and structured around these paths, and therefore indicative of the different habitus they possess” (Wynne 1998: 56). Moreover, the relative amounts of economic and educational capital, and the remains of political capital possessed can be employed in order to discover possible differentiations in social practices and representations such as cultural consumption, religious/spiritual habits, holiday making, leisure activities with friends, etc.

Table 4.1 shows the effects of social origin on occupation. Although the results indicate that most respondents’ parents were industrial workers in a *danwei* (30 per cent), the proportion of member of professional and technical staff is also particularly significant among respondents’ parents (27.5 per cent). Certainly, the figures indicate that a sizable minority (10 per cent) of those with origins in the agricultural labourers have achieved considerable mobility. When it is remembered that entry into professional occupations over the last decades is primarily guarded by educational qualifications, these results suggest that only 10 per cent of those from peasantry origins have achieved this mobility through educational credentialism or the accumulation of educational capital. Among mothers’ occupational categories, the least common categorizations are those of housewife and private entrepreneur which were indicated by solely 5 per cent of respondents; and, among fathers’ occupational categories, are those of manager and private entrepreneur which were indicated by also 5 per cent of our sample. The rest of the participants’ parents work or had worked as office workers (17.5 per cent).

¹¹⁴ In order to protect the interviewees’ identity, I will use fictitious names and avoid mentioning personal details.

¹¹⁵ I conducted a set of twenty semi-structured interviews from September 2017 to December 2018 mostly in Haidian district—where the majority of the most prestigious universities in the PRC are situated—, and in other areas of Beijing such as Dongzhimen and Gulou.

Table 4.1 Social origin and occupational activity

<i>Parents' occupational categories</i>	<i>Father (n = 20) %</i>	<i>Mother (n = 20) %</i>	<i>Father and mother (n = 40) %</i>
State and social administrators	-	-	-
Managers	5	-	2.5
Private entrepreneurs	5	5	5
Individual business owners	-	-	-
Professional and technical personnel	35	20	27.5
Office workers	15	20	17.5
Employees of commercial services	-	-	-
Industrial working class	30	30	30
Agricultural labourers	10	10	10
Urban and rural unemployed and semi-employed	-	-	-
Reproductive labour	-	5	2.5
Refused/Don't know/no answer	-	10	5

Source: Interviews in our sample based on variables used by Lu Xueyi (2002: 44).

The aim here is to shed light on the new middle class's formative process in order to answer the question of whether the new middle class in urban China is a phenomenon of class production or class reproduction. Further indications of the social origin of the respondents can be obtained by the comparison of their occupations with those of their parents; from historical data of the distribution of workforce, in terms of the class composition identified for selected years between 1952 —three years after the foundation of the PRC— and 2006 (Table 4.2); and by using Bourdieu's concept of political capital in his class theory.

Table 4.2 PRC Class composition of workforce (percentage), 1952-2006

<i>Class</i>	<i>1952</i>	<i>1978</i>	<i>1988</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2006</i>
State and social administrators	0.5	1.0	1.7	2.1	2.3
Managers	0.1	0.2	0.5	1.6	2.6
Private entrepreneurs	0.2	-	-	1.0	1.3
Individual business owners	4.1	-	3.1	7.1	9.5
Professional and technical personnel	0.9	3.5	4.8	4.6	6.3
Office workers	0.5	1.3	1.7	7.2	7.0
Employees of commercial services	3.1	2.2	6.4	11.2	10.1
Industrial working class	6.4	19.8	22.4	17.5	14.7
Agricultural labourers	84.2	67.4	55.8	42.9	40.3
Urban and rural unemployed and semi-employed	-	4.6	3.6	4.8	5.9

Sources: 1952–88 (Lu 2002: 44); 2001 (Lu 2004: 38); 2006 (Lu 2012: 20, 403); 2001 data from National Sample Survey Data; 2006 data from the 2005 Sample Survey of 1 per cent of the Chinese population undertaken by National Bureau of Statistics, and the 2006 National General Social Survey of CASS, Institute of Sociology (Goodman 2014: 60).

It was suggested previously that the model of the contemporary social classification by occupation developed by Lu and his colleagues at CASS was informed by the work of sociologists outside China (Giddens 1973; Wright 1997), highlighting class in contemporary society as being derived from the means of production, position in the authority structure and the possession of skills and expertise (Goodman 2014: 28, 58). Indeed, the CASS Institute of Sociology team used these three determinants, but they added also a fourth by distinguishing between those “outside the system” (*tizhiwai*) relying on their labour force, their properties and the market for a living, and those “inside the system” (*tizhinei*) depending upon power relations (Li and Sheng 2007) —being within the Party-state system; the former working in the private sector, the latter in public institutions (Goodman 2014: 58, see also Goodman’s explanation in Chapter III; Lu 2002: 44; Rocca 2017: 85). Thus,

[t]he reflection of the Party-state in the labor market is “the system,” as *ti zhi* (体制) or *bian zhi* (编制) in Chinese, which is a popular expression in China today to describe the hierarchy in the labor market, as well as various acts of redistribution. Employment “within the system” (*tizhi nei* 体制内) generally refers to public-sector employment. Jobs on contract terms are not included in the system. Only those permanent positions in the public sector that have access to benefits associated with political power or state assets are considered “within the system.” When it comes to reward distribution, the unique feature of employees “within the system” that distinguishes them from their counterparts “outside the system” (*tizhi wai* 体制外) is that their privileged status is more the result of the attempted egalitarianism of socialism than the success of market competition. As observed elsewhere, the economic return and material benefits for cadres and their families go beyond salary (Walder 2003), and it is the political and social reasons, instead of economic reasons that oriented the management decision-making of some entrepreneurs in non-public sectors (Xie and Wu 2008) ... A job “within the system,” most of the time, equals stable employment, a secured pension, and access to highly subsidized medical care, housing resources and other in-kind benefits.

(Tang 2018a: 7-8)

Yet, as an explanatory tool focused on occupation, this schema contributes to institutionalizing inequalities. In its detail it is very focused on the upper and middle strata of society as well as on urban China; thus, some of the key inequalities —such as gender and rural-urban inequalities, based on household registration distinctions— that have been highlighted as having emerged during the reform era remain masked (Goodman 2014: 62). However, far from jeopardizing the conclusions that can be drawn from the sample, urban-centered nature of the scheme meets the objectives focused on the urbanized lifestyle of the middle class in China.

The rationale for the occupational coding used in this study has been derived from the model of the contemporary social classification developed by Lu (2002); the occupational distribution originally obtained from the Goldthorpe-Hope classification (1974) based on the nature of the employment relationship; and finally, the structural composition and size of the sample itself, together with the theoretical concerns of our argument (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Occupational activity

<i>Participants' Occupation</i>	<i>Males (n = 10) %</i>	<i>Females (n = 10) %</i>	<i>Females and males (n = 20) %</i>
1 Professionals and Managers	10	-	5
2 Professors, officials and administrators	70	90	80
3 Technicians and Supervisors	10	-	5
4 Reproductive labour	-	10	5
5 Unemployed	10	-	5

Source: Based on our interview data.

Most of the participants have employment links with academia —Emeritus Professors, Associate Professor, Faculty Administrator (55 per cent of respondents). This is because, as is usually the case in China, the snowball sampling is the nonprobability sampling technique used here. In this technique, a researcher asks the main respondents to recruit further participants who meet the eligibility criteria among their acquaintances, so the extracted sample increases in size like ‘a snowball rolls downhill’. In the initial stages, the interviews were conducted at some academic institutions in Beijing to maximise response: initial informants to nominate were more likely to participate through their expanded network and professional contacts (deemed more trustworthy).

Table 4.3 shows also the effects of educational level on occupational positions. Further indications of the nature of the sample can be found in the levels of educational achievement. The findings suggest a clear link between the kinds of occupational activity entered and the educational level of participants, with occupational activity being clearly associated with graduate and post-graduate levels of education. Education qualification and “credentialism” (cultural capital) are clearly important for this population. They all have a degree and almost 85 per cent of respondents have a post-degree qualification —30 per cent have a master’s degree and 55 per cent have a PhD. However, as we have seen, the Chinese middle class cannot be understood as a uniform grouping but rather as a conglomerate composed of fragmented (but structured) groups with different habitus. In addition, given our findings pertaining to gender, geographical/social mobility and education, it soon becomes apparent that we should discover heterogeneity rather than homogeneity in the lifestyle of the PRC’s middle class.

Although Hakim’s (2011) study reveals that there are as many forms of capital as there are fields, Bourdieu proposes using economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital to analyse the individual’s life chances and how social space is constructed in the most advanced societies, such as France. Bourdieu, however, in *Practical Reason* (1998b), introduces another kind of capital or principle of differentiation: the political capital. When in the regimes that are properly called “Soviet” (rather than communist), such as East Germany, the political capital becomes the primordial principle of differentiation because the economic capital is officially and, in actual fact, out of bounds. Indeed, political capital guarantees its holders a form of private appropriation of public goods and services (Bourdieu 1998b: 116).

Borrowing the concept of political capital from Bourdieu, we aim to explore here the convergence between the “new middle class” and the “old middle class,” the formation of the middle class, and the reproduced relations between actors or collectivities organised as a set of “creative strategies of distinction” (Wacquant 1991: 52), reproduction and intergenerational transfer of privilege and disadvantage in Contemporary China. As we have seen when discussing the consideration of the urban middle class as the “new middle class” in the PRC, “economic capital was less important, giving more prominence to political capital or cultural capital, and that old networks with political access under transition could covert that into economic capital, that could in turn be used to control politics (Verdery 2003)” (Eichholz *et al.* 2013: 869).

Nevertheless, this “conversion rate” is historically variable and “must be discovered through analysis of the whole set of creative strategies of distinction, reproduction and subversion of all agents” (Wacquant 1991: 52). For the purposes of this research the primary interest in the analysis of Bourdieu’s social structure is the argument that

Reproduction strategies, the set of outwardly very different practices whereby individuals or families tend, unconsciously and consciously, to maintain or increase their assets and consequently to maintain or improve their position in the class structure, constitute a system which, being the product of a single unifying, generative principle, tends to function and change in a systematic way. Through the mediation of the disposition towards the future, which is itself determined by the group’s objective chances of reproduction, these strategies depend, first, on the volume and composition of the capital to be reproduced; and secondly, on the state of the instruments of reproduction (inheritance law and custom, the labour market, the educational system, etc.), which itself depends on the state of the power relations between the classes.

(Bourdieu 1984 [1979]: 125)

According to Jenkins, in this quotation, to which we will return later, “explicitly or implicitly, it is all here: strategies, the habitus with its dispositions, subjective expectations of objective probabilities and social reproduction” (2002: 141). Further, since education capital has become one of the main assets on the road to success, social reproduction has been promoted in the PRC by local governments in order to guarantee long-term social stability. As Rocca reports, “local governments exert pressure on universities and on the education administration to preserve and even increase the number of positions reserved for locals” (2017: 47). The attitudes of local governments seem to reflect the urban dwellers’ perception of these quotas reflect the higher *suzhi* of, for instance, the Beijing population. As a result, in order to guarantee social peace and avoid a new source of discontent, “universities continue to keep places for local dwellers” (Rocca 2017: 47).

Indeed, as we have discussed in Chapter I, in addition to vertical movements based on locations in the occupational system and attributes of a certain lifestyle, the conversion of capitals can take place in terms of “horizontal” or “transverse” mobility (according to the composition of the capital possessed by incumbents). In other words, both class location and fraction location may vary simultaneously through time and space. As such, the horizontal mobility is the result of the abovementioned conversion and reconversion strategies —when political capital is “cashed in” to obtain economic, cultural or economic capital in the next generation, as in the case of the Chinese middle class— leading to an acceleration of the

competition over access to elite education and, consequently, to a “diploma inflation”, for example (Jenkins 2002: 140).

However, convergent elements combined such as “embodied” behaviours (*habitus*) and unexpected consequences of actions are as important as policies —e.g., on access to housing or higher education— or rational actions in the class reproduction in the PRC. As explained before, in the section of using the concept of “new middle class” in the post-Maoist social structure, the offspring of the Maoist middle class were able to get a prominent position (horizontal mobility¹¹⁶) in the market due to their social capital and/or their levels of education fitted with the types of jobs in demand on the labour market at that moment. In addition, Rocca argues,

[m]iddle incomers are mostly members of the “old middle class” —workers and employees (*zhigong*)— and their offspring, and the “middleization” of Chinese society is above all a phenomenon of *class reproduction* of the middle class that was established during the Maoist era. I contend that at that time, urban workers and employees of state enterprises —that is, the vast majority of urban dwellers— were situated in the middle of the socialist society in terms of income, prestige and status. They were neither part of the ruling classes nor part of the lower classes (peasants). They had close and complex relationships with cadres (the ruling elite) and enjoyed better living and working conditions than peasants. Today also, the middle class is composed of urban dwellers. As there is a low level of income mobility, middle incomers and consumers are mostly urban people. University graduates and undergraduates, skilled occupations and qualified job opportunities are concentrated in urban areas. Professionals and office clerks are far less numerous in the countryside than in big cities. Lastly, as social capital is a determinant factor in finding a job, even university graduates who are not locals have difficulty finding a position. From the middle of the 1990s, being urban dwellers became a determinant stake. And to be urban dwellers meant to be former “employees and workers” (*zhigong*) or small cadres (*ganbu*), or the children of people belonging to these two groups.

(Rocca 2017: 44-5)

From the data in Table 4.1 and according to Rocca’s consideration, it can be seen that parents with occupations traditionally associated with the industrial working class, were situated in the middle of the socialist society in terms of income, prestige and status. That is to say, they were neither part of the ruling classes nor part of the lower classes (peasants) (Rocca 2017: 45). As the table reveals, 82.5 per cent of our sample have parents identified as members of the “old middle class” which also was composed of managers, private entrepreneurs and office workers.

In comparing occupations with the occupational activities of our respondents’ parents we see that most of the respondents came from “old middle class” backgrounds or Maoist middle class. In 1978, over 28 per cent of the Chinese population can be identified as members of the “old middle class” (Table 4.2), the parents or grandparents’ of most of the respondents. The numbers of those in the old middle class grew considerably after 1978, probably by the growth

¹¹⁶ Horizontal mobility, movement of individuals, families, or groups is associated with family background through a system of social hierarchy or stratification. Therefore, horizontal mobility is defined with respect to a variety of dimensions of time and space by involving “a change in position, especially in occupation, but no change in social class” (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 2020b). It should be noted that “if, however, the move involves a change in social class, it is called ‘vertical mobility’ and involves either ‘upward mobility’ or ‘downward mobility’” (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 2020b).

of the non-state sector, but the state sector itself, both in state administration and sectors like communications and education, also increased (Goodman 2014: 118-9). At the same time, direct descendants and relatives (“the new middle class”) secured the reproduction of their class position: in 1998 they represented 30.5% of the population Germany, in 2001 the “new” middle class constituted 52.3% of the PRC’s workforce and by 2006 this figure had grown to 53.8 per cent.

Significantly, what made these middle class’s members in a homogeneous group was not so much the level of their income as their political capital —or that of their families. Thus, this emerging middle class accessed valuable resources from the public system to maintain a series of privileges until those resources of political capital became private assets. The transfer of privileges representing their political capital in post-reform China, and the social reproduction that Rocca (2017) explains, were experienced by many workers of the old Beijing *danwei*. Indeed, the publicly owned flats located in the *danwei* were sold to the workers who occupied them at a low price before the liberalization of the real estate market made housing an important discriminator of social status over income.

As we discuss further on, the gated communities have radically changed the landscape of the cities and the lifestyles of urban Chinese (see also Section 4.4). The gated communities are residential areas, in particular inhabited by middle class individuals, characterized by their “closed” space with fences and security guards that would not only protect residents from the “dangers” of urban life (Sun 2008: 220) but also act as a privileged social island by providing the perception of security, segregation and exclusivity. Despite gated communities enjoy dubious social prestige in some Western countries (many members of the middle and upper middle class regard gated communities dwellers as new rich or snobs)¹¹⁷, in the PRC gated communities are usually associated with “middle classness” ideals. However, Tomba has also indicated in concerning with the emergence of these residential neighbourhoods in urban China as spaces inhabited mostly by the middle class and governed by power relations,

More than their monetary income, what made these early residents of Beijing’s first gated communities a homogeneous group was their (or their families’) ability to access valuable resources from the public system and their ability to maintain this privileged relationship until these resources could be turned into private assets.

(Tomba 2014: 114)

Thus, the urban middle class emerged —or preferably, reproduced— by the private appropriation of public goods and resources to maintain their privileges until these resources turned into private assets that determine social status more than income does. The intergenerational transfer of privilege resulted from the possession of political capital and the class reproduction process explained by Rocca were experienced by some urban workers. A real estate market in the cities emerged progressively in the 1990s after *danweis* began to sell their housing stocks to employees at very low prices (Tomba 2014: 8). Due to a real estate market boom, the value of the flats the employees had bought increased greatly, leading to the emergence of a comfortably-off middle class.

Some owners sold at high prices what had cost them nearly nothing, while others continued to live in their flats but bought another one and rented it out, or used as a money reserve. The rich are few by definition, and the largest group of people who

¹¹⁷ According to the definition of “gated community” displayed on Wikipedia.

have taken advantage of this dramatic increase in income are neither rich nor poor but middle incomers.

(Rocca 2017: 27)

Consequently, the privatization of real estate become a major socio-spatial discriminant between social actors, because through the real estate market households are able to capitalize properties that were not distributed equally during the social period (Wu 2002). Talking about the residential communities in Beijing, Mrs. Ai, a 33-year-old professor comments,

I live in a very old residential area in Liangmaqiao.... I don't know what you know about China, but some companies or the government bought apartments for their employees or just they [the state employees] paid relatively little to get an apartment. That's where I live because my mother-in-law used to work in one of those government work units, so we got a flat for a lower price. But the people who live there too, many people work[ed] in the same work unit, so they communicate with each other very often, yes. But in new areas or new flats in Beijing, facilities are very good but communication between neighbors ... is not as good as in older ones ... I prefer older [neighborhoods] because the infrastructure of the old areas has matured more and there are supermarkets to buy food or different things like [for example] if you need to fix your bikes there are also places like repair shops.

This is not an exceptional case. As Chapter III illustrates, a "middle class" existed during the Maoist period: the urban workers and employees (*zhigong*) group, which was situated between the ruling class and the peasants (Rocca 2017: 7). Many of the informants are the offspring or the partners of *zhigong* workers or employees, the "old middle class." However, tracing the genealogy of the respondents must be distinguished from asserting the reproduction of class is determined simply by the economic and social conditions (capital) as an external reality separate from the subject. The point is not to argue for the historicity of a natural and unavoidable appropriation of public goods and services belonging to the old *danwei* during the 1990s but to explain how the political capital allows for the production and reproduction of social systems as a result of specific events and developments.

It would be misleading to describe the remains of the post-Maoist political capital as a mere "private appropriation of public goods and services" during the reform era, since it is not technically a "appropriation" but a subsidized ownership, nor is it "private" because of existing limitations on property rights in China. A better indicator of the process by which the individual himself or herself becomes the reproduction unit for the social in the life world (Beck 1992: 130-131) is the analysis of the interview sample in order to categorize biographical trajectories of social mobility more precisely. However, the analysis of political capital in Chinese middle-class reproduction is predictive: it is the conversion of political capital into economic capital, that is, a transfer of privilege. Further, as indicated in her paper published in 1996, He Qinglian suggests that if a "new" middle class, in the general Western sense, has had difficulty emerging in China, it is due to a substantial portion of the resources necessary for one have already been cornered following the transferability between different types of capitals in the PRC (He 1996: 150-1; see Chapter III). As a result, adopting Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus, and employing them here, it is argued that our sample and social relations upon it may represent some of the distinctions within an emergent middle class grouping.

4.1.3 Geographic mobility: Exploring trajectories in Beijing

We can extend our analysis by exploring geographic trajectories in order to understand the routes taken by our respondents and the expectations that encouraged them to achieve their current occupational positions. First, account has to be taken to the fact that, methodologically, mobility studies must be closely involved with empirical field work and included in the overall concept of 'social' mobility (Bell 2006: 123). However, as we saw earlier by analysing the transfer of privilege that the political capital represented in China in the late 20th Century, Chinese middle class is not a phenomenon of class formation. Indeed, Chinese middle class cannot be solely understood through a social mobility accounted for by an increasing 'credentialism' or other forms of social mobility associated with occupational change (Wynne 1998: x). In contrast to the non-traditional middle-class individuals in Europe who had been both socially and geographically mobile (Stacey 1960: 17), the members of Beijing middle class who are newcomers to the town are mainly geographically mobile.

An evaluation of social origin of the informants demonstrates that 82.5 per cent of them come from "old middle class" backgrounds, thus upward social mobility is a minority in the sample. Two of the twenty informants were locals (10 per cent), in that they had been born and bred in Beijing. One of the informants (5 per cent) was born in a southern province of China and grew up in Beijing. At the same time, it should be remembered that most of the middle class in Beijing are people without long standing local attachments. They have deliberately moved to Beijing as a means of maintaining their own perceived social position in the relative isolation of a small urban or rural community.

Consequently, the geographical mobility and social mobility share a complex relationship. Thus, social identities may no longer be understood from class or occupational position but rather exist as a combination of a variety of social practices including those traditionally associated with leisure and with migration as class-based consumption. In order to map socially and culturally in society the social positions and trajectories of individuals, geographical mobility is a strategy developed by the middle class and wealthy Chinese for class reproduction and a way to convert economic capital into social status and prestige —e.g. *mai shenfen* practices (see Section 4.2.3 and Section 4.2.4).

However, nearly all the informants (95 per cent) agree that the accumulation of educational capital is the dominant factor in structuring class relations in urban China today. In addition to the educational qualifications, participants also identified two factors for class structuration: personal effort and luck. Only Mr. Yi points out that social status in China is best understood in terms of the intergenerational transfer of privilege and wealth, and then he expresses his gratitude towards his parents for "all that I have." Here, it should be noted that there are substantial differences between respondents' objective and subjective social class, a feature explored in more detail below.

In order to understand the objective and subjective social class divergence, informants were asked to indicate the reasons why they chose to study their degree subject. The aim of asking this specific question was to analyse how materialism, or the focus on acquiring money and material possession, is associated with the aspirations and social origin of the respondents. In most cases, the main reason given for choosing a major were personal interest. However, as we have argued that the Chinese middle class cannot be understood as a homogenous social grouping, we will also consider respondents' materialistic motivations as forms of cleavage or fragmentation within the emergent middle class.

Mr. Wen is a 29-year-old employee from a middle-class background. He was born in a city on the southeast coast of mainland China. He went to Beijing to study for a master's degree in Social Sciences in 2007. Currently, he combines doing a PhD and working in a major Chinese company at the same time.

In China we have the *gaokao* [PRC's university entrance examination, similar to SAT in the US], so when you have your report, then we have to decide our choice (*zhiyuan*) of university study and future career. My grades were not so high [smiles] ... I chose Human Resources ... so it was just a matter of grades.

While the result of the university entrance exams was decisive for Mr. Wen's chosen major, Mrs. He chose to study Law due to the movies. She is a 39-year-old lawyer originally from a coastal province in the East China region: "I studied Law by chance. When I was little, one day I saw a movie in which the star was a lawyer and I saw he played a positive role. He influenced me." When Mrs. He finished Law School at university in her hometown, she moved to Beijing and she now works as a social worker.

A significant characteristic of the respondents born and raised in Beijing is the parental influence on their process of choosing a major or career. For example, Mr. Qiao is a 35-year-old Beijinger and graduated in Medicine at Beijing University, popularly known as *Beida*, the most prestigious university in China, and he explains that

perhaps because it is a family tradition, my paternal grandfather was a doctor, I ended up being convinced by my dad ... you know, when you are a student you do not have a clear image about your future, what the family says is quite important when choosing your future career.

In short, personal interest and, to a lesser extent, other external factors such as the *gaokao* qualifications for admission into Chinese universities or paternal influence, are the key reasons in the process of choosing a career path. Conversations with middle class individuals reveal that post-industrial values and the shift to self-expression in contemporary China are for most of the respondents the principal reason for choosing to study a university degree. There was no mention of materialist concerns such as pursuing a profitable and rewarding career.

The results point out the divergent relationship between subjective and objective social class. However, the coded descriptions of both subjective and objective social class are less important than our examining the potential relationship between them and other variables such as cultural capital and social mobility. In an analysis of the correspondence between all variables mentioned above, here we can clearly see that the higher the educational capital, the greater the likelihood of upward social mobility. These findings suggest that the respondents' perception and beliefs about their class origin and post-industrial motivations is the outcome of a complex structuring process that involved both class reproduction and awareness of private interests.

After having re-focused the term of "new middle class," contextualized Bourdieu's concept of political capital, and explored geographic trajectories, it soon becomes apparent that the understanding of class membership in China varies with the observer (Li 2010; see Chapter II). However, class as socio-economic structure based on consumption and income, class as social representation (the rehearsal of identity), and class as ideological discourse are all involved in the Chinese middle-class definition (Goodman 2014: 5). On that basis, and in order to "break" with the tendency to "privilege substances at the expense of relationships" and the tendency to "reduce the social field solely to the economic field" (Bourdieu 1985: 723), this analysis

focuses on a combination of defining variables. The correspondences between objective defining variables such as occupation, education or residence, and subjective defining variables—lifestyle, identification with a social figure, manners, etc.—are analysed in the following sections not in order to provide a significant criterion for defining the middle class in urban China but rather to explore possible productions of “structuring structures.” Further, these relationships, including gender and “habitus” variable (social origin and cultural capital) allow us to explore possible variations in social practices and representations regarding domestic work, leisure and other non-work activities of the formal economy.

4.2 THE SOCIAL SPACE OF LIFESTYLES

In the previous section we uncovered some significant differences within our sample related to geographic origin and about their choice of career, and we relate that to horizontal mobility and habitus. However, we also identified some important similarities related to social origin and occupational activity that characterize post-Maoist social structure. It appeared that similar occupations are associated with similar levels of capital and similar social origin. In order to make sense of these distinctions and similarities we have used Bourdieu’s conceptualization of class as a “historical artifact” —by analysing the notion of “new middle class” from a historicist perspective—, and the concepts of habitus, and political, economic and cultural capital. In this section we will look at friendship patterns, *guanxi* interactions, some of the happiness and success social representations, and leisure and consumption habits. Following Bourdieu (1984) and more recent contemporary commentators on PRC’s middle-class lifestyles (Rocca 2017; Hanser 2008; Fan 2002; Tang 2018a, 2018b) it will be argued that Chinese middle incomers exhibit a different lifestyle that in some sense reflect their middle-class position occupied within the PRC’s social hierarchy. By doing this, we aim to prove if the occupational class of our participants has some bearing on their lifestyles —i.e., friendship patterns, cultural consumption habits, etc.— in the sense that their middle-class occupations can be associated with a set of different types of capitals, such as cultural or symbolic, of the middle-class type.

Related to this it is also argued, following Wynne’s (1998) approach, that non-work practices are becoming an increasingly salient feature of this urban middle class. This is not to suggest that occupation itself has become unimportant for this social grouping but rather that the role it plays in the construction of the social identity cannot be assumed to be as salient for the post-Maoist’s middle class as it is or was for the socialist middle class (Wynne 1998). Moreover, it illustrates, as Rocca points, that social identification is a complex issue that can be observed in three modes: first, although we can agree with the fact that membership must be “voluntary and expressed unambiguously,” the main problem with this point is its starting point: how to define this membership; “the second way to assess the identification with a social group or a class is to ascertain the commitment of its members to collective action,” which is the main subject of Section 4.4; and third, “adherence and contribution to a specific lifestyle is another way to recognize the existence of a social group” (Rocca 2017: 117-8). This section aims at analysing the content of the urban middle class’s lifestyle in the PRC. In order to delimit the concept of lifestyle,

if we use the definition given by Gérard Mauger, “a set of practices and/or representations specific to a social group,” the notion could enable us to understand

three crucial issues. First, it could help us grasp, at the same time, both the standardization of practices and representations within a social group and the variability of individual behavior within the same group. It is impossible to define precisely a lifestyle, as individuals and sub-groups continually reshape the “set of practices and/or representations.” Individuals are “subjects in the two meanings of the word,” subject “to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience and self-knowledge.” Second, the notion of lifestyles compels us to think of practices and representations as produced both by material interest and by ethical considerations. As Weber showed, it is impossible to separate the two. Finally, the notion of lifestyle offers the advantage of avoiding the thorny problem of the relation between consciousness and unconsciousness. In “conduct of life” or “ethics,” there is a conscious dimension—people deciding to follow a moral path.

(Rocca 2017: 118)

Indeed, the conceptualizations of lifestyle as “a set of practices and/or representations specific to a social group” leads to focus on unconscious modes of behaving (social practices) and thinking (social representations) (Rocca 2017). As a result, in this sections, patterns of sociability are examined and the role of leisure in the social construction of a middle-class identity is analysed by consider them as embodied by our respondents. As “habitus is a subjective and internal driver of social practices that can be brought to a conscious level through acts of reflexivity and conveyed through language,” we combine habitus and narrative inquiry as a methodological tool and lens for understanding the longitudinal and lateral aspects of social practices through reflective action (Costa and Murphy 2015: 162). In the case of our research in Beijing, the habitus-narratives emerged in the interviews are elicited through the respondents’ deliberations of their dispositions and the strategies that justify their consumption and sociability practices.

4.2.1 Consumption practices

Due to the publication in 2005 of Zhou’s characterization of China middle class as the consumer avant-garde but political rear guard (*xiaofei qianwei, zhengzhi houwei*), patterns of consumption has become the key marker of stratification. Most importantly, though, there is a general agreement that consumption is significant to the identification of China’s middle class, particularly as expressed through housing and homeownership (Goodman 2014: 96). But, does the Chinese middle class build only their self-identity and win social recognition by consuming goods such as private housing and a car, as Zhou and Chen (2010) suggest?

Such discussion is considered particularly important in any attempt to explore not only whether or not China’s middle class is more a cultural than a social construct, but also to evaluate the degree of homogeneity associated with the Chinese middle class especially in attempting to examine the cultural practices of such a group(s). It is through the analysis of the role of consumption in contemporary China and its association with a middle-class identity that we can observe the increasing importance of cultural practices and the homogeneity of leisure in social stratification in the PRC. And nowhere is this argument more developed than in Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984), as we have analysed in Chapter I. Basically, Wynne notes, “Bourdieu argues that social distinctions can be observed in a variety of social practices including those traditionally associated with leisure such as holiday-making, sports, reading, music, cinema and other tastes” (1998: 29). Certainly, taste is the clue to understand middle class’s consumption patterns within the theoretical context associated with *Distinction* (1984)

and the explanation of symbolic power. Thus, “[t]he justification of taste’ is an element central to the theory of taste, which seeks to delineate the relationship between taste and social distinction” (Warde 2008, in Zhu 2016: 3).

Online shopping

All of the interviewees affirm that they prefer buying online rather than in the traditional way, and they all agree that this new method is their main source of purchasing. There is proof to this trend. Since 2003, the growth rate of China’s online consumer market has doubled every year (Krokou 2015: 12). The Chinese e-commerce giant, Alibaba, reached historic highs after publishing its first quarterly report for investors since its initial public offering, showing a 25 billion-dollar record in September, 2014 (Carstern 2014) and growing profits year-on-year. Even though e-commerce depends on the existence of the Internet, its boom in China is inseparable from delivery companies.

The main reasons given are the possibilities of finding discount prices throughout several online platforms, the variety of goods offered and the ability to quickly compare the different qualities between products. According to Mr. Yang, it is also a way to “avoid wasting time at the shopping mall” —one of the most valuable capitals of the middle class. Online shopping allows for purchasing via mobile phone in any situation —even when taking the subway— and to receive those products just about anywhere.

Rather than going to a pre-determined delivery center, most prefer the personalized delivery service offered by online shopping platforms such as Taobao or Tmall. Although the former is a cheaper option, it still forces costumers to show up at a certain time. Despite being slightly more expensive, the respondents would prefer personalized delivery, because the deliveryman can use GPS to pinpoint the exact location of the client and proceed with the drop-off. The only effort required from the buyer is to pay attention to the mobile phone messages updating the status and arrival of the delivery.

On some occasions, during informal conversations with the interviewees at a coffeeshop or restaurant, the interviewee would stand up, walk to the entrance of the restaurant, and pick up a purchase after receiving a phone notification from the deliveryman, who is usually a migrant worker. This practice of online shopping, in particular order delivery, represents a performance of social difference in service interaction, as Amy Hanser (2008) has analysed in the context of Harbin’s shopping centres.

China has shifted from a state socialism system to one that is market-oriented and, in many ways, fundamentally capitalist. These changes to the economic, social, and ideological organization of the country have been accompanied by new sets of social relations and a reconfigured social hierarchy. The rise of new elites has paralleled the fall of the urban proletariat, and China’s cities have witnessed the emergence of new social groupings, including a small but comfortable salaried middle class, small-scale private entrepreneurs, and an influx of migrants and laborers from rural areas ... that relations among these disparate groups are understood and enacted through a framework of cultural distinctions that interpret —and legitimate— inequality as difference ... a new “structure of entitlement” is being cultivated in China through the making of such distinctions. The term “structure of entitlement” refers to the often-unconscious cultural and social sensibilities that make certain groups of people feel entitled to greater social goods.

(Hanser 2008: 3)

This sense of entitlement finds expression in everyday social interactions and practices by claiming overtly to formal power and material resources. This sense of entitlement is “a practical expression of one’s place in society and a fundamental part of the cultural scaffolding that supports larger systems of inequality” (Hanser 2008: 3). At the level of everyday life and consumption practices, such structure of entitlement and the social distinctions upon which is built is present in the final stage of online shopping: order delivery. Indeed, despite online shopping presenting itself as a more efficient alternative to traditional consumer habits in China —small businesses and shopping malls—, personalized delivery of merchandise is both fast and it represents a setting where people from different social groupings encounter one another. It is across the order delivery, that entitlements are expressed, and social distinctions are performed and legitimated, as Hanser points out. This is consistent with one of the capital assumptions underlying in Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984): the premise that contemporary social collectivities are formed primarily in *the arena of consumption* and, consequently, China’s middle class’ lifestyle can be understood as a set of “practical metaphors” of class consumption (Bourdieu 1984: 173). In the same vein, it is in the course of service interactions, in this case in placing an order, where key social divisions —along the lines of class, geographic origin, gender, and even generation— solidify, but instead appear to be a question of difference, these social distinctions reinforce the acceptance among Chinese people of new forms of inequality.

Understandings and acceptances of inequality are also the subject of negotiations and justifications in order deliveries between the service delivery staff —in the majority of cases, migrant workers— and online shoppers. Considering the average price of every package delivery is 13.4 RMB (1.7 Euros), which had fallen between 2013 and 2015 according to data from China Post, this consumer practice only reinforces such structure of entitlement and social distinction. As Hanser (2008) notes, when the wages of rural migrants working in cities such as Beijing are taken into account, the level of urban inequality has increased dramatically. It represents the social hierarchy, thus constituting the very substance of inequality (Sherman 2005). At the same time, the symbolic construction of class distinction represented by this consumption practice contributes to the creation of a new culture and structure of differentiated privileges, among which is the most evident for migrant workers: the possession, or absence, of a *hukou*.

Nevertheless, Beijing’s shopping centres continue attracting throngs of adults and students every afternoon, filling fast-food restaurants and cafes without having to purchase any merchandise, simply roaming with friends and glancing at storefronts. Among the participants, only four shop for products in this traditional manner, but not when in China. Mr. Yi, Mr. Qiao and Mrs. Gong buy brand products whenever they travel to Europe or the United States. As Mr. Yi explains, the items are cheaper abroad:

I mostly buy online, and I usually go shopping when I’m in Europe, like when I buy Armani products because they’re cheaper over there ... In China, it’s so much more expensive. For example, these pants cost almost 1000 RMB in Spain. Armani Jeans at just 1000 RMB, but here, maybe 3000 RMB, two or three times more costly. Since I travel frequently, I’ve been to many countries and tour around. I shop and buy a lot, so then I don’t need to buy cloths back in China ... I shop online here [in Beijing]. Going to a shopping mall is expensive and complicated. I have to go there, choose, look around, and there’s not much variety, it’s not enough.

While discussing brand consumption, Mr. Lu explains, “now I go abroad four or five times a year” for work, and “I used to buy at tax-free stores like cosmetics, but now I don’t have any [brand] preferences... but purchasing popular brand products still occurs every now and then when traveling abroad, taking advantage of the cheaper prices.” Indeed, the Chinese consumer, Goodman points, “is considerably more brand conscious than consumers elsewhere, 70 per cent preferring to purchase a branded rather than a non-branded (but otherwise identical) product, compared to 30 per cent in the USA” (2014: 11). Also, foreign brands are preferred by the Chinese consumer for clothing and consumer articles, while domestic brands for home appliances (Cartier 2008; Silverstein *et al.* 2012: 40, in Goodman 2014: 111; Tan 2016; Tian and Dong 2011).

Mr. Qiao not only buys European brands, but also follows existing trends. If there is any new brand or item that calls his attention, then he will look for more information to decide whether or not he wants to buy any of their products. This occurred during a visit to Barcelona, “Many people there carry bags from Freitag,” he explains. Since he liked the brand, he looked it up online and liked the exclusivity of their merchandise —all designs are different from one another. To avoid carrying it all over Europe until returning to Beijing, he searched for the cheapest way to buy one in China. He explained at length that in Beijing, there are only two stores that sell Freitag’s products, and the variety is lacking. The exclusivity of its merchandise and rarity within China motivated Mr. Qiao to buy a backpack (200 Euros) and a purse (50 Euros) from the brand’s official website. In a matter of days, the items had arrived at his doorstep all the way from Switzerland, “I don’t want to wear what everyone else is wearing, I like things that are unique.”

Considering that habitus is reflected in a series of selected consumption practices, amongst other activities, which gradually forms symbolic boundaries between individuals occupying different positions in the class structure and further legitimates this class structure (Hong and Zhao 2015: 5), Mr. Qiao’s disposition to “things that are unique” confers a semantic unity on the practices that warrants reference to coherent ‘lifestyles’ (Weininger 2005: 95). As a result, consumption becomes a battlefield in which “classification struggles” over individuals and classes take place in urban China. Thus, “it is only through these constant, reciprocal acts of social classification that social *collectivities* are born: bounded social groups are the result of practices that seek to symbolically delimit ‘regions of social space’ by functioning at a pre-reflexive level” as Mr. Qiao’s aim at following existing trends when travelling abroad (Bourdieu 1984: 174-175, 476; see also 1991b: 120; 1990b [1980]: 140, in Weininger 2005: 99).

This consumer habits are distinct for two reasons. Firstly, the practice and experience of shopping itself is different. What distinguishes the purchased product goes beyond the product itself. In the case of the Freitag brand, the difficulty of finding it in Beijing endows its products with a double distinction. Acquiring a premium or luxury product in the country of origin for its lower cost compared to Chinese prices, implies that the buyer has travelled to a European or North American country, which means that she/he possesses high economic capital (when travelling as a tourist) and/or possesses high cultural and symbolic capital (when travelling for business). Secondly, the impossibility of identifying through direct observation where the item was purchased also gives a double distinction to the practice of acquisition. On the one hand, the buyer’s high economic capital that has acquired a premium or luxury brand item in China or abroad and, on the other hand, the act of assuming a consumer habit with high symbolic capital that cannot be transferred.

In other words, the consumer shows his or her high cultural capital by acquiring a product whose symbolic capital—a trip to Europe or the U.S.—is not a transferable capital—due to the impossibility of differentiating a brand product bought in China or in its country of origin—except friends or family that know the individual had travelled abroad. This way, the buyer justifies the purchase claiming it was done for economic reasons. As Mrs. Gong mentioned, “When I travel abroad, I buy from the destination’s local brands because they’re cheaper than in China”. Simultaneously, it becomes a practice of distinction regarding the “new rich” characterized by flaunting their wealth while having high economic capital, but low cultural capital.

Cultural consumption

Cultural consumption can be understood, according to Rössel *et al.* (2017: 1), as a “consumption of goods and services with primarily aesthetic functions and only secondarily instrumental uses”. Cultural consumption is mainly related with the world of arts, culture and leisure, and its consumption practices vary from attending a classical music concert, to tasting a Hindu dish or going to the movie theatre. In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu argues that culture and the economy are intricately related in a mutually constituted relationship. Therefore, the economic distinctions of class inevitably generate the culture’s symbolic distinctions, which in turn regenerate and legitimize the class structure (Gartman 1991).

The explanation of Rössel and his colleagues (2017) is that these correlations between cultural consumption and inequality demonstrate the strong ties of cultural consumption to “the class structure, the unequal distribution of resources in society and —based on the theory of cultural reproduction— its important causal role in the reproduction of the structure of inequality in society (Rössel *et al.* 2017: 2). On that basis, the PRC’s class structure, Sun points, is becoming less of an economic stratification and more of an increasingly solidified cultural stratification with deepening inequality (Sun 2002; Li 2004). On that basis, Rössel *et al.* argues that,

Cultural consumption has important social consequences apart from individual pleasure, distraction, or enjoyment ... Perhaps the most influential dimension of cultural consumption in sociology —put forward prominently by Bourdieu (1984)— is the differentiation between highbrow and lowbrow kinds of cultural consumption. This is an aesthetic dimension associated with the distinction between form and substance, that is, between the formal configuration and refinement of cultural practices (e.g. classical music, art films, haute cuisine, etc.) and their function in terms of content and material significance (e.g. folk music, romantic comedies, convenience food, etc.). This highbrow–lowbrow dimension is, as argued by Bourdieu, directly related to a society’s social (class) structure and thus socially meaningful (homology thesis). As members of higher social strata are endowed with sufficient amounts of cultural and economic capital, they are able to understand, enjoy, and afford the formal standards of highbrow cultural consumption. At the same time, highbrow activities operate as a signal of superior social status and can thus be used to effect distinction from others. As a consequence, since they are related to high social status, highbrow activities are perceived as legitimate culture, meaning that they constitute —even though performed only by a minority— the dominant culture of society.

(Rössel *et al.* 2017: 7, 2)

Beyond the issue on the link between social class and cultural consumption raised by Bourdieu, this section also considers the conclusions reached by different studies that support differing opinions about China's cultural stratification. Also, in drawing the outlines of our study we must be aware that the concept of cultural consumption covers a wide range of subjects. Thus, our respondents were asked directly not only about visits to movie theatres, museums, art galleries, bookshops, but also how often they engaged in artistic activities, such as Chinese operas, ballet, theatre plays, dances, concerts, Western operas, musicals, etc. Furthermore, in the course of data collection we also attended with some of our respondents to artistic performances at the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) and other smaller theatres, in order to observe the composition of the public, their reactions and the interaction between them and the performance.

The result from the interviews reveals that all respondents who were asked about their cultural consumer practices responded that, to a lesser or greater extent, they consume culture. Among these consumption practices, the most common is going to the movie theatre (77 per cent of interviewees go at least once a month); next is visiting the theatre or opera (38 per cent), and literature such as poetry, novels, comics, essays and art books (30 per cent). The least common are going to concerts and museums, to which only 23 per cent respondents answered affirmatively. It must be remembered that despite the fact that the Chinese middle class in general reads more books and journals with more knowledgeable information, and spends more time on reading books rather than exposure to television, newspapers, or the Internet compared to other classes —thus, class differentiation on reading in emerging— (Zhou 2005; Guo 2009; Hong and Zhao 2015: 3), the answers of some of our respondents might be conditioned by their position as researchers, university professors and, in general, by their professional connections with the academic world and scholarly publications (55 per cent of interviewees).

Additionally, those who go to the movie theatre do so on an average of 1.15 times a month and go to the theatre once every eight months, or 1.6 times a year. Among those reading literature, do not buy a book within a month, but averaging nine books every year. Those who attend concerts or go to museums do so twice a year and once every three months, respectively.

Mrs. Ren is a university professor and not particularly fond of art, but has a friend who invites her out to different events:

I have a very good friend who's very elegant. She has a truly elegant lifestyle, which has impressed me a lot. She always invites us to exhibitions and things like that [and] I go with her when she invites me. ... I don't go often [to the movies], and if I go it's because my husband and son want to see a film ... but sometimes I'm not really interesting in watching it, but [I think]: 'Ah, it's time to spend with the family. I should go' ... I might go twice a year because most of the time we watch movies at home and it's very comfortable to download movies and watch at home. I'll go to the theatre if I've got the time and if an opportunity presents itself [but] I never go to watch a play if it's far from home because traffic in Beijing is such a hassle ... [and using public transportation is no good, either] you have to do transfers. It takes too much time. If you go by car, you won't find anywhere to park. So, I don't even bother and just watch it on the computer.

For Mrs. Ren, therefore, going to exhibitions is a social practice and going to the movie theatre is a family activity, a time spent with family that still counts as a shared consumer habit. Mrs.

Yao's case is similar. She dedicates some of her free time attending "a very active" church, and so she rarely goes to the movie theatre, "I don't go to the movies very often, maybe occasionally, like four times a year with my family because we want to go with our son. We want to educate him, even though he doesn't like movie theatres, but it's time spent together."

According to Mrs. Yao, cinema is also an educational tool aimed at acquiring a certain cultural capital that she considers necessary for her son's upbringing. Moreover, she tries to implant certain artistic dispositions in her son. When she says "we want to educate him," she seems conscious of the idea that family education is one of the "structuring" mechanisms of the *habitus*.

Price and crowding are some of the reasons Mrs. Yao brings forth to justify her low attendance at European classical music performances. Mrs. Gong also complains about prices at movie theatres, "I go to the movies at least once a week and to the theatre twice a year, but the tickets are very expensive." While Mrs. Ren, Mrs. Gong and Mrs. Yao mention material issues when consuming culture, other interviewees with young children blame a lack of free time as their main reason for low cultural consumption. Such complains about the price of the tickets implies the need to be convinced of standardized quality, having a positive attitude towards economizing and a feeling of guilt about cultural consumption, similar to those of other recently developing consumer societies such as India (Maxwell 2001). Despite their complains about the price of the tickets, however, it is exactly the price they pay for the tickets of highbrow activities that makes possible the conversion from economic capital to a signal of superior social status and can thus be used to effect distinction from others.

Mr. Lu explains that when he was single, he and the woman who would eventually become his wife frequently assisted cultural events, "Almost every weekend, we'd go to the theatre in Beijing, but after getting married we didn't so much (...) [Now] if I've got a chance, I'll go watch some musicals. For example, while making a business trip abroad, I look for theatres to watch some play (...) I used to read more before, but now I normally read my kids to sleep every night."

Mrs. Ai confesses to liking music ("folk and indie rock") and, as is the case with Mr. Lu, after having a son, her cultural consumption has diminished:

In Beijing ... the majority of small venues [to listen to live music] have disappeared because the authorities wanted to make all buildings physically alike ... They've closed them down or have had to go somewhere else to perform, but I seldom go to the big concerts. It's has to do with my life, with my son ... Nowadays, maybe once every half a year [I go to concerts], but I used to go a lot before, maybe once or twice a month ... I go to the movies quite often because there's one nearby and my husband likes going there, so we go at least once a month ... I watch plays at the theatre in Dongzhimen ... I've seen most plays written by one of my favourite playwrights, Meng Jinghui.

Interviewees with children confirm that childcare is the main impediment for their continued consumption of culture just as they had done before becoming parents. Therefore, we could argue there is a latent cultural consumption among these respondents. Mrs. Kang has a son in primary school who is not too young, so she is still active regarding cultural consumption, even though it also depends on whether there is work to do or if she has more free time.

However, in the PRC's "leisureization" of shopping there is always an opportunity to consume culture designed towards children, such is the case with Mrs. Wu and Mrs. He. Mrs. Wu hardly ever goes to movie theatres, but prefers the theatre, "I go to dance performances, or musical

theatre like, for example, they have children's choirs at the NCPA, or to ballets like *The Dance of the Swans*. I basically join my daughter (...) I rarely go to exhibits, two or three times a year". Mrs. He also explains:

Now is a very special time and I go to the movies once a month with my daughter. By going, I get to bond more with my daughter and, since we watch movies in English, she gets to practice her language skills. [That's why] normally I watch movies for kids, but all of them are in English. We never miss the Disney films ... I go [to the theatre] very few times because everything is for children. We recently went to watch a musical, before this last time we also went to see *Swan Lake* ... Every year, we visit museums four or five times, and go to concerts three or four times. It doesn't seem like a lot to me because my daughter's busy with her studies.

The NCPA is located quite close to Tian'anmen Square, and maintains an active international cultural schedule, showing self-produced Chinese and Western operas, classical music concerts, Western and contemporary Chinese theatre, and performances from the most renowned ballet companies. Also known as "The Giant Egg" or *Judan*, the NCPA was opened in December, 2007 and since then, it has become Beijing's great centre of *high culture* consumption. There is no other place in the capital where a single structure contains a grand opera hall, a concert hall, and another for theatre plays that shows a combination of Chinese and foreign works with diverse programs like those dedicated for children. Its sumptuous architecture, its strategic proximity to symbolic centres of power —the Great Hall of the People, Tian'anmen, etc.— and the nature of its activities which are so far from popular Chinese consumption, all of these powerfully represent the legitimacy of high culture, which is the dominant culture despite being practiced by a minority.

As we have seen in Chapter I, one of the capital assumptions underlying in *Distinction* is the premise that contemporary social collectivities are formed primarily in *the arena of consumption*. According to this assumption, the lifestyle of Beijing's middle class can be understood as a set of "practical metaphors" of class consumption (Bourdieu 1984: 173) — "including those having to do with 'canonized' forms of culture such as cinema, art, opera, literature, etc., and those that belong to culture in the wider, anthropological sense of the term, that is, food, clothing, media, sports, etc." (Weininger 2005: 93). While some respondents may prefer to go to the movies, still others choose to go to NCPA. This demonstrates "how diverse social settings and practices exhibit a stylistic coherence or thematic unity in the lives of embodied agents and in the lifestyle of collectivities" (Jenkins 2002: 78).

This is evident in the case of the central role played by foreign authors in the institution's programmed events, ticket prices for operas are within range for the middle class, oscillating between 150 and 800 RMB, and the presence of bars and businesses situated far from popular Chinese customs. The respondents who take their children to these performances are aware, like Mrs. Yao and her son going to the movie theatre, of the social significance of this kind of cultural consumption, since high culture activities serve as a superior social status signal and are useful for creating distinctions.

To a lesser degree, Mr. Cui admits to his appreciation of paintings because "I have a friend who's skilled in oil painting, so I've learned to appreciate it" and so he often visits museums "to enjoy paintings ... between four to five times a year." Regarding movie theatres, "maybe only once in many years" and he says he attends theatres "once a year with my son." He does

not read literature, but “lately, I’ve been reading a science fiction novel *The Three-Body Problem* by Liu Cixin and have finished the trilogy.” Henry is also reading this book:

I read many books ... novels, books about management because it’s my specialty. Many kinds of novels ... I like Chinese literature, modern literature, and contemporary Chinese literature, but one has different tastes at different stages in life. Recently, I’ve read books from Liu Cixin, a famous science fiction writer in China who wrote the famous book, *The Three-Body Problem* (*Santi*).

While some female interviewees are of the opinion that going to movie theatres, for them, is more of a family activity rather than an experience of artistic contemplation or personal enjoyment, some of the men who were interviewed consume mainstream cultural products because of their popularity and media coverage, such as Liu Cixin’s books or the Wes Anderson’s film, *Isle of Dogs* (2018), which Mr. Qiao went to watch alone one morning when he had free time because the movie “was so well received.”

Finally, as mentioned above, the acquisition of books is also a defining feature of the Chinese urban middle class. Looking at Mrs. He’s testimony, she buys “some ten books a month, including those for me and those for my children.” Mr. Lai does not go to the theatre or museums, but since “my wife’s job involves buying books for a library, she tends to buy books for us that she believes are a good read, buying around 50 every month”, he laughs. Meanwhile, Mr. Qiao hints at the new tendencies in literature consumption when explaining he reads a book every two months, “If I’m interested in something at a certain moment, then I’ll start reading. I need something that draws my attention in order to start reading a book,” also “it’s a lot easier to buy e-books now, which are often free. All you need is to do is one click.”

4.2.2 Friendship patterns

An assessment is made in this section of the nature of friendship networks, the validity of the concept of *guanxi*, and sociability by asking a series of questions relating to social practices with friends and some of the leisure activities in Beijing. The study reveals that none of the respondents have ever mentioned of being friends with someone possessing a smaller cultural capital except in one case, which will be discussed later, in which an informant referred to her former companions from her hometown’s secondary school. Our own interest in measuring this item is derived from the notion fundamental to Bourdieu’s theoretical framework on distinction and class location that “all the practices of a given agent are objectively harmonized among themselves ... with those of all members of the same class” (1984: 172). The results indicate that the urban middle class in the PRC use social practices and representations to identify similar others —that is, those who have similar external living conditions (capital) and internal disposition system (*habitus*)— to establish social ties with, and to avoid people with dissimilar practices or preferences. Additionally, conversations with Beijing’s middle-class members reveal that many of them have maintained friendships created during their university studies —both graduate and post-graduate— and, in the case of those coming from other provinces, with friendships fostered during childhood and adolescence in their hometowns with similar capitals and *habitus*.

Since *habitus* guides individuals’ social lives by providing an implicit comprehension of “the rules of the game,” the theory of class *habitus* predicts a low probability of friendship between,

for example, liberal professionals and unqualified workers since both groups differ in terms of capital and habitus. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that, although friendly relationships play an important role in middle class lives, the majority of informants in Beijing explain that they are far too busy most of the time and prioritize dedicating time with family or work, rather than with friends. Hence, since some interviewees lacked available time, sometimes the interviews were also limited, and we opted to ask about the frequency with which they would see their friends, the activities they do together, how are their relationships with co-workers and bosses, and their appraisal of *guanxi*'s importance in the social sphere. In the following, we will analyse their testimonies about friendship and then about family relationships and neighbourhood interactions.

However, analysis about personal relationships in China requires extreme attention regarding the difference between friendship and *guanxi* (Zang 2006). The latter can translate as "personal relationships" meaning, the relationships we maintain with others, whether it be with friends, family or one's partner and "personal contacts". Many academics consider *guanxi* as something ambiguous that encompasses both instrumental and expressive dimensions (Gold 1985; Smart 1999; Walder 1986; Yang 1994; Zang 2006). Walder (1986) considers that, in China, *guanxi* occupies a vast spectrum, limited at one extreme by one's explicit subordinates and at the other by *best friends*, but it includes a considerable area where weak ties have become increasingly strong and intimate, while still containing an instrumental dimension (Zang 2006).

The interview data collected in Beijing is used now to show in more detail how the statistical findings can be understood as a general representation of the everyday social practices of Beijing's middle class. As we have seen, research on homophily in social networks has elaborately shown that time is a key element in urban middle class in China today. For instance, the availability of free time to practice personal hobbies, like Professor Cui, and socialize with friends is a trait shared by middle-class marriages with grown children and single individuals. Mrs. Tang works as an administrator, explaining, "I often meet up with friends on weekends," and with them, "I go out to eat, watch a movie, chat," she explains. Mr. Duan dedicates more time with friends than Mrs. Tang, commenting, "I go to the gym, play ping-pong or meet with my foreign friends."

Beijingers Mr. Qiao and Mr. Yang, both single professionals, exemplify this tendency. Mr. Qiao studied medicine and works at a European pharmaceutical company. He spends his free time enjoying hobbies, being with family and socializing:

On weekends, I play tennis, visit my parents, and have dinner with my family. Sometimes I go skiing in winter and hiking in summer, I watch television, go to the movies, eat at home ... I was born and raised in Beijing and I know many people here, so I don't try to socialize with too many people because I don't know many of them. If everyone wanted to eat with me, I'd be out all month long. Normally, I eat with friends once or twice; twice with one person, that's already four times. Sometimes I have to work at night or some sort of clinical work at home ... Going out to eat [with friends] is the easiest option.

When on vacation, Mr. Qiao travels outside China because when he was a child, he had already frequently travelled inside the country with his parents, so he prefers to "travel the world," "I like to go places where I've never been and see things I've never seen to understand the world, to see the world, have different experiences. Nature relaxes me." Mr. Qiao is very focused on his professional career; family and work occupy most of his free time. He does not

usually travel with friends; he does so alone like in his previous trips as it allows him to improvise his leisure travels according to his “quite unpredictable” work schedule. Before the interview, he had travelled to Georgia, hired a guide to take him to the mountains and sky, his favourite winter sport.

Mr. Lu, a married professor, has two young children and has a pre-determined amount of time spent with friends, similar to Mr. Qiao’s calendar which organizes his time precisely, in order to make it as productive as possible.

Friends can be divided into two types: the first type are those who existed since before getting a job, the others are friends from work with which I have professional contact and share common study interests. With the first type, I share past experiences, they’re former classmates, colleagues from my previous job, family and acquaintances from my hometown, [and with them] we sometimes meet on weekends, especially if they live outside Beijing ... In my daily life, for example, from Monday to Friday, I usually eat with co-workers ... [Although with the first type of friends] we sometimes don’t speak during weeks, but afterwards we meet for two or three hours. I’m not particularly sociable ... In total, I think I spend no more than three hours a week with friends. For example, if we organize a dinner on the weekend, then those three hours are spent [since] I don’t count the time I spend with my colleagues as social time.

Mrs. Gong explains that she is seldom with friends, since she does not have much free time, “On Saturdays, I take my daughter to extra-curricular activities all day, and on Sundays, I take her to the park or her friend’s house.” Mrs. Gong’s attitude is similar to the phenomenon known as *hainu* or “slaves of children”, which refers to the Chinese middle class and forms part of a series of “slaveries” undergone by this group —the *fangnu* or “slaves of mortgages”, and *chenu* or “slaves of the automobile” —. These concepts put forward the fact that being part of the middle class means that one must buy a house and spend a large sum of money to pay for a mortgage and a car, as well as a good education for one’s children. For all of this, the middle-class groups “need to work hard and earn a maximum amount of money” (Rocca 2017: 100).

These implicit critiques towards the society that followed reforms go beyond the economic sense and are aimed at life’s rhythm in general —social commitments related to consumerist practices, individualist values, etc. — Although Mr. Lai’s case is different, we could also regard the accumulation of cultural capital as a “slavery” present among the middle class which feels it necessary to further their post-graduate studies —especially a PhD— when faced with competition in the professional world.

It is increasingly common for professionals to study a doctorate’s degree while working and taking care of their families. Mr. Lai, 37, is finishing his PhD while working, and his wife works in the selection and acquisition of books for a library. She also recently finished a doctorate’s degree at Beijing University. Mr. Lai laments not having more free time; waking up at six-thirty in the morning, he takes his 8-year-old son to school and goes to work:

My job consists of visiting clients which are Beijing companies, some are far away and might take two hours to get to, but others only need a short walk to get there. I visit different clients every day, communicating with them and incorporating their demands into our projects ... At night, I get home at six or seven to have dinner, but my job requires me to answer phone calls at night. Some are from my company, while others are from clients.

Mr. Lai's experience can also be extrapolated from others in the middle class and of middle age, having arrived to Beijing from other provinces to study, and once they graduated and found a job, stayed in the capital. This fact, living far from family and childhood friends, also influences their patterns of leisure. Mr. Lai sighs, saying,

On weekends, during the last four or five years I've basically been studying, busy doing my PhD studies ... My boy sleeps at ten and then I study till one in the morning. On weekends, I'm studying for a day or a day and a half. I don't have enough time from Monday to Friday, and clients don't call at night, so I study ... When I write my thesis, I do what I can to write between seven-thirty and nine-thirty in the morning, and at night, when my son is sleeping, I'll continue since ten to twelve or since twelve to one ... I've never had time. I've spent all my time taking care of my parents, my wife's parents, my son, my wife —while doing her doctorate's degree at Beijing University—, our jobs... I don't have time. I hope to have more time to exercise, read, and be with my son.

While on vacation, Mr. Lai and his family take small trips to see his parents in Inner Mongolia "once or twice every year", but "since my son is eight years-old, we prefer he travels when he's older", or also during vacation, "we watch *talk show* programs on TV" together, or "draw cartoon and play with toys." In addition, "we've been thinking for a while about having a second child." Mr. Lai does not do any other activities in his free time, nor does he have time to see his friends, "There's a joke that says: if you live in Beijing and meet up with a friend at least once a year, then that person is your best friend, especially for people my age."

Mr. Lai hails from Baotou, Inner Mongolia and laments that people in the city do not understand that the busy rhythm of urban life makes it difficult to spend time with friends:

I live in Beijing now, I have to maintain my independence, and it's been seven or eight years since I last went back to my hometown. On the one hand, I don't want to see how my town has transformed into an unrecognizable city. On the other hand, it's difficult to contact my childhood friends. If they'd live in a massive city like I do, they'd understand my behaviour.

Mrs. Ai is also conscious that having a child has affected the time she spends with friends:

I think that, during these last two years, because my son is two years-old, I spend most of my time at home and keeping busy with all this work. Before having children, however, I would normally spend time with friends. Actually, we'd travel a lot before ... around the world. The days I don't have class, I spend time with family more than with my friends ... [Before] depending on the friends I'd be meeting with, if they were very close, we'd go to a cafeteria and talk about lives. If they were friends who lived outside [of Beijing], they'd come to visit and we'd go to the Forbidden City, the Great Wall or one of the parks, of which there are many now. Many parks are free, so I think they're a good place to go, take a walk and chat ... We don't like the way people usually socialize by going to eat at restaurants, we prefer taking a walk or something healthier.

Mrs. Ai shows more distinctive practices beyond those related to consuming when she says, "We don't like the way people usually socialize by going to eat at restaurants, we prefer taking a walk or something healthier." Through "healthier" activities, Mrs. Ai and her family/friends distinguish themselves from one of the more pervasive social practices in China: eating at restaurants.

For Mrs. Kang, on the other hand, having children is a circumstance that has made him spend more time with friends. Indeed, a remarkable finding is that for the many informants with children, they become not only an important part in the process of *jiaoyou* ('friend-making') but also in restoring friendship, "[Before having children] we would talk a lot on *Wechat*, but once we had kids we started to see each other more often because we could discuss about how to educate them. Before having them, I dedicated most of my time on work."

Mrs. Wu, whose parents usually help with taking care of her son, often meets "with old classmates and friends from my hometown who now live in Beijing," but "not anymore." In contrast, she meets with "co-workers and my husband's friends who we go out with to eat together, play tennis, or go to family gatherings so they can spend time with their children like hiking in the mountains. Although we don't have a routine, either."

In other cases, such as with Mrs. Li or Mrs. Ren, they do not quit seeing their friends after becoming mothers. Thanks to Mrs. Li's mother who helps with taking care of her daughter, and the fact that Mrs. Ren's son is more independent, both organize separately their activities with other adults on one side, and those concerning motherhood on the other. As Mrs. Li explains when speaking about her seven-year-old daughter:

If I don't have class, I meet my friends and chat. Not every day, we meet twice a week more or less ... We talk about books and films that interest us, and gossip about celebrities and others who we personally know. Often times, we go to a cafeteria and go shopping, too.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ren is mother of an adolescent and explains that she now enjoys "going out with friends once or twice a month" when they're free,

We all work at the university, so when we're available and don't have too many classes ... we go out on excursions. For example, to the Forbidden Palace or exhibitions ... or to the Summer Palace or the Botanical Garden. We also see each other on holidays like New Years, before or after, and we choose a day and go together to see our [former doctorate's] supervisor ... We always want to be together, but it depends if we're available. We always try to meet and be together, propose plans...

The parents of older children do not dedicate any more time with friends than Mrs. Li or Mrs. Ren. Consequently, an individual's civil status is not a determining factor when cultivating friendships under normal circumstances. However, as Bourdieu (1984) and scholars who continued in his line of research (Bryson 1996; DiMaggio 1987; Lamont and Lareau 1988) provided theoretical ideas on the importance of popular culture and, in particular, highbrow cultural taste in social network formation and lifestyle model as a specification of the homophily argument —similarity in attitudes and activity preferences fosters attraction in interpersonal relationships (Byrne 1971; Kalmijn 1998; McPherson *et al.* 2001; in Nagel *et al.* 2011: 426). For example, Mr. Cui's son is also an adult, and when answering the question if he often goes out to meet his friends, he says:

It's very irregular. Sometimes we meet a lot, and sometimes I don't see them for a while ... Recently, many of my friend's children and co-workers have gotten married and have invited me to their weddings. That's why I've been seeing them more often ... On a certain week I might meet with them every day, or a month might go by and we don't see each other; it's difficult to calculate the exact time. [My friends and I usually] eat together and I also have friends who I run with. We can do 10 kilometres together in the park.

In the case of the PRC, highbrow culture taste has not been an effective means in the process of including and excluding other persons in the social network due to the PRC's historic context since Chinese society is moving from an industrialist (accumulation of capital) to a post-industrialist class schema. Indeed, as Rocca points,

According to Chinese scholars, China follows the path described by the "post-industrialism" theorists: in the course of modernization, middle incomers discover that life is not restricted to its material aspect. Once they have satisfied their material needs or at least the most basic ones ... Middle class people have free time and money to spend, and companies are ready to respond to these new markets.

(Rocca 2017: 135)

In conducting the interviews, it became clear that friendship related far more to cultural capital —former university classmates— and leisure preferences —the most widespread social practices in the PRC are eating at restaurants and going shopping—. Moreover, any of these measures that we look at are probably more influential in 'friend-making' process than attitudes because they have direct behavioural implications (Nagel *et al.* 2011: 439).

For example, Mrs. Yao has an older son and also puts time aside for her friends and spiritual practices, explaining "I have colleagues who are my friends and I see them almost every day [and] I see friends at church on Sundays. We also exercise once per week every once and a while". In several of her responses, Mrs. Yao alludes to her Christian background, an aspect that signifies someone of religious faith and, on the other hand, points to distinctive practices. These religious practices, such as the "healthier" activities that Mrs. Ai practices in the social sphere, harken to a distinctive, middle-class lifestyle linked to the concept of *jingshen*, which we will analyse in the chapter about "success" (see section 4.2.5 Happiness and social success).

When asked the location of their current friends most of the respondents indicated that their friends were people they met during graduate and post-graduate studies, friends of their partner —as was the case for those who were married—; relatively few informants indicated that their friends were the people that they worked with and, to a lesser degree, colleagues and friends made during their childhood or teenage years. Therefore, despite a distinguishing feature of the urban middle class in the PRC is their place of residence —gated communities—, friendships are not associated with other residents and owners of their neighbourhood or gated community, or with friends made in previous gated communities rather than through integration into the neighbourhood. Further, they do not feel themselves integrated into the community, nor do they express having a close relationship with their neighbours.

One could say that neighbourliness is not a prominent trait for members of the urban middle class. Certainly, geographical proximity coupled with social proximity is not an important indicator of friendship patterns, although many of the residents of the gated communities are employed in similar middle-class occupations themselves. The communal areas, the activities organized in the gated communities and even the "self-servicing" —e.g., restaurants and shops— provided in the neighbourhoods are not major factors influencing in friendship patterns. Neighbourliness, as opposed to friendships, thus, does not appear to be a particularly prominent feature of urban middle-class gated communities —none of the informants express an intimate relationship with their neighbours. Everything seems to indicate that the relationships constructed in the gated communities "are made through the social construction of communities of interest, rather than from necessity, echoing previous differences observed between working- and middle-class friendship patterns rather than any privatisation thesis"

(Devine 1992, in Wynne 1998: 72). Indeed, it is not so much that our informants “are privatised but that their friendship choices depend less on any necessity for ‘good relations with neighbours’ and more a choice of ‘who to mix with’ according to criteria of interest” (Wynne 1998: 72) relating to preferences of social practices, behaviour or leisure, such as sharing their free time with friends belonging to other gated communities. As Mr. Bai explains that is apartment is

a 30-minute walk away from the university, not far. It’s close to the university and I wouldn’t say that I like it because I don’t. I’d say I have to live there because people who live in China, since people who live in residential zones do not know each other, they don’t talk to each other. I couldn’t say that I know them [my neighbours] well, I know them in a simple way ... I don’t have time for that.

On the contrary, Mr. Qiao says his lack of interest in socializing is the main reason why he has little communication with his neighbours. Mr. Qiao lives “between the third and fourth ring roads” in a rented studio inside a gated community. Although he likes his neighbourhood, he explains, “I already have enough relationships with my friends and family, I don’t need any new relationships.”

He adds that his relationship with them is “as if we were strangers”, and he does not know what their like, nor talks to them in the elevator, either. In contrast, “At my parents’ house, we chat more with neighbours. Actually, I live in a rental and don’t have a real relationship with my neighbours.” He also avoids participating in his community’s activities because “I don’t like public activities with many strangers. I have to manage many events at work, with my family, and so I choose not to do it”.

Mr. Wen also shares this lack of communication with neighbours and points to his tiredness and lack of time. He lives in a Beijing apartment located in the 3rd Ring Road close to Guomao, a 30-minute car ride from his job:

The community where I live is in the CBD (Central Business District). It’s very convenient, very convenient for shopping, going out for dinner, go to the movies. Very convenient, and people in my community, most of them are middle class ... [But] people are more indifferent now. It’s just that I barely see my neighbours, so I don’t have an opinion of them, but I’m happy because we don’t bother each other [laughs] ... [I don’t have a relationship with them] because during the day, we’re working and return home too late. We barely see each other, that’s why we don’t have any contact ... I don’t know them, and they don’t know me,

Everything seems to indicate that the lack of interaction with neighbours is the main source of satisfaction of these interviewees regarding their relationship with their community; for Mrs. Li, too:

I live in a community of neighbours, but I don’t organize activities with them because I stay at home a lot, I don’t usually go down and stroll around the community. My neighbourhood is nice because I don’t have to participate in any events. It’s convenient because it’s a well-communicated place. Anyway, I’m content with my neighbours, we don’t see each other a lot.

Mr. Lu justifies this, saying “As I’ve said, I’m not from Beijing. Neighbours and I greet each other, but we don’t get involved in the lives of others.” However, this phenomenon does not apply to the lack of integration in the Beijing community on the part of respondents not native to the city, nor to the fact that they have recently move to a new home and have not yet had

time to establish a significant relationship with their neighbours. Rather, it applies to a general attitude that includes both the informants who spend little time in their neighbourhoods, as well as those who take care of their family (Mrs. Gong) or do not have a paying job (Mr. Yi) and spare more time in their place of residence. Additionally, two of the three informants who grew up in Beijing actually seem to be less enthusiastic about building relationships with their neighbours.

In fact, the majority of interviewees do not participate in the activities organized by their communities of neighbours since they are associated to retirees or those unemployed, as it is analysed further on in this chapter. Mr. Yang says he does not participate in his community's activities:

I'm always very busy and I live in my own little world most of the time. I don't interact much with them, but I see them every day. Many in my community are my uncles and aunts, and for the Spring Festival, for example, and other important celebrations, we meet up and eat together, but I don't have many things I can talk about with them. They tend to organize what most Chinese do, big dinners.

Mr. Yang continues, adding that he does not participate in those events because "I think the majority of young people don't have time or don't want to do the same things that older people do." For example, "My mother is in a dance group, it's free and someone organizes it, but the majority of its members are women over 50 years-old. No young person wants to participate." Sherry has this in common with Mr. Yang, "My community doesn't have many activities that cater to young people, they're for older people," and therefore "I don't participate."

Indeed, Mrs. Gong also mentions that those who participate in her community's activities are "older members, for example, they'll be taken to a hospital to get a complete health check, play in parks," but "for folks my age, there's barely anything." Mrs. Yin also believes that activities for working individuals are rare: "maybe there are more for older people because they are at home all the time, but for those of us who work there aren't many options. In any case, activities organized by ourselves where my friends and I invite each other are not community activities."

Moreover, as Mr. Wen points out, "The residents' committee (*juweihui*) of my community regularly organizes activities, but generally speaking, only mothers who don't work participate with their children ... They are activities aimed at fomenting the relationship between parents and children, and operas, dances and *taiqi* are organized for the elderly." In fact, according to what Mr. Wen revealed, some informants with children who are minors, such as Mr. Lai and Mrs. He, confirm having participated in some of the activities organized by their communities. For example, Mrs. He, a lawyer, lives in Haidian District in a gated community apartment, argues, "Lately, I've been participating in [my community's] activities. Just recently, I was with my daughter in one of the events organized by the community for Children's Day to draw on the ground (*yinjing hai*). I also attended in an event that promoted recycling."

For university professors who live in neighbourhoods with other professors and university employees, due to the subsidized sale of public housing for workers living in the former *danwei* during the 1990s, the situation is no different from the rest of the informants. For example, additional to the community activities, Mrs. Wu says, "There are exercise machines in the common spaces" that "are very simple, some for running, some for strengthening the arm muscles." Also, Professor Cui "rarely" attends community events and excuses himself, saying

“This [community where I live] is my wife’s university, and she’s the one who participates, not me”. However, he explains that the kind of events organized are “during traditional Chinese festivals.”

Indeed, the interviewees generally do not interact or regularly participate with their neighbours. Actually, many are hesitant with such interactions, appearing to be satisfied with the lack of communication and cooperation with them. The main reasons shown are the lack of free time and interest, the inadequacy of the activities organized with respect to their habits of leisure and, in general, their pace of everyday life is similar to other members of the community and are all too busy. Regardless, some individuals, mostly women, participate sporadically in activities organized by their community that have a cooperative character as we analyse in Section 4.3 in this chapter.

4.2.3 Family relationships

The prominent role of family in the Chinese culture and its impact on individual social practices and representations, attitudes and behaviours have been compellingly noted (Bond 1986; Lehto *et al.* 2016). Because the PRC’s basic societal unit is the family rather than the individual (Yau 1988), understanding family as a lifestyle and consumption unit is especially pertinent for class analysis. However, the analysis of the relationship between family and social change is complex. At the family level, we must distinguish between the different familial units, from the broader unit (kinship group) to the nuclear unit. This section aims to encompass the nature of the dynamics of the interaction within each unit and among these units as well in order to trace family lifestyles and evaluate the effect of the group status structure on family patterns. However, we focus not only on the family as a field of practices and representations that shape middle-class subjectivities and lifestyles but also as a crucially important institution and an emotional realm (Zhang 2016: 7). As Bourdieu notes, the family is a major institution through which economic, social, and cultural capital is fostered, converted, and reproduced (1984, in Zhang 2016: 7). At the same time, singles represent a growing percentage of the population in Chinese cities. The trend that has become global due to cultural changes which entail a lifestyle change. Despite the fact of the lifestyle becoming popular, it is thought that an unorthodox way of life, including being single, constitutes not so much an alternative, but a norm (Ochnik and Mandal 2016: 163).

Nuclear family and “mai shenfen” practices: accumulation and distinction

In the previous section we have seen that, since relations with neighbours are practically non-existent during the informants’ free time when they are at home, their pastimes are generally spent with family members. Generally speaking, practices of leisure are also conditioned by the individuals’ marital status and whether or not they have underage children. In the case of middle-aged married individuals with young children, free time is dedicated to family, children and parents. Meanwhile, in the case of single individuals or married persons with children who are adolescent, family time occupies less of their free time.

At the time of the survey, Mrs. Gong’s weekends were highly representative of the free time spent by the rest of middle-aged couples with children. While Saturdays are dedicated to the accumulation of cultural capital through a great variety of formative extracurricular activities

for the youngest, Sundays are saved for the *accumulation* of another kind of capital: social capital. Indeed, parents foster social and familial relationships with their children through various types of activities such as excursions, family meals, visiting classmates, etc. During weekends, Mrs. Gong says, “I take my daughter to extracurricular activities to study all day on Saturdays, and take her out to the park or a friend’s house on Sundays.”

Keeping in line with this pattern, Mr. Lu also explains:

Like many people my age, I spend almost all my time with my kids on weekends, [since] I don’t have time during the work week ... I basically join my kids to their classes, [and] because my wife also works many extra hours [during the week], we normally use weekends to be with the kids. It’s also an opportunity to be together and chat with her ... We join them and see each other on weekends. If relaxing means doing personal things, then accompanying my children is also a kind of entertainment.

Returning to Mrs. Gong’s case, a significant feature is the difference between the formative activities her daughter does on weekends and those done during the school vacation period, “I take my daughter abroad to participate in summer or winter camps ... [so that] my daughter can experience a different world and I can experience a different activity.”

This way, Mrs. Gong’s idea of her daughter’s education and vacation is a constant process of cultural capital accumulation, both on an academic certification level such as “new formative experiences” abroad, and as practices of social distinction.

[I want] her to go to a foreign university because for her generation, unlike us, it’s no longer difficult to earn a living. The most important thing is that she sees more of the world, and experiments as much as possible. It doesn’t matter which university she goes to, the important thing is that it’s outside the country ... [Now] there are many people sending their children abroad to study a bachelor’s degree, but I don’t want that for my daughter. She’s still very young; I’m not prepared to let her go abroad.

Indeed, despite Mrs. Gong is nowadays aware that the PRC is in the process of becoming a post-industrial society —as a whole— when she says that for her daughter’s generation, unlike her generation, “it’s no longer difficult to earn a living,” the fact of receiving a degree from a foreign university, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, has a significant double function: that is, to accumulate cultural capital and a practice of social distinction that forms part of what Gracia Liu-Farrer (2016) calls *mai shenfen* 买身份 (“buying status”) practices (see also Section 4.2.4).

Although the recent emigration of wealthy Chinese has been attributed to a desire to secure their wealth, an aspiration for a different education for their children as Mrs. Gong’s case, or concerns with air pollution and food safety as Mrs. Ai points about her plans for moving out from Beijing, Liu-Farrer argues that, underneath these stated motivations, emigration is in fact a form of class-based consumption; that is, a strategy for class reproduction, and a way to convert economic resources into social status and prestige (Liu-Farrer 2016: 499). Despite this form of mobility involves primarily the richest 0.1 per cent of the Chinese population —i.e., over one million people—, the high profile of the people who move causes the “trickle-down effect” (see Chapter I). As a result, members of the middle classes are claiming those migration forms of legitimate culture, which are confined, on the one hand, to amassing cultural capital: namely, not only academic certificates but also “enriching” experiences, as Mrs. Gong says: “The most important thing is that she sees more of the world, and experiments as much as possible.” And, on the other, to imitating the existing “legitimate” tastes of the dominant class:

in this case, emigration (*yimin*) as “a form of mobility that may not entail settling abroad, but it is a path created by wealthy Chinese striving to be among the global elite” (Liu-Farrer 2016: 499) in other words, to be among “people like us”. On that basis, international mobility is one of the most valued commodities because “migration is seen as a form of lifestyle consumption, an ideology and a way to fashion oneself as a modern subject” (Chu 2010, in Liu-Farrer 2016: 502-3). In this sense, as Mrs. Gong states, “It doesn’t matter what university she attends, the important thing is the experience abroad”.

This urgency when acquiring cultural capital reveals that middle class individuals express their class identity through their consumption, ranging from clothes, food, cars and leisure to housing or national and international mobility. As Li Peilin observes, “consumption style itself, where one lives and what one buys, enhances one’s subjective class identification (*zhuguan jieceng rentong*)” (Li Peilin 2005, in Liu-Farrer 2016: 501). Therefore, the consumption of extracurricular activities practiced by many children in Beijing after school hours on workdays, on Saturdays and during periods of vacation, with the assistance of an industry that services them, are aimed at different and maybe more legitimate ways to distinguish themselves, while at the same time their children are accumulating cultural capital.

Mrs. Yin and Mrs. Wu also spend their weekends with their respective families in terms of consumption and accumulation. Mrs. Wu says, “My schedule from Monday to Friday is very regular. I don’t have a lot to do on weekends, basically all of it being spent with family.” Similarly, Mrs. Yin stays at home on weekends because “it’s the time for being with family.” Thus, Mrs. Kang argues,

[Although] My weekends are more varied, basically all activities revolve around our son ... He plays soccer and is learning to play the piano, so we have to take him and pick him up. [On weekends] we also do the shopping for the rest of the week, clean up the house and, if the weather’s nice, we’ll go outside or see a performance at the NCPA.

The defining practices of Beijing’s middle class also affect the city’s urban landscape. Not only shopping centres containing music schools for children seen the number of parents and grandparents increase during weekends, but Beijing’s traffic is also altered. Professor Cui recalls his experience a few years ago when his son would go to school.

You can see many parents who take their sons to participate in extracurricular activities. It’s like a battle, and parents are outside the entire time waiting for them to come back out. The traffic is tremendous because of this, they only go with their kids from one place to another. That’s how weekends are spent ... [That’s why] the typical lifestyle in Beijing is characterized by its traffic, it’s something typical of this city. The time one spends in a car is plenty.

These practices, however, form part of Professor Cui’s past since his son, currently, is studying in an American university. Again, we encounter *mai shenfen* practices within our interviews,

Except for the time spent working, the rest of my time I spend it with my wife. Now that we live with *kongchao laoren* [empty nest syndrome], there’s only two of us at home and we’re always together ... We eat and run together, she also runs ... We also go shopping. If she buys things, I’ll carry the bags for her [laughs].

As he recounts, Cui dedicates most of his time to running, “I really like running, especially marathons. I participate in many races, having started three years ago to keep healthy ... [and

now] every weekend, I run some 15 kilometres at the Beijing Olympic Park. Sometimes I run 21 kilometres, half a marathon.”

The study also reveals that family as a cultural consumption unit is an emerging phenomenon in China. However, the spending-time-with-family benefits that middle-class families pursue are not only based on theoretical and experimental learning for children but also communication, relaxation and togetherness. Mrs. Li also dedicates time to be in touch with nature with her family, “It’s a bit different on weekends. Sometimes we go on excursions with my daughter to be surrounded by nature. For example, we’ll go somewhere 20 minutes by car from home”.

Even though Mrs. Ai, a professor, also spends a large part of her time with her young son, she does so in a less conventional manner because she works on Saturdays and on weekdays when she’s not in class. She uses any of her free time to be with him:

Yesterday [Wednesday], I didn’t have class, so I took my son to the *Aolinpike senlin gongyuan* (Beijing Olympic Park) to see the golden leaves and take pictures ... [On the other hand] I work on Saturdays ... because I have class on Mondays which I need to prepare for. However, the rest of the day is spent with my daughter, taking her to the park or to do some other kind of activity, sometimes sports or at the gym.

Mrs. Ai also mentions that “Every Winter we go skiing [near Beijing] for one week, more or less, or we go places like to Japan. In the summer, since it’s vacation time, I’m with my family most of the time for about a month.” Bearing general similarities to the middle classes from European countries, many Chinese middle-class families seem to expect and welcome the opportunity to escape from their fast-paced life when travelling by immersing in nature-related activities, including snow sports or simply appreciating the scenery and taking pictures and videos, which contribute to the functionality and sociability of a family unit. As Mrs. Ren suggests, “The trick is combining tourism and some activity. For example, last time, we went to Japan, visited some places, and we also took a class on Japanese tea culture.”

One interesting feature to come from these conversations was the fact that some informants say most of their free time is spent on issues and activities related to work. Not only for the many households without children career become an important part of their leisure time, but also for most of households with children. For example, Mr. Qiao changed jobs and during the first months, he spent his weekends alternating between study sessions to learn information required by his new position in the company, with strolls through nature after renting an apartment hotel in a mountain outside Beijing. His practices seem similar to those done by Mrs. Gong’s daughter on Saturdays and vacations in order to accumulate cultural capital.

The concept of what Colin Gordon (1991: 44) calls the “entrepreneurialization of the self” (Gordon 1991: 44) in the production of human capital as Anagnost explains (2009: 197) could help understand this perception of the productivity of both children’s and adult’s free time. It turns middle-class individuals into calculating businessmen of their own lives according to values characteristic of the market —investment, benefits, losses, and so on— in which “the body is a site of investment through an entrepreneurialisation of the self,” as Anagnost (2008: 512) mentions in her study about how “[t]he politics of *suzhi* is the local form in which neoliberal technologies of selfhood take shape in the Chinese context.” This phenomenon associated with both migrant workers and middle class in industrial societies not only encompasses free time, but also the emphasis on resting. As Mr. Lai explained when referring to the calls received at night from clients or his bosses; or in Mr. Qiao’s situation where his

former job required videoconferences early in the morning once or twice a week with American counterparts.

It is also revealing that Mr. Yang includes one or two extra hours of unpaid work to his definition of a normal day. Therefore, the “corporeal politics” of *suzhi* (Anagnost 2004) and working extra hours weekdays or on weekends are characteristics of the urban middle-class lifestyle that works in the private sector. However, among married couples in our sample, gender is an important factor when determining who works extra hours. The extension of hours worked represent a prioritization of professional time above the personal and familial which, as indicated before, characterizes industrialized societies. In this case, it is the men in our sample who refer to this phenomenon. On the other hand, if we look at couples with older children, the availability to work extra hours is similar between men and women.

Professor Bai, explains that during vacation “I usually go to my hometown to visit my parents”, but he also spends some of the time handling work events, more so when taking into consideration he had founded a centre of foreign studies at the university towards the end of the last century. He had studied abroad since his youth and, as he comments:

I thought I could do something to help young Chinese students, so they can understand everything about foreigners ... I put in a lot of my time to this centre, organizing weeks of culture, dedicated to a writer, seminars, classes ... I spend a lot of time on it ... That’s what I do on weekends. I’m absolutely busy, seven days a week.

Mr. Lu, also a professor, works during vacation, as well:

I arrive at my office at seven thirty, and get back home at eight in the evening. The biggest difference is that I don’t have classes, so I can spend most of my time on research [but] when my wife and kids are also on vacation, we travel or visit my parents ... [Although] they often come [to Beijing], we also visit them in the summer. My parents and in-laws take turns coming to Beijing to care for the kids.

Certainly, professional and familial spheres tend to easily mix between members of the middle class, more so among both married and single men than women.

Although the urban middle class in the PRC is not a homogeneous social grouping, one interesting feature to come from these conversations was the dominant understanding of home as a heterosexualized family space. Queer couples, stepfamilies, divorced, widowers or widows were also lacking in the sample, which can be evidenced at the cultural level. Related to this it is also argued that heteronormative practices are a salient feature of the social practices and representations of the Chinese middle class. However, it does not necessarily mean that the dominant discourse positioning the heterosexual nuclear family as the ideal family form to achieve well-being is shared by all of the respondents. Mrs. Kang says she is not stressed out by her family duties, but explains, with an apathetic tone, her day-to-day and that of her husband, who also works in the same university as her:

I have a son in secondary school, and he has to be at school by seven-thirty in the morning. We get up at approximately six o’clock, then we get to the university because he studies at the university’s school [and] afterwards, we walk to the school and then to our office ... If we have class, then we’ll teach. If not, we’ll read academic articles or books. [Later] I eat with my colleagues while discussing work, studies and also daily topics like our children [and] after lunch, I take a nap and at around two o’clock, I get back to work till four, which is when we and our children return home by car ... I used to be much happier before, but now, not so much. I don’t know if it’s my age [laughs],

but when my son was younger or when I didn't have children and concentrated on my work, I felt happy.

Relationships between the individual subject, family, and class in contemporary China are complex. During the early years of the twenty-first century, Yan Yunxiang argued that the PRC "has been undergoing a process of individualization and erosion of family values as a result of the transformation of its political economy (2003, 2009, 2011), a trajectory that seems to match the classic model of modernization suggested by Anthony Giddens (1992) and others" (Zhang 2016: 2). However, in many ways our analysis of extended families of middle class in Beijing is similar to recent investigations as shown below. This section suggests that realities are more complex in the PRC, "and that the making of an autonomous, economically calculative individual is but one of the multiple dimensions in the reshaping of society and culture" (Zhang 2016: 2). We observe the mutual reconfiguration of extended families on the one hand, and nuclear families' lifestyle and middle-class subjectivities on the other, in a context of social change in the PRC, including rapid urbanization, industrialization and globalization. Furthermore, as Zhang illustrates, "the reproduction of the multigeneration family structure as a persistent cultural form has not only been shaped by, but is also shaping, China's political economy and the state's efforts to revive and represent Chinese culture" (2016: 2).

Spend time with parents, as Mr. Yang, Mr. Qiao and other young Beijingers whose parents live in the same city, occupy an important part of the spare time of urban middle class. Mr. Yang explains, "Not only on weekends, also on some weekdays I'm at home. I try to talk to them every day, especially with my mom. I speak with them for half an hour or an hour because my time is very limited." Mr. Yang usually does an hour or two of extra work and also studies in the afternoon. He currently lives with his parents, but he will soon move to a single's apartment near his parents' neighbourhood. He is also planning to travel to Taiwan with them for the Chinese New Year. In general, besides marital status and age, sharing with parents to a greater or lesser degree is a common characteristic among all the respondents.

Other than the two single individuals from Beijing, Mrs. Tang, Mr. Duan and Mr. Wen, single and residing in Beijing, but originally from other provinces, spend time both with parents and with friends, and carry out different kinds of practices in their spare time. For instance, Mr. Wen usually goes traveling with friends during vacation time. He is originally from Fuzhou and also on vacations, "My parents come to Beijing or I go to Fuzhou, usually meeting for Chinese New Year. Now my mom is retired and sometimes comes to [my home in] Beijing to be together for a month." In addition, according to Mr. Wen, one of the main reasons to show he feels happy is that his relationship with his parents "is harmonious, I love them and they love me. I have many friends who I communicate with frequently." The importance of family for the urban middle-class members does not deny the phenomenon of the increasingly personal-fulfilment way of living and individualization, but rather to emphasize that is merely part of the complex processes of social change in post-socialist urban China. Indeed, as Zhang (2016) notes, "the relationship between individualization and family values is not all or nothing" (2016: 19).

While speaking with participants, it became evident that the concept of *guanxi* is still a key concept in understanding social relationships in contemporary China. *Guanxi* means "connections, social relationships, relationship," and it is a very influential element in society, as the interviewees will point out, "it is very important" for understanding social, economic and political interactions in China. As Mrs. Ren says, "China is a *guanxi* society or *guanxi shehui*,

it goes beyond Chinese culture.” The current trend among the majority of testimonies coincide with the most cultural dimension of the concept of *guanxi*¹¹⁸. It fits within the Chinese tradition which aspires to the individual’s harmonious relationships on the familial level and in a more extensive manner with the rest of society. Our findings indicate that filial piety and family values have a moral power so strong today that none of the respondents seem to defy it.

This tendency might be linked to the institutional deficiencies in certain areas that affect the social and familial spheres, such as the right to free medical care and other public social services provided by state institutions (Davis 1995). According to Mr. Lai, the sense of *guanxi* is related with Fei Xiaotong’s theory of concentric circles (*tongxinyuan*) or social circles (*shehui quanzi*), “A person’s life is like concentric circles (*tongxinyuan*). Meaning that every person has the responsibility and ability to care for what is within each.” These concentric circles referred to by Mr. Lai represent a concept introduced by the sociologist, Fei Xiaotong, to describe the different structural principles of Chinese society through a metaphor: the most important relationship in Chinese society —kinship— is similar to “the concentric ripples of a pebble hitting water”. According to this metaphor, kinship is a social relationship formed by matrimony and reproduction. The networks weaved by matrimony and reproduction can extend to innumerable individuals in the past, present and future¹¹⁹ (Fei 1992: 3).

The concentric circles perception of *guanxi* explained by Mr. Lai, which considers *guanxi* “of utmost importance,” coincides with Mrs. Gong’s perspective of this universal social phenomenon, even though it contains certain peculiarities in China. For example, Mrs. Gong explains how important familial *guanxi* is for her, saying that family relationships “Are very important ... they can make me happy and feel content. If you don’t have good relationships with others, then you end up living with anxiety and pressure. Many things can be gained by this relationship that can’t be replaced with money.” Also, she sees *guanxi* as relationships that one has with others and within a concentric circle of social responsibilities.

I think I have my own [professional] specialty that allows me to make a living and take care of my family, but I believe that responsibilities between men and women are

¹¹⁸ Many Western studies have simplified the definition of *guanxi*, reducing it to a mere instrumentalization of other individuals to achieve one’s goals. This simplification is a heavy moral charge of ethical failing made from a Western perspective. However, throughout the interviews, the meaning of *guanxi* acquired different facets and one of them, but not the only one, is precisely that of “using” as a means to obtain something from a relationship established with another person. However, even from this perspective, a required reciprocity to return favours is created. The repeated exchange of favours represents a measurement of confidence between members who form a social network. In this manner, the risk of uncertainty is minimalized, and resources become more flexible (Wong and Chan 1999). Davis (1995) highlights three usual theoretic approaches regarding the concept of *guanxi*: (1) as a result of favouritism and of the dichotomy conflict/harmony, or the dilemma born out of institutional weakness; (2) as an efficient mechanism of interaction due to the poor development of property rights and legal contracts; and (3) as a personal and individual gain in a highly controlled society.

¹¹⁹ However, it must be remembered that the analogy of concentric circles goes beyond kinship. In fact, it refers to Chinese society being characterized by particularistic mode of association compared to Western societies which are characterized by an organizational mode of association. Fei Xiaotong states that every Chinese individual has his or her own social network of relationships which is “particularistic”, the first circle being their immediate family, the second is extended family, the third consists of closer acquaintances, friends and neighbours, and the fourth is where less familiar acquaintances and others are placed. Even though his argument extends beyond family and kinship, it can be used to culturally contextualize these relationships and Mr. Lai’s testimony.

different. My husband spends little time at home and has a high salary ... It's easy for him to get a high salary, it's the reason why I left my job. The pay was not very high, so I thought it wasn't necessary for both of us to work. I then stayed at home for my family, and during this time, I have had the chance to study a PhD. When my daughter was younger, my parents would care for her, but now that she's older, it's not easy for them to continue taking care of her. They're no longer able to keep pace with her needs. My main responsibility is caring for my parents and daughter.

Mrs. Gong's ethical approach to social relationships goes hand in hand with Saba Mahmood's (2005) understanding of ethics pointed out by Zhang (2016). Thus,

If Saba Mahmood is right, however, ethics is less about social norms or values, and more about "practices, techniques, and discourses through which a subject transforms herself in order to achieve a particular state of being, happiness, or truth" (2005: 28). Filial piety no longer comes in the form of the categorical authority of the senior and the obedience of the junior. The real issue is how to translate filial piety as an abstract moral principle into quotidian practices that engage with the variety of choices that the new, material life has provided, and with the series of constraints that China's political economy and birth control policy have set. For middle-class families, the intergenerational bond is not built simply or primarily upon strategic concerns, but upon intense everyday interactions through demonstrating love and practicing care. Taking care of and being responsible for the family are ethical essentials among these middle-class professionals.

(Zhang 2016: 19)

For instance, in her spare time, Mrs. Tang enjoys spending quality time with their parents and other family members. During weekends Mrs. Tang mentions that "Sometimes I go swimming, or stay at home. Sometimes I go out to eat with friends, or go to the movies." Regarding the time spent with his family, "My folks don't live here, that's why I don't see them. Sometimes they come to Beijing and we stay together at home. After leaving work we hang out. If they don't come then I wait till vacation time and go see them [and then] we are together all the time. We eat, watch television, chat, shop, read." The fact that in Liaoning, Mrs. Tang's hometown, "the air quality is better and my parents are there, [and] my whole extended family is there," has prompted her to consider leaving her life in Beijing and returning to Liaoning. "I don't know about my future, it's not very clear. Sometimes I want to go back and sometimes I don't," she says. Also, Mrs. Tang's estimates about her financial situation living in Beijing probably also influences this decision to leave: "I don't have enough money, that's why it's not easy [living in Beijing]" and "the city is so full of people." This thought of returning to one's hometown did not appear in any of the other interviews involving individuals from other provinces, since it contradicts the tendency among the majority of rural population of leaving their hometown to migrate to a larger city. However, beyond the trend of rural gentrification, which is linked in particular to the migration and permanent settlement in the countryside of middle-class or affluent urbanities, and beyond the return of migrant workers to their native towns, the phenomenon of the middle class's return to their hometowns or native cities and villages deserves in-depth research in the future.

However, for Mr. Wen, the generational issue is a determining factor of *guanxi*. He's 29 years-old and works in the human resources department of a Chinese insurance company, and although "in Chinese tradition, *guanxi* is important," he goes on to relativize its importance with the young: "I think *guanxi* carries less importance for our generation because people in my age group are independent. We have our way of doing things. We believe we can depend

on our capacities, our knowledge and our skills to be successful, [and] not just on connections.” Mr. Wen’s words manifest the values of self-fulfilment, meritocracy, the increasingly personal-fulfilment lifestyle, and a process of individualization and making of an autonomous, economically calculative individual that contests Yan Yunxiang’s argument on the transformation of the PRC’s political economy (2003, 2009, 2011) referred to above. According to Yan (2009), these middle-class ideals promote “a belief that one could change one’s fate through intelligence and hard work” (2009: xvii) or, as Mr. Wen said, through one’s capacities and knowledge. Yan also considers “the meaning of the communist slogan ‘regeneration through self-reliance’ had change from a slogan of ideological collectivism to a slogan of individualism in everyday life competition” (Yan 1994, in Yan 2009: xvii).

Despite the increasingly lifestyle based on personal fulfilment of young middle class in urban China, the relations of this generation with their parents is close and is getting more and more expressively emotional as the comments of Mr. Yi suggest. He mentions feelings of gratitude to his parents for the very favourable economic situation he now enjoys, “Because they provided me with a very good situation, and I can use it to learn, do something, explore myself, to improve myself, but I’m aware that poorer people don’t have the resources ... I don’t have that kind of worry, that’s why I’m thankful.”

The testimonies from married individuals, and regardless their age, also share commonalities when manifesting this tendency to visit and spend time with parents if they live in another province. During his vacations, Professor Bai, 64, says, “I normally go to my hometown to see my parents,” which is not unlike professor Mr. Lu of 37 years-old: “When my wife and kids are also on vacation, we go on a trip or visit my parents” in summertime. If they are not already in his house helping take care of his children, “My parents and my in-laws take turns coming to Beijing to take care of the kids.” The young couples, not only the young mothers but also the young fathers, feel they need their parents around. Money was not the main concern mentioned, as two couple hired a nanny regardless of whether their parents moved in with them temporarily or not. Further, as in the case of Mrs. Gong, if they could afford it, the parents may have moved in a separate apartment but in the same gated community or building where the young couple lived.

Broadly the findings with regard to living with parents, when the urban professionals in our study mentioned it, and in line with Zhang (2016) findings, it would be best if the parents were to live with them or near “since they could keep an eye on the parents’ health and ensure they had a materially comfortable life.” As a result, middle class individuals have more authority than their parents or other relatives on many familial issues, and not only because they are the financial pillars in the households but also because they have skills and knowledge that the parents’ generation lacks. The establishment of these new relationships within the family unit “reshapes the intricate power play between the older generation and the younger.” In short, the family both nuclear and extended is “a multilayered entity rich in emotional as well as material exchange, and the reconstitution of family ethics” seems essential in the making of middle-class identities and subjectivities in urban China today (Zhang 2016: 16).

These familial practices, Zhang (2016) highlights, unintentionally, resonate with the state agenda and the newly revised Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (*Laonianren quanyi baozhang fa*) that seeks to reassert traditional values and impose the middle-class ideas of community and self-governing (*zizhi*) in apparently autonomous private spaces based on values and self-discipline rather than rights as a way to deal with an aging

population and to establish its soft power on the global stage (Zhang 2016: 1; Tomba 2014: 16-21).

On July 1, 2013, the newly revised Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly 老年人权益保障法 took effect. Just like its earlier version, the law acknowledges the need to deal with an aging society from a long-term strategic perspective. While it encourages social support for senior citizens, the law reinstates the centrality of the family and the need for filial piety. Individuals and their spouses are obliged to take care of their parents in various ways. The revised law has one new stipulation: those who live apart from their parents should visit or greet the elderly regularly. Although the law does not specify punishment for violations, courts started to receive cases in which parents sued their children and asked for regular visits.

(Zhang 2016: 20)

The state-sponsored campaign for the revival of filial piety and other Confucian virtues can be seen as a part of China's quest for modernity in the form of a middle-class society, thus disregarding the aim of turning individuals into subjects of the nation-state in the Mao-dominated era, especially when the family system and filial piety came under heavy attack (Glosser 2003). Later, when the post-socialist state pushed an agenda of individualization — "relinquishing its previous promise to take care of its citizens' basic needs in exchange for their loyalty, and substituting its socialist ideology with the market logic of choice and survival of the fittest"—, the "reforms provided the structural forces to continue the unfinished Maoist task of destroying filial piety" (Zhang 2016: 20-21). It is in this individualized "context that the state is seeking to revive filial piety, family values, and the fostering of the parent-child relationship, sometimes even at the expense of the conjugal relationship" (Davis 2014) in order to legitimize "the withdrawal of the state as a social welfare provider by shifting the responsibility of care from the state to the family" (Zhang 2016: 21). This is in line with Tomba's approach on self-government practices put in place by the Chinese state in accordance with "the need to maintain social order under different conditions" by linking "marketization with the decline of the role of the state," and promoting self-governing communities almost as the culmination of a middle-class evolutionary civilization path (Tomba 2014: 171, 175, 58). Thus, for Tomba,

[t]he Chinese Communist Party has adapted its language and narrative repertoire to the new subjects that it is helping to create (such as the middle class, the unemployed who are still in the system, and other clusters not discussed here) by conflating the ethic of self-government with that of socialist assistance, both in the communities and in society at large. The language of "class struggle" has been replaced by an emphasis on "harmony" (*hexie*), but the entitlements of some groups to access public support are constantly upheld. Social conflicts are no longer the engine of a revolution; they are a threat to it.

(Tomba 2014: 60)

Leaving aside the academic debate as to whether self-governing practices in the PRC are aimed at promoting *Chinese* culture and traditions, of which filial piety is at the core as states Zhang (2016), or at maintaining social order and PCC's legitimization by resorting to "harmonious" frames that borrow from public discourses of social stability as Tomba (2014) maintains, what is clear, according to a high proportion of our sample, is that behind the autonomous and economically calculative middle-class individuals in urban China, emotions and ethical considerations, such as in holding the family together, are as important as the material base in constructing and defending their social identity.

4.2.4. Representations from the centre: the subjective social status and the narratives about inequality

The subjective social status

Subjective social status “is fundamental to the development of class consciousness and class formation” (Hsiao and Wan 2013: 113). As Chen and Fan notes, “self-rated social position in essence can be seen as a substitute for or component of class consciousness” (2015: 3). In line with Bourdieu’s class theory, “both individual-level and contextual-level factors contribute to its formation” (Hodge and Treiman 1968; Wright 1997; Morris and Murphy 1966; Lopreato and Hazelrigg 1972; Jackman and Jackman 1973, in Chen and Fan 2015: 3).

In the PRC, social scientists since the 1990s “have been interested in how people see themselves as being located in the social hierarchy” (Bian and Lu 2002; Dong 2007; Gao 2013, in Chen and Fan 2015: 1). Recent empirical descriptions have shown that the proportion of deflated social status in China is higher than that among in Western countries, such as the United States, “suggesting that people may have more difficulties in recognizing their genuine social position during fast social transition, like what China is undergoing” (Chen and Fan 2015: 15).

In our study, subjective social status was measured by a single, semi-structured question asking respondents to place themselves in society, and by asking what their views are of the dominant class, the subordinate class and other social groups such as the migrant workers and the new rich. The study reveals that nearly 80 per cent of the informants think of themselves as belonging to the “middle class” identity. They completely coincide with objective social position —according to the class scheme based three objective criteria describe above (see Section 4.1.2). The rest, little more than 20 per cent, do not know where they are situated or they do so without referring to any middle stratum, or they place themselves around it without being precise.

The narratives about inequality

The PRC’s emergence as the world’s second largest economy after four decades of transition towards a market economy has transformed one of the most egalitarian countries in 1970s into one with the highest levels of social inequality at the start of the new century (Naughton 2007). In considering economic inequality in the PRC, attention commonly focuses on the Gini coefficient (see Chapter II), which has increased from the relative equality of 0.20 in 1978, to 0.45 in 1996 —on par with the U.S.—, 0.42 in 2002, and 0.43 in 2010. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Goodman points, “it reached the considerably less equal level of 0.474 in 2012, having been even higher at 0.491 in 2009; levels which the NBS indicted gave cause for concern in terms of the developing inequality and its potential consequences (Xinhua 2013)” (2014: 45).

Despite since 2010 there is a downward trend, “China’s Gini coefficient has been standing above 0.4 for years, a number that is defined by UN-Habitat as an “international alert line.” According to statistics from NBS, China’s Gini coefficient reached a peak of 0.491 in 2008 and has since then dropped steadily” (*People’s Daily Online* 2018). Indeed, when considering the Gini coefficient —in relation to income, education, its Human Development Index (HDI) and life

expectancy— the inequality in Chinese society has remained moderately high according to international standards (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Inequality adjusted Human Development Indicator (HDI rank)

	<i>Germany</i> (5)	<i>USA (13)</i>	<i>France</i> (24)	<i>Spain</i> (26)	<i>China</i> (86)	<i>India</i> (130)
Human Development Index (HDI)	0.936	0.924	0.901	0.891	0.752	0.640
Inequality – adjusted life expectancy index	0.913	0.865	0.930	0.945	0.799	0.590
Inequality – adjusted education index	0.915	0.853	0.768	0.671	0.571	0.341
Inequality – adjusted income index	0.763	0.685	0.739	0.676	0.582	0.509
Gini coefficient (2010-2017)	31.7	41.5	32.7	36.2	42.2	35.1

Source: Human Development Indices: A statistical update 2018. United Nations Development Programme

Simultaneously, “the Chinese government is looking to 2020 in terms of eliminating the remaining poverty in the country” and, although poverty has decreased, “yet the mission remains arduous” because “[r]egional income disparity and the urban-rural wealth gap remain large” (*People’s Daily Online* 2018).” According to official standards of poverty in the PRC, the population living in poverty was reduced from 250 million in 1978 to 40.07 million at the end of 2008 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2009) (Wang, Shang and Xu 2011: 715).

However, this transformation from a socialist society with relatively modest income disparities to a market-based society with large gaps between the rich and the poor has also had a number of more divisive consequences (Han and Whyte 2009). Hence, “[o]lder Chinese who had learned how to survive by playing by the rules of Mao-era socialism had to adapt to a fundamentally changed distribution system in which there were plenty of losers alongside the many winners.” (Han and Whyte 2009: 193). As Mr. Lai explains by remembering his childhood in his hometown,

In the 90’s, many factories closed like the one my parents worked in, and unemployment skyrocketed ... When I was studying my bachelors [I remember that] many people were eating more poorly than before when, in the city, you could eat meat. We had a working-class lifestyle, but after the wave of unemployment it got much worse. The [unemployed] workers, out of a sense of dignity, didn’t go searching for new opportunities and then it got a lot worse. Gangs and prostitution appeared ... [Nowadays] things have improved [sighs], the city subsidizes part of the population ... They help them, but that is also related to a worker’s dignity.

The implications of these complex trends for Chinese citizens’ attitudes toward social change and new patterns of inequality have been the subject of academic debate both outside and inside the PRC. Some analysts, Han and Whyte note (2009), “contend that China’s robust economic growth, improved living standards, and ample new opportunities promote general optimism, acceptance of current inequality levels, and little nostalgia for the bygone socialist

era.” So according to this view, the PRC “today might best be characterized as enjoying “rocky stability” (see Shambaugh 2000).” The contrary view states “that rising income gaps and popular beliefs that current inequalities are unjust are threatening to turn China into a “social volcano,” with China’s social and political stability threatened” (Han and Whyte 2009: 194-5). As a result, “an expected division” emerged “between the winners and losers in the reform” (Li Chunling 2005: 339-340, in Guo 2008: 48). As a result, the CCP “brought to privatization a zero-sum nature: those who are connected to the government officials and CCP cadres can amass wealth through privileged to state assets, whereas those who are not are the losers” (Zang 2008: 69). Even though none of the informants during this investigation clearly described themselves as a “loser” or feeling unjustly excluded when accessing certain opportunities, there is a reluctance among the majority to position themselves within the conventional social hierarchy.

Indeed, “[m]any who felt they should have been honored for their contributions to building socialism found themselves unemployed, while suspicion was rife that many of China’s new millionaires were the beneficiaries of corruption and official favoritism” (Han and Whyte 2009: 193). In his analysis about the Party’s different strategies to eradicate poverty, Beltrán (2018: 139-40) notes that several plans like the *National Plan for Poverty Alleviation* (1994-2000) that aimed to lift 80 million of its rural citizens out of poverty within seven years, did not reach their objectives. By the end of the year 2000, 22 million people still lived in poverty (Hu, Hu and Chang 2005: 12). Consequently, the PRC has been rocked this century by a rising tide of public protests by peasants, workers and, even middle-class homeowners, who denounce from different perspectives the current social order as unjust. Simultaneously, new plans were being elaborated, such as the *Development-oriented Poverty Reduction Program for Rural China* (2001-2010). As we have seen, the country’s latest plan will finalize in the year 2020:

“Currently, the plan, *Development-oriented Poverty Reduction Program for Rural China (2011-2020)*, continues its mission to eradicate poverty and reduce the differences in the pace of development within the country. Ending poverty has become the government’s key aspect to stimulate internal demand, accelerate the transformation of the economic growth model and promote a long-term sustainable economic development”

(Beltrán 2018: 140)

As such, the plan targets the more than 43 million people who in 2016 still lived on the equivalent of less than 90 Euro cents a day, the poverty line set by the Chinese government. President Xi has identified anti-poverty as one of the three “tough battles” for 2017 to 2020 (the other two being, risk prevention and pollution control)” (Diallo 2019). The Chinese government has set the agenda for government institutions at all levels to lift 10 million Chinese citizens out of poverty in rural areas per year, an objective in line with the president’s pledge of a *xiaokang* society by 2020. The achievement of “a long-term sustainable economic development” nationwide (Beltrán 2018: 140) would “promote broad acceptance of the current system as at least relatively just” in order to “prevent local grievances and social protests from escalating into general challenges to the system” (Han and Whyte 2009: 193-4).

From the Party-state perspective, Diallo (2019) notes, the “largest poverty alleviation campaign in history” has been an overall success. Thus, Diallo argues,

The campaign has revolved around the development of local industries, education, healthcare and combating corruption and abuses in poverty alleviation itself. It has

lifted more than 68 million people living in China's rural areas out of poverty over the past five years. In other words, 37,000 Chinese were able to escape poverty every day, driving the national poverty rate down from 10.2 to 3.1 percent. The importance given to the role of the Party and government has implications for both the possibilities and stumbling blocks of China's anti-poverty drive, especially when set against the efforts of the political leadership to reform Chinese society.

(Diallo 2019: xxx)

With the deadline fast approaching, and beyond the narrative of success promoted by the Chinese government and some bureaucratic issues and controversies due to the relocation scheme entailed by the campaign, Beijing is beginning to feel the pressure and has ramped up its efforts. As Diallo (2019) points out, progress of the PRC's "poverty alleviation campaign is noteworthy, although problems still loom ahead."

As mentioned from the beginning, the PRC, as "a natural laboratory" (Hong and Zhao 2015), provides social scientists a rare opportunity to explore the distribution, determinants and discordance regarding not only subjective social status but also narratives of inequality among urban population under social transformation. In our project research, two informants, Mr. Duan and Mrs. Tang, expressed disagreement towards our questions on social differentiation. While Mr. Duan categorically denies the existence of these categories — "in China and the rest of the world. I think that there are no rich or poor people, they have different lifestyles" —, Mrs. Tang argues that inequality "it's a social problem due to an imbalance in development ... [That is why] I don't like classifying people into rich and poor [since] some rich people make money thanks to their intelligence and capacity, and others make their fortune illegally. Not all rich people can be treated equally." However, the answers of the rest of informants provide an opportunity to explore the diversity of early twenty-first-century social representations on distributive injustice in urban China. In the pages that follows, we examine the social contours, attitudes or feelings of urban middle incomers about distributive injustice (the poor and the rich) in China today.

However, how does one measure middle incomer's attitudes toward distributive injustice or poverty in a semi-structured questionnaire-based interview? Our questionnaire contained some semi-structured questions in order to probe respondent attitudes toward issues regarding inequality such as the causes of poverty, the phenomenon of migrant workers, the emergence of the "new rich" or how the China's billionaires got so rich. We focus our attention here on the views on distributive injustice, we asked informants to give their assessments of why some people in the PRC today are poor, and why some others are rich. First, we examine their perception of the subordinate classes, and further on, their perceptions of the economic elite.

The narratives about the subordinate classes

The only respondents born and raised in Beijing are Mr. Yang and Mr. Qiao, and they both agree that the most important social cleavage in China today is based on access to education. However, they are not referring to it exclusively in academic terms, but to the lack of attitudes or disposition to become more respectful individuals and be able to think beyond the mere accumulation of material wealth, which is related to the concept of *suzhi*. As Mr. Yang says:

I can't judge both groups [the rich and poor] with one single opinion or word because, most of the time, the poor have a motive. Why are they poor? Some only need one chance. For example, they might have the ability to change their circumstances, they just need one chance. If you give it to them, they can do things really well, and completely change their situation and become rich, with a family ... but others are very short-sighted ... Yeah, for example, they don't want to invest too much in education, only save money; they want save and save, but not earn money. So, then they always live in poverty. It's a mistake, and that's why I say they are short-sighted, because their mindset must change. Even if you give them a chance, they won't take advantage of it because they only want to save money.

However, Mr. Yang understands that "because those kinds of people might fear going back, they don't have anything, but at the same time they need an opportunity so that everything can change." Mr. Yang seems to be referring not exclusively to the lack of economic capital, he talks about being "short-sighted" —that is, some poor people lack of dispositions to behave as rich people which generates perceptions, appreciations and practices of rich people. Indeed, Mr. Yang seems to be referring to the concept of habitus, which was defined by Bourdieu as "a system of durable [and] transposable dispositions" resulting from, on the one hand, an enduring occupation of a position or location in the social world and, on the other, a product of the conditions associated with "particular conditions" of existence of a class (Bourdieu 1977a [1972], in Chapter I).

Mr. Qiao also has a similar opinion that lack of education is characteristic of the poor, albeit with more resounding words, affirming, "I think that, due to various reasons, I don't like them [the poor]. Not because they don't have any money, they have to be taught to respect people. They're not educated enough." A lack of education, in other words *low suzhi*. As Mr. Qiao manifests in many ways,

It's that interaction that makes people uncomfortable, physically or otherwise. For example, they smell, they're dirty ... or it's their behaviour, like pointing at you [gestures pointing with his finger], you know? They say rude things; they're very direct. This is something I dislike, but I think that without money ... it's not necessarily related to what I think of them, but with money comes social problems. It doesn't necessarily affect my daily life because it's a much more extensive problem. I think that if there are a lot of poor people in the cities, it will become a safety issue for society.

As Anagnost notes, the discourse of *suzhi* appears most elaborated in relation two dimensions (rural-urban) and two figures: the body of the rural migrant, which exemplifies *suzhi* in its apparent absence (e.g., a lack of education, cleaning, manners, money, etc.), and the body of the urban, middle-class only child, as Mr. Qian and Mr. Yang, which is fetishized as a site for the accumulation of the very dimensions of *suzhi* waiting in its "other" (2004: 190). In addition, regarding migrant workers, Mr. Qiao says:

[I have] very conflicted feelings. On one hand, they are part of our city because they provide easy resources, make our living costs cheaper. On the other hand, since I was born and live in Beijing, I feel that my city easy filling up with too many people. It isn't a city for the locals, but for the country as a whole. I feel like I'm losing my home because it's changing very quickly; it's not the same place I was born and grew up in, there are people from all over this country. It's like a really fast metabolism, the person becomes someone else. That's why I feel like a stranger in this city, being excluded by this migrant trend because everyone is from somewhere else, and Beijing locals are a minority.

In fact, when government relaxes its restrictions on rural-to-urban emigration, inequality is alleviated. According to Li, Sicular and Tarp, “unchanged political reform associated with excessive government intervention into economic activities have resulted in corruption and rent-seeking and have generated an excessive number of super-rich businessmen and disguised rich officials,” that is inequality has increased in recent years (2018: 17). However, these scholars note that evidence suggests that

the expansion of redistributive policies has begun to play a role in moderating income inequality. Such policies are important not only for their actual impact on income distribution, but also for their symbolic function. They signal the regime’s commitment to a certain vision of social welfare.

(Li, Sicular and Tarp 2018: 17-18)

The essential argument behind Mr. Yang and Mr. Qiao’s words is that one of the most important social cleavage in the PRC “today is based on the society’s distinctive system of household registration (*hukou*), which divides China socially into three status categories: rural residents, rural migrants residing in urban areas, and urban residents with urban *hukou*” (Wang 2005, in Han and Whyte 2009: 198). Certainly, *hukou* is an embodiment of the concept of *suzhi* that captures a differential, “a play between plenitude and lack that could not be set into relation with each other” (Anagnost 2004: 190). As in this instance, strategies of middle-class social location employ a narrative of separation, and a set of social practices and representations of separation. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the concept of *suzhi* acts as culture, as the question of the very meaning of *suzhi* or culture, and symbolic appropriation stands out clearly in the antagonism between the lifestyles and habitus (Chapter I).

The narratives about the objective and subjective dimensions of poverty

The findings from our interviews challenge two widely held views. The first is that anger is not the dominant mood among middle incomers at current patterns of distributive injustice or generalized sense of inequality in the PRC. Although many informants, who most of them are women, express the feelings of sympathy for the most disadvantaged people in Chinese society, the dominant mood might be characterized as “acceptance tinged by criticism” (Han and Whyte 2009: 208). The second challenge to middle incomers’ attitudes from our research results is equally pointed —generally participants rate individual merit factors, in particular hard work, as more important than external and unfair factors, such as family background and unequal access to education, in explaining why some people are poor while other are rich. As a result, criticism of distributive injustice is not attributed to the status quo or the unfairness in the system, but it is instead more likely to explain inequality in terms of difference in individual efforts and capacities.

As note earlier, the informants who were born and raised in Beijing evaluated the causes of poverty as a subjective living condition. However, they are not the only ones that consider the causes of poverty to be subjective. Three of the women interviewed living in Beijing, but having migrated from other provinces during their childhood, point to subjective motives, but also objective ones. They show more empathy towards the situation lived by the more unfortunate, but on the other hand, blame their poverty on not trying hard enough. Mrs. Gong’s answers are particularly significant since she talks about her similar origins, “When I was a child, my family was poor. My parents’ salaries were meagre and I had many siblings.

Back then, I really didn't want to live that kind of life ... So, when I got to Beijing, I told myself I was not going back to my hometown."

During the interview, Mrs. Gong explained that her husband is an architect and earns more than a one million RMB a year. According to her, she has reached her goal, "We are no longer poor now, but I empathize with them. However, I see that some of them don't try hard enough," she explains. Mrs. Gong attitude is in line with the majority view of the Chinese population as the Chinese people, along with the state and the Party, tend to consider poverty as an individual problem rather than a structural or contextual one, and that individual effort is basically responsible for ending it (Beltrán 2018: 154).

For this reason, Mrs. Gong points to two causes of such poverty: "On the one hand, the environment they grow up in is not their choice and, on the other hand, they don't work hard enough because there are more opportunities nowadays. If you are willing, it's possible to get out of poverty." Also, research undertaken in other societies "has shown that subjective perceptions of personal and family status and of changes in social position over time often have about as much influence on distributive justice attitudes as objective indicators of current status" (Kluegel 1988; Kluegel, Mason, and Wegener 1995; Kreidl 2000, in Han and Whyte (2009: 209). However, coinciding with Han and Whyte's study, Mr. Gong's consistent and expected patterns of association between her subjective social status measures and perceptions of current inequalities as unfair does not resonate with such research cited earlier from other countries. Consequently, Mrs. Gong's answer is unexpected for someone who has had bad experiences concerning inequality (Han and Whyte 2009)

Mrs. Gong reflects an attitude of personal effort as a distinctive element not so much of a social class or group since, as we have seen, are part of a general trend (Beltran 2018: 154), but as a feature of measurable acknowledgement according to one's level of wealth. In the case of the urban middle class, this feature operates as a distinctive measure through, for example, consumption, amongst other social practices. The same narrative is present in Mrs. He's statement in saying "the country must help the poor, but the poor must also work harder." Indeed, although she relates poverty to low interest in working, she also empathizes with those who have no resources, and supports a stronger state role to solve the problem: "First, I don't want to see the poor suffering. I have great sympathy for them ... I provide long-term help for a student who lives in a mountain town. I do it as a public service through an NGO ... They should at least have a more comfortable life."

However, it must be considered that informants' ideas regarding distributive injustice are influenced not only by their personal characteristics, backgrounds or social status (such as in Mrs. Gong's case), but also by their place of birth, where they were raised and currently live and work. For example, Mrs. He was born and studies her degree in a coastal province, while Mrs. Gong was born in a landlocked province. Location in geographic and economic space in the PRC influence greatly the views respondents have about distributive injustice. As Han and Whyte argue,

the common perception that people residing in coastal provinces of China have benefited disproportionately from the reform era and will thus support the status quo, while residents of inland provinces have seen few benefits trickling down to them (despite recent government efforts to "develop the West") and are likely to feel aggrieved. However, some coastal provinces (such as Guangdong) have benefited much more from market reforms than others (such as Liaoning), while within any province some people live in globally connected major cities while others live in

isolated and poor villages. (See the critique of traditional groupings of provinces into regions presented in Skinner 2005).

(Han and Whyte 2009: 199)

This perception about economic inequalities among the different provinces still manifests itself in the people from these provinces even after leaving them. It is part of a stigmatization based on geographical origin that Mr. Cui and Mr. Bai experienced when reaching Beijing in their youth during the 1980's. "My family is from Anhui, a relatively poor province in China, and it's always said that babysitters and thieves come from Anhui ... When I wanted to leave Anhui, people labelled me and it wasn't easy to earn respect in other places once they knew where I'm from"

Perhaps for this reason, Mr. Cui understands the inequality the many are living through. "I look at the poor with empathy and respect because I come from this kind of family. My father was a poor farmer, so I came this sort of background." While, Mrs. Ren is also aware of the country's issue of inequality, "I try to be kind to some of them," Mrs. Yao coincides with Mr. Cui and Mrs. Ren in expressing

a deep respect for them. They leave their families and try to survive with their work, with their own hands in order to support the family. They put up with so much humiliation from the big city, I see people showing this disrespect towards them, but I feel so much sympathy for them. I admire their courage to leave their families behind.

When looking at the issue of migrant workers, Mrs. Gong believes that "They work a lot, and they don't have good living conditions. The city needs them [since] every year during Chinese New Year, life gets very inconvenient here without them after they go back home ... but then again, migrants consume a lot of resources in this city; the subway is packed."

In conducting the interviews, it became clear the difference in consideration shown by respondents for *the poor* and *migrant workers*. Mrs. Yao refers to the poor as "the poor poor" to differentiate them with migrant workers, who she sees as "the ones who work long hours like computer technicians" at the university where she teaches. "Migrant workers are different, many work in the tech industry. They don't have family here, but have stable jobs ... Maybe talking about migrant workers means talking about construction, maintenance and janitorial workers." This differentiation seems similar to the classic perspective of marginality —that is, a theoretical approach in terms of margins, "at the edge of a system, but ... not ... outside the system" (Leimgruber 2012, in Leimgruber and Chang 2019: 7). Despite the ambiguity of this notion (Gutiérrez 2003: 33), the sociology of marginality not only focus "on vulnerable 'groups'" such as the migrant workers or the poor (which often exist merely on paper, if that) but also "on the institutional mechanisms that produce, reproduce and transform the network of positions to which its supposed members are dispatched and attached" (Wacquant 2016: 1078). Mrs. Yao's words clarify that migrant workers are not located at the fringes, but occupy a certain position in the center of the social system. A regrettable position, but "necessary" as Mr. Lai described. On the contrary, the poor are perceived as if existing in the fringes, not integrated —"Integrated" understood as the fact of taking part in the system of economic production (Gutiérrez 2003: 33).

Mr. Lu's thought agrees substantially with those of Mrs. He when discussing objective and subjective causes as determining factors of distributive injustice, although without showing any empathy, "some among the poor don't work hard, they don't want to change their lives through effort. It's their own problem ... It's not discrimination or contempt, but the real

difference between them and me is due to their disadvantages and decisions.” Mr. Lai’s assessment is similar to that of Mr. Lu, but emphasizes the subjective causes of poverty: “the poor are poor because of their mindset,” adding “It’s not terrible that they’re poor. If they want to change their mindset, their behaviour, maybe they’ll have a chance.” Again, Mrs. He shows empathy for groups with less resources, and her opinion of migrant workers represent an important part among the subjects interviewed in this study:

Their lives aren’t easy because they must leave their families, work tirelessly to support them ... and they contribute a lot to the city, so the city should respect them in return. In this city, we are told to respect them. They experience difficulties, have their own problems, like their healthcare services not being located here, separation from their family and their children’s education ... These situations that emerge are obstacles; they’re different ... What I see is that we’re all the same, I’m also an emigrant.

Mrs. Li adopts this egalitarian view, but without pointing out previous subjective causes (e.g. “the poor must work harder”). In her assessment of why some people in the PRC are poor, and why some others are rich, Mrs. Li indicates objective factors, “We’re all the same. Maybe the poor are poor because they live in less developed zones and have less economic opportunities or are incapacitated in some way that doesn’t allow for obtaining a better job, or as a consequence of their family.” The difference is not between people, but rather between their external circumstances: “There are many reasons like educational inequalities, but in terms of human beings there’s no difference. It’s a result of family and societal factors...” Similarly, Mrs. Wu, a 38-year-old originating from Anhui, does not place responsibility on those who are experiencing poverty, “Currently, the gap between rich and poor in China, between the city and the countryside, is massive. So, for some it’s very difficult to change their situation; it’s not entirely due to the individual, but to objective factors, as well.”

Analyses reported here suggest that Beijing’s middle incomers are on average more accepting of and less angry about current patterns of inequality in the PRC. Although this section presents some evidence coinciding with the findings of Han and Whyte (2009: 195, 208) related to the comparative question on social distribution by showing the greater prevalence of positive or neutral, rather than negative responses about current patterns of inequality, some informants stated that they would prefer that the government take more active measures to help the migrant workers and the poor, and thereby reduce income gaps. Concurring with this, Mrs. Yin, 42, comes from a north-eastern province of China, and she says she believes “the government should offer favourable policies, more aid, and that they [the poor] have a better life,” while she is also indicating that socioeconomic differences and access to education as the important objective factors causing this inequality.

In this vein, Mr. Bai considers that during the last several years, inequality has increased in a way he had never seen previously. Mr. Bai’s words of indignation with respect to the inequality China is experiencing represent the most critical and angry attitude to the rest of informants.

It’s a huge problem, the difference between the rich and poor is too great; it’s incredible. I’ve seen people, construction workers in Beijing living on 5 RMB ... a day – no breakfast, lunch is 3 RMB, dinner is 2 RMB and two loafs of bread (*mantou*) for the cabbage and potatoes ... And in the same city you can find Fan Bingbing, that damn, famous Fan Bingbing, incredibly rich ... Where did her money come from? She deserves the *National Spirit Award*?

Mr. Bai showed his strong aversion towards the famed actress, Fan Bingbing, on the same day of her disappearance, which Western media speculated this was related to her alleged tax evasion charges in the past. According to Mr. Bai, the inequality gap in China is not comparable to other countries, where “There are poor people and rich people, but the difference between them is not so great ... You can still see many poor people in [China’s] rural areas; there are many rotten rich people ... new rich kids.”

In addition, Mrs. Ai also argues concisely about the solution to inequality in China:

They definitely need help from the government, and I think they’re taking steps in that direction: providing basic assistance, paying them and also offering them health services ... However, the most important issue is that the zone where they live in, some very poor in China, need help, they need industry, they need to know how to use their own resources to grow ... This is the most important factor. More than just the government simply handing them money and helping them, they must also learn to stand on their own two feet ... [They require] investment or help them build some type of industry there that can adjust to their characteristics, of the local areas.

In her assessment, Mr. Ai reproduces the narratives of *suzhi* by suggesting that the latent capacities of poor people have to be expressible in a rhetoric of development. That is, “[i]t is self-development that ‘qualifies’ neoliberal subjects, so that the actualization of the body’s latent potentialities becomes an expression of value” (Anagnost 2004: 201). However, none of the informants consider the improvement of the legal system as a measure to give migrant workers and ‘the poor’ “increased voice in influencing the people and policies that govern their lives” while implementing the government redistribution from the rich to the poor (Han and Whyte 2009: 211). Indeed, the participants do not attribute the inequality they see in the PRC’s society mainly to unfairness in the system, as Mr. Lai argues.

A class that needs to exist. I think I’m someone conscious of having an economic mindset belonging to an era of evolution; the system dictates that such people must exist ... They have to work and if they don’t work in construction, they might be worse off because there aren’t many opportunities in the countryside. At least construction offers a chance to change, even though it might not be good, it’s an opportunity. It’s very difficult being middle class ... and they might never become part of it.

Also, when discussing migrant workers, Mrs. Ai believes that there are many, and explains her personal experience shared with one of them.

We have had some nannies who have cared for our son, and they were also migrant workers from different provinces, but I don’t think they live so poorly in Beijing because they also had their studies or specialties, their way of making money and earn a living. Whenever you work, that’s my mindset, you deserve respect and they can also maintain their families ... I think the most difficult part is the residency permit [*hukou*]. I’m not sure, but I think they can’t get health services in Beijing, they have to go back to their hometown to see a doctor ... Their children don’t have the chance to go to school in Beijing. I think these are issues that make life difficult, not only in terms of salary ... Nowadays, I see migrant workers living relatively better than before, like the nanny at my house now. I pay her 60,000 RMB a month, which I think is a very reasonable salary for them. It’s even higher than what some university graduates earn [laughs].

Regarding the group formed of migrant workers, there exists a large variety of opinions which, in some cases are not similar, a fact that demonstrates a lack of knowledge among the middle

class towards this phenomenon —for example, Mrs. Ai does not know if the person who takes care for her son has primary health care in Beijing. Despite some informants display of sympathy for less privileged groups, the dominant view in the PRC which associates poverty and exclusion to the lack of personal effort prevails among various informants.

Further, although Mrs. Yin, Mr. Bai and Mrs. Ai describe the current social order as unjust, for the majority of the informants, the benefits produced by market reforms by far surpass the disadvantages, such as the situation with migrant workers, which is the issue they have showed the most concern for in terms of social injustice. Their perceptions of distributive injustice are associated to the level of effort and work that every individual contributes. Hence, the wide acceptance of the current system while considering it, at the very least, relatively just.

This is why many of the informants mention their personal trajectories as an example of perseverance and effort, but simultaneously, their responses show that only 10 per cent of them experienced any upward movement in the social ladder with regards to their class origins; only two of the participants have parents who are farmers. Without putting into question their personal effort, it is still evident that access to certain opportunities such as higher education, is thanks to the belonging to a household that is not from the less privileged classes.

Mrs. Yin's testimony coincides with those who employ their own personal experience as an example that the current system is, at least, relatively just and rewards those who make an effort:

I was not a local to Beijing. I grew up in a small city in north-eastern China, passed the *gaokao* and the university's entrance exam. I attended university and got diplomas in advanced studies. In the end, I obtained a Beijing *hukou* along with a job at the university, but my friends or former classmates my age, if they didn't succeed in the *gaokao*, they probably became migrant workers in Beijing. They didn't want to come to Beijing, but they would've become migrant workers; maybe not involved in cleaning work, but they'd work in some supermarket.

There are certain distinctive dispositions of Beijing's migrant middle class with respect to the community they left behind in their native towns which can be found in Mrs. Yin's words. Other than effort, she refers to her ability to pass the exam and prosper in the city while migrant workers, in many cases, return to their hometowns when the work season in the city is over.

Moreover, she adds:

People in my city don't want to come to Beijing because they believe there are many difficulties, there's more adversity. You have to wake up very early, take the subway to go to work and work harder. In my city, you can get a job and not have to work so hard. It's more relaxed. Bosses aren't as demanding, but they don't earn a lot ... They don't make a lot of money, their salaries are lower, but living costs are also much lower. That's why they don't have any stress ... Some prefer to live in small cities, but the younger ones might think there are more opportunities in Beijing. They can earn more money and grow there, become more successful, that's why it all depends.

Mrs. Yin's assessment defends a point of view decoupled from more traditional positions of a classical economy, and from the mainstream tendency in the PRC which associates poverty with the lack of effort. As such, her argument points only to individual responsibility and subjective causes as the origins of inequality. Although she admires the leadership of Mao, as we analysed further on, her statement lacks the Marxist perspective that considers distributive

injustice as a consequence of capitalist production system which, among other things, produces poverty and/or the threat of poverty as a mechanism for controlling the working class. As a result, depending on how the participants define poverty and/or wealth, whether from its causes —like unequal access to education— or its consequences —insecurity, public disorder, etc.—, they point to proposals to eliminate inequality —more public assistance in education, increasing control of the population to avoid insecurity and so on.

More importantly, Mrs. Yin identifies herself by a consumption-oriented lifestyle. As we have already seen, we argue that underneath Mrs. Yin’s stated narratives about inequality and living in Beijing, domestic emigration is in fact a form of class-based consumption or *mai shenfen* practices (see also Section 4.2.3). Mrs. Yin considers herself harder-working person, “more successful,” more industrious, possessing greater economic and cultural capital —not only academic certificates but also ‘enriching’ experiences— and, consequently, better behaved, with higher *suzhi* and more civilized and responsible citizen and thus being superior to her townsfolk. As shown in Mrs. Yin’s statement,

[t]hose who identify themselves by class status express their class identity through their consumption, ranging from food, clothes and leisure to housing. Li Peiling [2005] observes that consumption style itself, where one lives and what one buys, enhances one’s subjective class identification (*zhuguan jieceng rentong* 主观阶层认同).

(Liu-Farrer 2016: 501)

Mrs. Yin stated reasons, however, may all be real —that is, “In my city, you can get a job and not have to work so hard. It’s more relaxed. Bosses aren’t as demanding, but they don’t earn a lot”—, but despite these expressed motives, as Liu-Farrer notes, we can observe this form of migration which “is essentially a type of class consumption” (2016: 506). Indeed, “[m]obility, along with the recent fads of spiritual pursuits, cultural learning and physical exercises, is a practice the moneyed urban elite [who come originally from another Chinese provinces], and especially those with a better education, adopt in order to attain social status,” and to adopt the style of an urban elite by allowing them to equip their children with Beijing’s elite educational credential and urban cultural capital (Liu-Farrer 2016: 506).

In addition, this class-based consumption solidifies the group of the “successful middle-class migrant workers” and creates boundaries between groups in terms of a *suzhi* hierarchy between the rural residents and the former-rural-residents who become successful-urban-dwellers. Thus, this type of domestic migration is above all “a form of lifestyle consumption, an ideology and a way to fashion oneself as a modern subject [Chu 2010] ... a strategy for class reproduction, and a way to convert economic resources into social status and prestige” (Liu-Farrer 2016: 503, 499). Underneath such consumption-oriented middle-class lifestyles, Tang points, “is the resource-grasping capacity of the socialist institutions and the market, which largely determine the social-mobility mechanisms in post-reform urban China” (2018a: 145). As a result, the social construction of a middle-class identity is maintained primarily through consumption —namely, economic capital—, but not through a recognizable “class” identity.

The narratives about the dominant classes

In the previous section, for the most part our informants do not draw conclusions about the fairness or unfairness in the system by comparing themselves with migrant workers. However, do they explain distributive injustice by comparing themselves with the newly rich and the

economic elite? The findings from our 2017 and 2018 sample of semi-structured interviews with Beijing's middle incomers about the dominant classes indicate that, although the majority of informants do not see wealth as something immanent to certain people, they defend businessmen —they did not talk about businesswomen— who acquired their fortune in the PRC since the end of the 1970s, when the economic reforms were initiated. Those who obtained their fortune illegally or through corruption are the only ones criticized.

Only Mr. Qiao doubts the origin of their wealth, and Mr. Bai speaks of them in an ironic tone, but the rest either defend the wealthy from criticism or maintain a neutral opinion. Hence, Mr. Qiao believes that the most privileged “must be more aware of helping the poor,” despite his severity when previously discussing the lack of education among the most disadvantaged. He explains the emergence of this group in relation to China's economic context:

This is what differentiates China from Western countries, there's no such social awareness. There isn't a system of public control about whether these wealthy people care enough about society, the poor, minorities ... I think that this is an image of China, it's quite common: people hate the rich ... This hatred or paranoia of the rich is not healthy ... But how can they [the rich] earn money so easily when it's so difficult, right? How do they make money? Using contacts, *guanxi*?

Mr. Bai had also previously spoken about the wealth of some people with an ironic, indignant tone, regarding inequality as “a huge problem” and severely criticizing the existence of public figures, such as Fan Bingbing. He speaks in the same manner that Mr. Qiao questioned the ways of wealth acquisition among certain sectors of Chinese society. Further, Mr. Bai had also referred to the phenomenon of the *hulianwang xingui* or *hulianwang dalao* —tech businessmen who have become multimillionaires, in most of the cases at a very young age— in saying earlier that in the PRC “You can still see many poor people in rural areas” and also “many rotten wealthy people ... new rich kids”. He sarcastically calls them “new rich kids,” and uses them in his assessment, together with the image of the new rich appearing in rural areas or *tuhao*, to show the existing inequalities in China compared to other countries.

Our findings are also supportive of a criticism of the behaviour of the “new rich.” According to this category of people, “new rich not only have bad taste but they are proud of them” because “to buy something without looking at the price is not only silly but reflects a lack of class,” as “[t]he price of things must reflect their quality, then the price is a very important element;” consequently, “[w]e have to develop knowledge, to be able to choose the best product and the best activity” (Rocca 2017: 150-151). Indeed, according to Mr. Qiao, the poor mentioned before are not the only ones who need to learn to behave themselves, the new rich also “need to be educated ... They need to learn,” he comments “it's the same problem as with the poor, what I've said before. For migrant workers, money doesn't change them.” Mr. Qiao understands the new rich possess the same cultural capital as migrant workers, but accumulate more economic capital.

For example, when on public transportation, some are very well-dressed with luxury items, but their behaviour is exactly the same as the lady cleaning the bathrooms ... or even more disgusting because they have the advantage of being able to receive a better education, but they choose not to. The poor don't have that opportunity, but for these kinds of people, they allow themselves to be that way – basic and uneducated.

Similar to Mr. Qiao, Mrs. Gong also shares a certain disdain towards individuals whose wealth does not originate from personal effort — meaning, through work or study. This sort of wealth in Beijing, according to her, has one cause:

It comes from the *chaiqian*¹²⁰, which is why there are wealthy people in my community, but actually don't really know how to spend their pile of money. Many don't have any professional specialty, they can only get a job like those people in uniforms at the bus stops who maintain the queues in order. One can't say they're bad people, but their mentality is not compatible with wealth; they're not efficient when spending money.

Mrs. Gong's comments exemplify the importance of distinctive consumer practices in Chinese society and their relation with again the concept of *suzhi*, which in this context clearly demonstrates the distinctive class character of this idea. If we switch the term "efficiency" in Mrs. Gong's statement to "quality" (*suzhi*), the meaning of her words remains unaltered because she is referring to quality in terms of spending money. In addition, these *chaiqian* practices, whose origins we explain further on, had low economic and cultural capital in the past. This category of people saw the former increase suddenly, but as they do not possess a middle- nor upper-class *habitus*, they cannot be considered upper class since their spending habits are different due the lack of a *suzhi* or *class habitus* associated with the dominant classes.

However, "since 2000, there have been heated discussions on 'wealth hatred' in the mass media and internet. This is a popular term used by ordinary citizens to reject the legitimacy of the claim to wealth by private entrepreneurs." The term 'wealth hatred' "reflects the public anger at or public resentment toward the rich" by labelling them as "the 'problematic rich' as their ways of making money have been portrayed as improper, unjust, or even illegal" (Zang 2008: 56). Also, although some respondents recognize the value of figures such as Ma Yun or Liu Qiangdong, founders of successful businesses who provide much employment, they are also conscious that some government officials businessmen become wealthy thanks to their power, "They got rich through corruption, of course people hate them." However, the hatred in the PRC also extends to those who acquired their wealth legally, as if part of an expanding effect.

¹²⁰ According to Zhang Li, the *chaiqian* - meaning "demolition and relocation" - phenomenon emerged in the mid-1980s due to the new regime of land transferring. As a result of these new land policies, "the real estate development craze took place in Chinese cities. Although some development projects venture into suburban farmland, many target the city core (*shiqu*), which frequently involved the expulsion of families who have lived there for decades. The relocation of these densely populated urban neighbourhoods and the demolition of their homes has become one of the toughest problems facing development agencies and local government since the mid-1980s. Given this situation, two kinds of entities came into being. One is a government branch office called the "demolition and relocation bureau" (*chaiqian ban*) that specializes in persuading families to leave and arranging resettlement; the other is a highly profitable private sector, composed of the so-called "demolition and relocation companies" (*chaiqian gongsi*), dedicated to the actual demolition work" (Zhang Li 2004: 254). In the case of the old workers who lived in small and unsafe single-story houses, Tomba notes, many of them "were forcibly moved into high-rise crowded residential communities where they no longer live with their old workmates ... The result is, yet again, a high level of segregation within the district, with gated communities on one side and low-quality housing built with a substantial injection of public investment on the other." The new apartments usually "were then sold at a price comparable to the average compensation that the inhabitants received for their old houses ... The relocation of large parts of the population from central areas of the district has resulted in increased density and the freeing of prime real estate locations for more lucrative development projects" (Tomba 2014: 160).

However, generally, the results indicate that most of the respondents believe that the members of the economic elite deserve their wealth, in other words: “not all of them are bad,” as Mrs. Gong admits. Although she is critical towards the fortunes of the *chaiqian*, her view of the new rich and the rich is not limited to this single group.

Not all of them are bad, they receive a good education and also focus more on their children’s education. They have money, so they have more resources, they can provide a better education for their kids, and they make money circulate this way. They plan their investments. They have more resources because of their wealth and their children receive a quality education; it’s a vicious cycle.

Regarding younger men such as Liu Qiangdong, the founder of the e-commerce heavyweight JD.com, or Ma Yun, the founder of Alibaba, who obtained their wealth only recently, Mrs. Gong has a similar opinion to Mrs. Ai, “Many young people have become rich” after working in online companies, “they should be respected.” In Mrs. He’s case, she also defends some wealthy citizens who have worked hard in the last few years in China:

There’re many; I know many rich people, but it’s also a lifestyle. What I mean is that it’s a common phenomenon, their wealth is due to their effort, which motivates me to obtain more wealth in the future through work [because] being rich, I’ll be in a better state both in the workplace and at home with my family.

Mr. Wen justifies the existence of the wealthy within the economic and political process kickstarted in China at the end of the 1970s. He explains this phenomenon from the industrialist perspective, as if the emergence of “the rich” was “an unavoidable stage during China’s reform and opening-up era” from egalitarianism (*daguofan*), characteristic of the Mao-dominated era of China’s politics. “[After] the reforms and opening-up, a slogan was proposed —‘Some must become rich first, then help others become rich’— but as this slogan developed, the wealth gap began to widen ... It’s an unavoidable cost the country must pay to become rich out of a situation of poverty.” Mr Wen also notes that “Those who are still poor today might be related to how far away their hometown is.” Also, Mr. Wen adds:

Nowadays, there is so much hostility towards the rich that I have my reservations towards these kinds of opinions. I believe rich people take advantage of their know-how, skills, or are familiar with politics, but maybe there’s a grey area. In any case, they’re representative of us, the ‘hardworking and intelligent Chinese’. Besides, many wealthy Chinese do charitable work. I’m not hostile towards them, they work hard to have a better life.

As a result, the idea that there is currently a new economic elite in the PRC that unavoidable emerged during reform and opening-up era, which is a combined product of both past state institutions from the socialist era and more recent structures of wealth, has taken root in the popular imagination. This has particularly reflected in the term *heiling jieceng* (the black-collar class), in contrast to blue-collar (manual) or white-collar (office and middle-class) workers (Goodman 2014: 65). In addition, the “harmonious” values of the middle class contrast with the *heiling jieceng*¹²¹. This term refers to the increasing number of urbanites who are “early middle-aged, corporate types: males with black hair, dressed in black suits, dark ties and black

¹²¹ The concept *heiling jieceng* also is connected to a specific lifestyle —“living secret lives with concubines, having ties to the criminal underground (*heishehui*, or black society), and, most important, operating their businesses and exert their economic power in an opaque manner;” that is, “having hidden incomes, and engaging in shady (and sometimes illegal) collusion (from one side or the other) between officials and entrepreneurs or even” (Goodman 2014: 65-66; Li 2010: 77-78).

leather shoes; wearing dark glasses,” and “driving expensive and high-status, black (usually Audi) sedans, with no number plates (the number-plate holder thereby being black too), and never obeying traffic signs and regulations” (Goodman 2014: 65-66).

Other respondents also wish to clearly distance themselves, as do Mr. Wen and Mrs. Gong, from the perceived hatred towards the rich in Chinese society. Mrs. Tang also mentions, “Some wealthy people earn money for their intelligence and others illegally. You can’t treat them all the same.” Mrs. Kang continues reaffirming that they earned their wealth through merit, “It’s an interesting question, especially if we compare it with the poor because they try hard, but unsuccessfully,” and she adds:

Life is not the same ... People who are more successful aren’t necessarily smarter, and the smarter ones don’t always have the best of fortunes ... The whole country should be motivated because any commoner might have more possibilities to be successful [than someone belonging to the elite]. People like Steve Jobs or Gates, their success had a lot to do with their drive ... Mark [Zuckerberg] works 10 hours a day and the total distance he travels every year by plane equals circling the world several times. So, it’s reasonable that they are successful. On the other hand, they have more money which they can contribute to society.

Mrs. Wu, without entering a debate about hatred towards the wealthy, shares an opinion about them:

First, I’d say they’re skilful. The majority of them are skilful, ambitious and daring ... Some get rich through special means. In their case [the new rich], at least those who I know, owe their wealth to the internet. Liu Qiangdong [founder of the ecommerce heavyweight, JD.com] is also a new rich. Maybe they found a new way of earning money. They aren’t that old, some are under 30 and very rich. I really admire them ... They’re very creative and skilful ... compared to celebrities, the appearance of such people demonstrates society’s dynamics.

Mrs. Yin’s argument about the historic circumstance that gave rise to the new rich is similar with those given by Mr. Wen and Mrs. Wu:

China is in a period of transition, people become wealthy through different methods, there’s no one, single way. There are people who were simply lucky and seized the opportunity. If you want to copy them, and be rich and successful the same way, it probably won’t come true; you won’t get the same results twice ... During the transition from a planned economy to a market economy, nobody knew that if you participated and became a part of these companies, maybe you’d have been penalized in the future or become a millionaire; it was kind of uncertain ... Some took the leap and got rich, others [clears throat] are very smart, hardworking and know that, in the end, they can make a profit from these things, and so they invested ... [The richest of this group are the businesspeople] maybe they had savings, used all of it to set up a business, and were successful. They deserve it because they were successful, earned more money and offered jobs to people, like Ma Yun [founder of Alibaba] or Liu Qiangdong.

Mrs. Ai believes that these young individuals who have become rich recently through the tech industry “have put in a lot of effort to make a fortune, and I think that’s what we have to look at.” In general, when discussing about this economic class, Mrs. Ai speaks from her own experience, talking about her friends who “are very rich”:

From my experience and communicating with them, they're also very kind and you get used to some of them easily. Well, it's easy to get along with each other, and they also have their own problems they must face, as well as worries and family relationships they have to deal with, but they're simply normal people. The only difference is their money, but ... I think there are those who you can understand, but you can't live the way they do. I don't agree with some attitudes in China that turn them into enemies, or the negative comments towards them ... I think you have to have your own objective attitude, no matter if their rich or poor.

Mrs. Ren, on the contrary, admits to not knowing many members of the upper class:

I think everyone around me is middle class, we all have our professions, specialties and earn money through work. So, I don't envy wealthy people like Wang Sicong [businessman and son of the founder of Dalian Wanda Group, a property company]. They've made sacrifices and paid a lot for what they have. I'm happy with what I have. I've read a lot about Ma Huateng [founder of Tencent], and I think they deserve what they have ... [They] foresaw the future, and have wanted to show their potential and have put themselves at risk. They've taken risks and deserve what they've gotten.

Observational notes and case study material on middle class perceptions on inequality and distributive justice with regard to the dominant class also indicates a neutral held view. As we discovered above, while some informants, like Mr. Qiao's, display a critical perspective towards the subjective causes of inequality in any of its forms (wealth and poverty), other are more critical with one (poverty) and neutral with other (wealth). As we have discovered above, Mr. Yang is critical towards the subordinate classes for being "short-sighted" and having an "accumulative-focused vision", but with the wealthier citizens, he is more descriptive and does not see the causes of their wealth as he does when judging the poor: "Regarding rich people, there's a reason why they're rich ... It doesn't matter if it was through family, if it was some kind of talent, or some contact that's allowed them to become rich."

Also, Mr. Lu considered poverty as a sum of objective and subjective factors, but when he is asked about wealth, he perceives it simply as a material difference with respect to his personal situation: "If my parents were very ill, I could pay the cost of the treatment, at that moment I'd admire [the wealthy] because they have such money." Beyond these sorts of situations, however, Mr. Lu thinks what is important for him is that he can fulfil his necessities: "I don't have any issues right now with my children's education, and I can cover any hospital treatment and go anywhere. So, I don't think the rich are that different."

In this vein, Mr. Lai mentions some of the prosperous people's behaviour as opportunist, but he speaks of them without any moral judgement. "There are many wealthy people now, some were intelligent and took advantage of abandoned factories. They seized the initiative during the transition of commerce, and in the end, they became wealthy. That's why one's mindset is very important." To an extent, Mr. Lai feels admiration for those young multimillionaires, but he does not see them as a personal role model to follow: "I admire them, but it's not necessary for me to become one of them. While one's wealth grows, that person's moral opinions change, some of which I can accept, others not." Similarly, while Mrs. He discusses ambiguously about these new rich individuals by saying "I'm not going to follow their path," because "I believe they have their ways of making money," Mrs. Yao expresses herself more clearly when talking about businessmen, CEOs and Allen Zhang, the founder of WeChat, "I respect them because they're brave enough to take risks, ... but I don't really admire them"

Finally, Mr. Yi, the respondent who recognizes having more purchasing power than the rest of the respondents, avoids the topic concerning the dominant class, and his statement constitutes a clear Bourdieusian example about how the social being is defined through its relations with others. While being asked about the rich and poor, and despite distancing himself at first from this classification, he finally ends up defining his position by the distance or closeness regarding other social groups.

I'm thankful that my parents provided me with good circumstances and can use it to learn, to do something, to explore, for me, to improve myself, my own self. But I know that poor people don't have the resources; they have to study, work, have a routine life because they have to feed themselves, survive and eat. I don't have those kinds of concerns, that's why I'm very grateful.

Regarding the wealthy, he also responds by explaining the situation: "I'm not that kind of person, I don't know what worries them. Surely something must concern them, so I can't imagine how they live their lives, but, from my class, I don't want to stay surrounded by this fortune, [in] this fortunate life. I want to improve myself, make this fortune better." Mr. Yi would place himself "above the middle class, but not in the highest position. Not a millionaire, but..." Indeed, "the magnitude and intensity of 'wealth hatred'" in the new century have apparently provoked not only "legal and administrative measures" launched by the government "to protect the rich and their property," and "public campaigns to recruit private business people into the CCP," but also that the rich and many entrepreneurs felt "an acute sense of insecurity" (Zang 2008: 56, 58).

In the distributive realm, status acquisition is related to but distinct from economic resources or structural positions (Zang 2008: 54). However, it is clear the fact that the *hulianwang xingui* or successful business(men) enjoy a high level of respect, influence, and even esteem and admiration in most of informants. Such feelings are based on values such as hard work, sacrifice, risk, or just the fact that the emergence of rich people is the unavoidable cost to become a rich country. Some of these values, however, are also pointed out by many of the informants when talking about migrant workers—hard work, sacrifice, risk—, but the feelings for the disadvantaged groups experienced by them are not quite the same. How can we explain this? And how can we explain the counterintuitive pattern that on balance middle incomers are less critical of current inequalities linked to the emergence of great fortunes than the ones linked to the emergence of new forms of poverty and precarity? Is it simply the case that the individual middle-class subject in the PRC has been undergoing a process of an autonomous, economically calculative individualization, and for whom the accumulation of economic capital is his/her only concern? We do not think this is a plausible explanation. This study suggests that realities are more complex, and in fact our result point to other, more likely explanations.

The findings indicate that both the narrative of *suzhi*, and the binary—or exclusive—logic based on "the winners and the losers in the reform" can be one of the plausible explanations. Also, taking into account that, objectively, Beijing's middle incomers have many more advantages over migrant workers or rural residents, and that Beijingers—even those who migrate from other provinces in China—do not draw conclusions about distributive injustice of the current system by comparing with migrant workers or farmers in the remote towns, rather most likely they consider what has been happening to themselves, and to their friends and relatives in recent years, and they compare these life courses and expectations with the rich and poor people they see in the much wider and more complex, but also blurred and

ambivalent Beijing's stratification system —compared to those of current rural residents— in which they live now.

Although some of the informants come originally from small towns in other provinces, we need to remember that only two of them have parents who are farmers. Here again our findings coincide with part of the work by Han and Whyte on the social contours of distributive justice in the PRC.

So urban workers and members of China's middle-aged "lost generation" will be confronted on a daily basis with images of the lavish and privileged existence of the newly rich and the powerful, and as a result they may have a sense of their own insecure status and lost opportunities powerfully reinforced. Unlike villagers, urbanites face not only the potential rewards of upward mobility, but also the hazards of downward mobility into unemployment and poverty. Those with high levels of education and high incomes should have a lot to celebrate, but if they compare themselves mainly with their richest and most successful neighbors, rather than with the "masses," they may also come to emphasize the unfairness of current inequalities.

(Han and Whyte 2009: 210)

One final conclusion can be drawn from our survey results. Class in the PRC can be understood not only as a social relation constituted dialogically and relationally —middle incomers compare what has been happening to themselves and people they know with the daily images of the lavish and privileged existence of the newly rich and the vague, if not missing, images of "the poor"— through structural narratives and processes which create and reinforce distributive injustices and inequalities. Hence, power and relations of symbolic domination and subordination such as the narratives of *suzhi* or the binary logic of "the winners and the losers in the reform", are inscribed in bodies —e.g, migrant workers—, behaviours, aspirations, decisions and actions. As a result, class can be understood as an intersectional concept fashioned beyond the dual nature of class established by the grand narratives, from at a number of sites such as consumption, education, sexuality and expectations. In what follows, by elaborating an analysis on happiness' perceptions of middle incomers in Beijing, class is understood as an aspirational identity in terms of life satisfaction that re-produces representational practices as a conversion of forms of capital.

4.2.5 Happiness and social success

This section discusses the relevance of the concepts of happiness and social success from the point of view of social representation. Happiness is a basic emotion which is translated in a positive emotional state of mind and a satisfied perspective of life, as well as a human value in its own (Iancu and Hanțu 2010: 12). Social success "is the accomplishment or attainment of an individual aim or purpose related to fame, wealth, political power, and social status in her or his society" (Lee 2017: 2). The aim of this section is to evaluate how Beijing's middle incomers represent happiness and social success by analysing the descriptive process of the social representations of happiness and social success, according to two research methods: survey and content analysis.

Happiness

The concept of happiness used in this study stems from Veenhoven (2004), who perceives it as a synonym of subjective well-being (SWB), personal satisfaction and quality of life. The term SWB is only “a more scientific-sounding term for what people usually mean by happiness” (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000: 9; Diener 2000: 34, in Ludwigs *et al.* 2017). According to the *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*, launched by OECD in 2013, happiness (or SWB) is defined as “Good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences” (OECD 2013: 10). In order to look at measures of SWB of our informants, this section addresses two kinds of “subjectivity”: subjective substance and subjective assessment (Veenhoven 2007). Subjective appreciation, Veenhoven notes, “can be about different domains of life, such as work, family, or leisure” (2007: 224). The three main domains of the SWB are objective living conditions (Section 4.1), significance of average happiness and/or satisfaction with dimensions of life (this section), and the perceived quality of a society (Veenhoven 1996). With respect to the last item, we understand that the perceived quality of a society is seen as generalized social trust. As such, generalized social trust is a crucial component of social capital, not only to a variety of individual-level but also community-level outcomes as the previous section has evaluated and the following sections analyse—the social space of the community, nation branding, the social space of gender, security, and so on—. Also, we consider that SWB is also based on the individuals’ perceptions about their position within a hierarchy (Jackman and Jackman 1973).

However, since people appraise different aspects of life from numerous approaches and often combine aspects and appreciations, the design of our questionnaire intended to ensure that the informants answered openly and, therefore, avoid any predetermination of concrete domains to facilitate the maximum subjectivity possible. At the same time, during the interviews in Beijing, questions linked to the three domains of the SWB pointed by Veenhoven (1996) were raised, such as ‘Do you consider yourself happy?’, ‘Do you think China is a safe country?’, ‘What do/would you expect for the future of your children?’ or ‘Do you feel any pressure in your life?’ The answers were coded on a three-category ordinal variable following the Wang and Davis’s (2010) model, with 1 representing “happy” (65 per cent of respondents), 2 representing “just so-so” (23 per cent), and 3 representing “unhappy” (12 per cent).

Materialist and post-industrialist concerns

The most evident expression of happiness comes from Mr. Yi. “I’m very happy [because] I’m satisfied with my circumstances and with myself.” He refers to a Chinese idiom which says a person is happy in any situation if she/he does not desire much, “I don’t yearn for anything, which is why I think I’m content.” Considering that he is equipped with enough economic capital to not have to worry about his economic future, and due to the fact that he is the informant who expresses himself the happiest (“I’m very happy”), in his case, happiness and economic capital, or lack of “yearning for things,” are two converging variables. Indeed, to a greater or lesser extent, the association between happiness and material well-being is mentioned by most of our informants. According to the post-industrialism thesis¹²², “the

¹²² In general, the post-industrialism thesis, as Lin points, “is intimated to the New Class theories and claimed that the intelligentsia is on the road to power, instead the working class is weakened by the industrial upgrading and the transition to a service economy” (2008: 126; see also Chapter I).

importance of post-material concerns for happiness, relative to that of materialist concerns, is indeed higher in rich post-industrial societies” — “[p]ersonal autonomy and job creativity serve as indicators for post-materialist concerns,” while the income domain and concerns for basic needs serve as indicators for materialist concerns (Delhey 2010: 65).

Nevertheless, over a decade from 1990 to 2000, at the time when the PRC “experienced a massive improvement in living standards,” people’s SWB unexpectedly fell considerably. The percentage of the population that described itself as being “very happy” went from 28 per cent in 1990 to 12 per cent in 2000 (Wong, Wong and Mok 2006). This “combination cannot be explained by the ‘Easterlin paradox’ and stands in direct contradiction to the established notion that SWB increases most strongly when there are material improvements at low standards of living” (Brockmann *et al.* 2009: 403). Nowadays, social scientists generally agree that the relationship between material conditions and SWB “is curvilinear: at low living standards rising income yields great gains in happiness but these gains level off as incomes continue to rise” (Brockmann *et al.* 2009: 389).

Against this background, and considering that “the depressive effects of anomic and political disaffection are less pronounced” and less consequential for SWB in the PRC, Brockmann *et al.* suspect that the main reason of the profound decrease in SWB caused by financial dissatisfaction in China lies in the rapid transition from a planned subsistence economy — in which “the fulfilment of needs depended on political loyalty or family ties, and money mattered little— to capitalist economy— in which many areas of life like health care, retirement or education are commodified, money *does* matter. In capitalism money is the key to get goods, services, security and also social reputation — in short: for subjective well-being” (Brockmann *et al.* 2009: 389). In the case of the middle class, as the study of Brockmann *et al.* (2009) highlights, urban dwellers tend to equate SWB with “material well-being even more than rural residents do.” Also, among the three negative feelings studied — namely, subjective powerlessness, political distrust and financial dissatisfaction—, “financial dissatisfaction is the only one showing *both* an increase in its aggregate level *and* in the size of its negative effect of life satisfaction” (Brockmann *et al.* 2009: 398). For the most part these findings are similar to those obtained by our research on urban middle incomers: money matters more than feelings of powerlessness or political distrust for SWB.

Indeed, behind some narratives of “the winners and the losers in the reform” and personal fulfilment, money matters. For instance, Mr. Qiao, who considers himself “happy”, also remarks that as “Living in a city like Beijing can be very stressful because there are many people who want to take your place if you slack off,” and “if you don’t apply for a higher position, then you’re humiliated by others. So, achieving this will make you feel more at ease, being recognized by others, more money... In the end, you have more options in life.” Similarly, Mr. Lai’s explanatory statement very clearly sets out the reasons why material grounds are the source of his worries. He also notes that “housing is now an issue; it costs a lot of money, a whole lot.” Additionally, Mr. Lai mentions material anxieties particular to his generation, since when his parents were young, “The pressure my parents faced was much less! (*bu zouxin*) I think they were happy, they had innocent beliefs just adoring commander Mao, not us.” Moreover, Mrs. Tang, whose answer is one of the two assessments coded as “unhappy”, explains that “I’m not in a good moment in my life, but I try to be happy.” Although she works as an administrative office at the university, she considers herself poor. She states that Beijing is a very expensive place if you want to enjoy the food. She hopes to find a partner, get married, and have children. Sometimes, she considers moving back to her hometown and

leaving Beijing behind; after all, the only reason she likes her current job is because of her co-workers. Additionally, when she is asked about stress, she responds with apathy, “I don’t feel stress in my life because I don’t have enough money.”

In contrast, the importance of post-material concerns for happiness is also high in the informants’ assessments. For instance, the main reasons that Mr. Wen offers to show he feels happy are far from being only materialist:

I’m an optimist ... I’m an optimist first and foremost ... I’m happy! My parents, my relationship with them is harmonious, I love them and they love me. I have many friends who I communicate with frequently ... and I also have a stable income, which is why I’m not worried about the pressures in life. [laughs] There’s no huge weight bearing down on me.

Although Mr. Wen mentions at the end that he does not suffer from stress due to the economic stability he enjoys, the principle causes of his happiness are characteristic of someone without any major materialist anxieties, since he refers to familial ties and friendships as a primary source of satisfaction. Not only Mr. Wen, but also Mrs. Ai, and Mrs. Wu, mainly associate happiness with optimism and being a positive person, or not someone who habitually responds to situations in a melodramatic way. According to this point of view, happiness depends on one’s own personal attitude, meaning the subjective, and not the objective factors such as salary, education or access to suitable housing.

Similarly, Mrs. Wu, Mr. Lai and Mr. Qiao consider themselves happy persons, and indicate that happiness is the result of individual choice which requires responsibility. Mrs. Wu’s assessment shows a non-material view when saying that she has reached an equilibrium associated with stability and tranquillity: “I’m a happy person ... Most of the time, I’m a calm person, I don’t think about negative things or overreact. I don’t think too much, that’s why I think I’m happy.” Tranquillity, stability and the lack of material concerns for covering family needs are all features of someone who enjoys a life “under control” and without uncertainties, which is a *xiaokang* life. In the case of Mr. Lai, he points out that happiness “consists in taking good care of things within those ‘concentric circles’. A Chinese person’s life is like a concentric circle (*tongxinyuan*), meaning that each individual has the responsibility and ability to care for the things in each one of these concentric circles.” In the same vein, Mr. Qiao states that he is happy “most of the time,” but “I don’t think it makes sense to be happy or not, you have to adapt by yourself. If you share an interest with the world, it won’t be difficult to be happy because there’ll always be things that attract your attention. So, you just do what you want to do, what you like to do.”

Indeed, according to them, happiness is based on the achievement of individual objectives based on personal fulfilment and not on material concerns such as an apartment, a car and so on. That is, the importance of post-industrialist concerns for SWB is indeed high among our informants. It clearly indicates that something has changed between the middle class emerged in the 1990s and the one in the 2010s. This perception is similar to the discussions on poverty, when some informants argued it was a product of lack of effort. In other words, poverty and happiness are caused by one’s personal attitude or disposition. Indeed, “the message is that if you make the right choices and build up enough social and cultural capital you can achieve personal and professional success simultaneously in a virtuous cycle that reproduces itself” (Aschoff 2015: 93-94). Consequently, “by emphasizing individual strategies for success,” these perceptions “place the burden of success on the individual, in the process disguising societal

shortcomings as personal failures and blinding us to collective visions of change that challenge alienation and inequality” (Aschoff 2015: 14).

Mrs. He’s assessment summarises a general tendency among middle incomers in SWB: material concern is a strong factor in depressing life satisfaction, but at the same time post-industrialist approaches to evaluate SWB rises. Mrs. He focuses on the constant accomplishment of her personal objectives, which is the strategic accumulation of different kinds of capital, in order to evaluate her SWB. “There are different objectives depending on where you are in life. For example, I initially wanted to pass the National Judicial Examination (*sifa kaoshi*), and then study a doctorate’s degree, which I also got.” Currently, “I want to familiarize myself with all professional topics and be valued by my colleagues in the profession.” However, when asked if she feels any pressure in her life, the materialist worries emerge. “There are two aspects. The first, is work and my family, too. I have to care for them. The second is the economy, because life in Beijing is very expensive, and there’s pressure from my studies, too ... Pressure from [paying] the mortgage and schooling are the main costs.”

We observe the mutual reconfiguration of post-industrial concerns such as personal fulfilment on the one hand, and material concerns on the other, in a context of a fast-paced commodification of a growing number of areas in both public and private spheres —rapid industrialization, competitiveness of the labour force, globalization, economically calculative individualization, and urbanization. On that basis, Mrs. He’s accumulative aspirations of cultural capital are understood, according to Zhao (2012), within the context of Beijing’s inequality:

After a series of radical socioeconomic reforms in the mid-1990s, the Chinese state has overhauled the socioeconomic structure and dismantled the redistributive system. At the same time, it adopted different paces and strategies to develop markets in various economic arenas. This result in fragmented market environments characterized by heterogeneous institutional arrangements and distinct allocation mechanisms (Zhao and Zhou 2012). Consequently, multiple indicators of economic inequality —income, housing, consumption, and social welfare benefits—are embedded in distinct market environments and have different allocation processes: income becomes a more salient indicator of one’s economic position in the emerging labour market; housing is allocated via both market and organizational channels as housing was transformed from a public benefit into a private property through work organizations; consumption has been largely commercialized in a booming consumer market; in contrast, the social welfare domain is characterized by strong socialist legacies and undeveloped market mechanisms.

(Zhao: 2012: 435)

Indeed, a higher level of contextual inequality, which affects status perceptions and life satisfaction, not only increases status differentiation, but also heightens status competition and status insecurities among social members (Wilkinson and Pickett 2008). As a result, income becomes a more salient indicator when evaluating social status and “yields higher returns to one’s perceptions of social status and of the change in socio-economic status” (Zhao 2012: 448). However, in situations like the one created in Beijing after the surge in housing prices due to heated competition in the market —itself a consequence of contextual inequality—the indicators of social distinction are transferred to other areas as we have seen when analysing the non-material concerns of some of our respondents. In Mrs. He’s case, the

mechanism of social distinction most widely used and easily quantified is the accumulation of cultural capital.

Self-referential narratives and Pseudo-happiness

Happiness as a post-industrial social representation in urban China is mostly understood in terms of accumulation of both symbolic capital —such as prestige or personal fulfilment— and cultural capital such as the completion of a PhD. For example, Mrs. Yin refers to personal fulfilment when explaining that, despite already feeling happy, she still wants to achieve his dreams. “I’d like to research more out of personal interest. I’m now working on projects, and would like to write books. I think that’s my dream: to publish more.” Mrs. Ren, a 46-year-old university professor, explains why she feels happy after accomplishing a series of goals and professional requirements achieved based on effort and sacrifice. “I’m satisfied with what I have, with what I’ve received. Now I think that I’m a happy person in this period of time ... When I was doing my doctorate ... everything was truly difficult, not because of other reasons, but just because of the academic pressure.” However, she states, “I now believe that I’m enjoying the fruits of what I’ve paid for [laughs] in the past. I worked hard, too much during previous years, and now I’m simply enjoying the sweetness of those fruits [laughs].”

These words refer to a self-referential narrative based on personal perseverance as a generating element of well-being. This has also been detected in the response of other informants who share the same condition as migrants. Such self-referential narratives about subjective social status and status change also exert “a strong impact on subject well-being, even after individuals’ economic conditions are controlled” (Zhao 2012: 448). At the same time, factors such as personal income, housing values and the consumption of lasting goods also contribute to a more positive perception of the general state and of the changing of status, as exemplified by the cases of Mrs. Yin and Mrs. Ai.

Keeping in mind the results from the first section of this chapter, people with moderate incomes living in Beijing are characterized more by their geographic, rather than social, mobility. However, they consider “upward geographic mobility” —that is, migration to *Bei-Shang-Guang-Shen* or Tier-1 cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen— in terms of upward social mobility. According to the main empirical result from a study conducted by Jiang *et al.* (2012), city dwellers in China feel unhappy “with between-group inequality, as measured by the income gap between migrants without local urban *hukou* and urban residents, irrespective of whether they are urban residents with or without local *hukou*” (2012: 1191).

As a result, these testimonies and that of Mr. Bai when alluding to his life course — “I come from a small town, came to Beijing and I appreciate it very much. A competitive job for most people, but I think I’ve been successful in a way. I feel happy” —, all show their distinction from the rest of the migrant population once overcoming their unfavourable situation —apart from their economic and cultural capital, not having a local *hukou* when arriving to Beijing— which is why they form their social identity from a unique personal experience of overcoming challenges.

Theoretically, a situation in which inequality is overcome is a reflect itself as a prize for one’s effort. Hence, inequality could be positively understood as the manifestation of economic incentive and an opportunity (Jiang *et al.* 2012: 1191), as explained by Mrs. He when giving an opinion about the wealthy, “I know many rich people ... their wealth is due to their effort,

which motivates me to obtain more wealth in the future through work [because] being rich, I'll be in a better state both in the workplace and at home with my family."

In Mrs. Ren's case, she decided to study a doctorate when working as an English teacher at the university at the end of the 1990s for several reasons such as professional requirements, competition in labour market, personal fulfilment, and

the fourth reason was that I gave birth to my son in 2001, so you feel that everything is becoming settled, a stable family life. It was as if life was just that: family, teaching, daily life. It gives the impression of being very boring [laughs]; life will be like that for the next following years. I didn't want that, I wanted a change in my life.

When Mrs. Ren explains her feeling after having a child and seeing that "everything is becoming settled," it reflects the beginning of the post-material phase that many people with middle incomes had experienced over the last two decades in the PRC. It illustrates that, despite the increase in economic capital, her SWB declined. In similar vein, clearly the majority of statements coded as "just so-so" seems to be characterized by the link between the increase in economic capital and the decrease in SWB that Mrs. Ren has also experienced. Up to this point, Mrs. Ren and the respondents have all shown to be happy despite the pressure that most of them feel for material reasons. However, other participants do not show to be so happy. For instance, Mrs. Kang says:

To tell you the truth, having a family hasn't really been stressful for me, I'm lucky considering the circumstances of most Chinese households. My husband actively participates in domestic responsibilities and in the education of our son; he's contributed a lot ... Regarding family responsibilities, I don't have much to do. In terms of work, it's given me a little bit of stress, but it's not about whether I'm competent or not, but about knowledge ... I used to feel a lot happier before ... Now, not so much. I don't know if it's because of my age [laughs]. When my son was little or when I didn't have any kids, I just focused on my job and was happy."

Mrs. Kang also perceives that when contextual inequality rises, not only does the objective difference increase – economic inequality – but so does competition and insecurity of social actors with regard to their social status. This is evident when she begins discussing life in Beijing:

It's not easy, the stress of living is greater than before. You can tell with housing, the pace of work, and in children's education ... Beijing is full of smart people, many parents have received a very good education, many children grow up in that family, and competition for educational resources is very competitive for them ... If I had the chance, I'd go to Shanghai or Hangzhou [but] my son is in his first year of secondary school, and he still has six more years to get into college. I'm not going to think about that these next years.

For this reason, some testimonies quantify their happiness around 50 per cent. Although Mr. Bai is conscious of the virtues of his life as a professor, he does not say he is a happy person. Pace of work that he decided for himself has been a burden. "I'm only superficially content. Inside, I have huge pressure; I think I do it to myself, most of all ... Nobody has asked me to do anything other than teach classes or do housework, [the rest] is all my choice." We coded such statements as "just so-so" or "pseudo-happy," just as it was described in an online article issued by the *People's Daily* (2010) about middle class families in Beijing and Shanghai. It explores the idea that a higher level of contextual inequality not only increases differences in

status, but also competition and insecurity of the social actors in terms of their social status. This is consistent with the outcome of the investigation undertaken by Wilkinson and Pickett (2008) on the association between income inequality and population health. They suggest that “income inequality is more likely to influence health through processes of social comparison.” By understanding health as both physical and mental health, they conclude that “[i]t is even possible that there are 2 completely separate domains: health inequalities may reflect the direct effects of material living standards, and income inequality may reflect the psychosocially mediated effects of social comparisons” (Wilkinson and Pickett 2008: 699).

However, there is no consensus on the calibre of the relationship between happiness and inequality. As the controversial results of Knight, Song and Gunatilaka’s (2009) analysis show, there is a positive relationship between inequality and happiness due to the tunnel effect (Hirschman 1973), which causes wage inequality to potentially serve as a demonstration effect of the possibility of progress in the future.

High income inequality within a county need not give rise to feelings of relative deprivation—people’s orbits of comparison are too narrow for that. Instead, higher inequality might serve as a proxy for greater diversification in the county, in turn raising the prospect of greater opportunities for economic benefit. This ‘demonstration effect’ can occur at the individual level (e.g. by offering employment possibilities) or at the village level (e.g. knowledge that other villages have launched themselves into successful development can raise expectations of the successful development of one’s own village). Hirschman’s analogy of two lanes of cars stuck in a tunnel describes this phenomenon well (Hirschman 1973). The effect appears to be most powerful in the poorest thirds of households and provinces and more powerful for men than for women. The coefficient is twice as high for those whose reference group is beyond the village than for those whose reference group is within it: those with wider horizons experience a stronger demonstration effect.

(Knight, Song and Gunatilaka 2009: 644-645)

In the case of Mr. Yang, he speaks of his dissatisfaction when facing with the prospect of unfulfilled expectations and social conventions associated to a determined age, a well-known phenomenon present among the Chinese middle class. Additionally, his words also demonstrate how social pressures to find a partner, traditionally associated to women over 30 years old in China, is also pervasive among single men (see also Section 4.3). Mr. Yang, a 32-year-old Beijinger, argues,

I used to think I was someone happy, but as the years go by and I get older, I think I’m becoming more unhappy [because] I feel that I’ve lost something ... I’m losing my youth, time, and my parents, slowly but surely. My dreams haven’t been achieved either and I feel I bit nervous. If I compare myself to a few years ago, I was happier than I am now. I have more money now, but I’m not as motivated as before. I was more positive before ... [This is because of] age and time. Sometimes I look at my friends around me and see a whole, and they are those that can’t be filled. Like, for example, they all have their own families, which is part of your own dream. It’s not easy to have your own family, and I feel a little depressed.

The sensation of emptiness that Mr. Yang bring up is due to the “monetization of happiness” typical of the middle class during the 1990s and at the start of the new millennium. It is characterized by equating subjective well-being with material well-being. However, the relatively low happiness among the urban population, despite relatively high incomes and

expecting higher wages in the future, has to do with the nature of the urban society which has emerged in the past several years (Knight and Gunatilaka 2010). The feeling of relative privation occurs when individuals believe their achievements, or those of the group, are unjust. It refers to the emotional experience of injustice when comparing their situation with those who surround them and, specifically, with those who find themselves better off (Ayllón, Mercader and Ramos 2007: 137).

Certainly, the contours of happiness are not well mapped by assuming that the increase in income —or objective living conditions— automatically produce the increase in SWB. This confirms Zhao's study affirming "when social status is controlled, income has little explanatory power on happiness among all indicators of economic well-being" (2012: 448). As Mrs. Kang, Mr. Bai, Mr. Yang or, even Mrs. Ren suggest, the increase in income may produce the increase in apparent happiness or "pseudo-happiness" (*People's Daily* 2010). Brockmann *et al.* (2009) explain this pseudo-happiness phenomena due to the unexpected relationship between the increase in economic capital and the decrease in SWB by drawing on a specific version of relative deprivation theory, the concept of "frustrated achievers" (Graham and Pettinato 2002) in the PRC. The concept of frustrated achievers refers to people who have acquired higher incomes in absolute terms, but who are dissatisfied when it comes to their income position relative to the "winners" (Brockmann *et al.* 2009: 403). The economic growth during the 1990s brought with it an increase in inequality that stimulated social comparisons among middle-class citizens. This provoked many to feel discontented with their financial situation because, although they had increased their economic capital and wages drastically in absolute terms, a growing portion of the Chinese population was placed below the rising national income mean. Although "people tend to be happier if they think they outclass others, negative experiences seem to be more salient than positive ones: relative disadvantage makes people unhappier than relative advantage makes them happy" (Delhey and Kohler 2006; Surowiecki 2004, in Brockmann *et al.* 2009: 391).

It is remarkable, from an ideological standpoint that the cultural significance of economic success has completely changed in the PRC over the last four decades. As we have seen, it was considered immoral during Maoism, but in a market economy, "economic success has now become the prime goal of life: 'becoming rich is glorious' claims the new official doctrine — propagating a Confucian version of the Calvinistic predestination doctrine that gave rise to Western capitalism" (Brockmann *et al.* 2009: 403). Consequentially, "money means happiness in today's China, and that financial dissatisfaction is on the rise" (Brockmann *et al.* 2009: 403). However, is this equation still applicable today, or are we in a post-industrialist phase that characterizes societies which have left industrialization behind and reached a certain social status, in which the middle class does not depend on financial satisfaction? Does the initial materialist stage as a response to rapid economic growth, as seen in the PRC, provoke distinctive practices that endure in the lifestyles of those with "middle incomes"? Do other variables exist, such as relationships with family, friends, and neighbours, which may have a stronger impact on happiness than economic capital? These questions will be answered by analysing informants' assessments on social success in the following section.

Social success: hexie, 'wuzhi' and 'jingshen'

As we have seen earlier the social representation of happiness among middle incomers in urban China is based on both materialist and post-industrialist concerns. We can now turn to

an examination of the social representation of social success in order to see how the concept of happiness reviewed above is reflected in its composition and how this composition itself relates to social representations of accomplishment or attainment of an individual purpose in terms of prestige, fame, power or social status in Chinese society. From the data examined it would appear that there are epistemological connections between social success and the concepts of *wenming* or civilization as well as the notion of *hexie* or harmony. Such variables, which relate both to the cultural history of China, inform views on key social practices by affecting personal conduct in the PRC today.

Indeed, the legitimacy of the post-Mao communist regime, Tomba notes, “has relied on the simultaneous development of two aspects of civilization: material (*wuzhi*) and spiritual (*jingshen*)” (2009: 591). As Bakken notes, “roughly, material civilization represents the growth aspect of the model, and spiritual civilization the social control aspect of it” (2000: 119-120, in Tomba 2009: 591). At the same time, the concept of harmony is an ideal “constantly pursued by the whole of humankind and the social ideal of Marxism,” including the PCC as President Hu stated in 2006. Also, “Confucianism prioritizes the harmony of the self because it believes that individual harmony is the starting point for attaining all the others” (Solé-Farràs 2014: *xix*). This double variable of civilization and the key concept of harmony are present among the assessments of the informants in a general sense, especially when talking about *spiritual* development and financial reward.

As we have seen in Chapter III, the concept of “harmonious society” cannot be defined as mere paternalistic patterns of governance or a simple call for social order, “it argues for the conscious and rational removal of the causes (whether economic, social, or behavioral) of underlying conflicts, rather than for their institutionalization and repression;” it is, thus, “accompanied by a stress on individual behavior, self-improvement, virtues, and responsibility” (Tomba 2009: 594). It is part of a disciplinary regime with governmental techniques “that envisage the active participation of subjects and the agency of a wide array of players in a virtuous scheme based (when possible) on self-discipline” (Tomba 2009: 594). The concept of harmony therefore involves an emphasis in the individual behaviour of Chinese people, that is in their daily social practices and representations.

Improve myself every day, not regret the decisions I’ve made, be deserving of one’s life without regretting what would’ve happened in the past if I had chosen differently ... For me, it [success in life] is persevering day after day, and being able to work for myself, not for anyone else. Work for myself, and not waste my time.

As we have seen below, Mrs. Yi’s definition of success stresses on self-improvement, individual behaviour, virtues —such as perseverance, determination (“not regret the decisions I’ve made”), independence (“being able to work for myself”), productivity (“not waste my time”) and so on— and responsibility. With respect to the last item, Mr. Lai also argues that success consists of “living the way you want [drinks water]. Fulfilling family responsibilities so that they live well and, at the same time, have free time to do what one wants. I think that’s the life I want.” In similar vein, Mr. Lu also offers a description of success as he refers to a form of individualism manifested in the volume of symbolic capital and responsibilities towards others,

The greatest success is self-recognition, the satisfaction obtained from the confirmation of one’s values based on daily experiences. Since we have different values, the level of esteem varies. The second type is the recognition of others, that of family members and society ... It’s just that I think my life is divided into two parts, one being my role as a professor whose responsibilities include teaching, researching ...

This forces me towards a recognition of both my students, as well as my colleagues in the same field, [and] the other role is that of a husband and father. I need the recognition from my wife and my children ... These two types of recognition lead to self-recognition.

According to Mr. Cui, 52, one of the difficulties of the achievement of harmony consists of striking a balance between three aims. As such, Mr. Cui argues,

Success consists of three factors: ... the first is money, wealth, because at my age, I think that it's necessary to have a certain amount of money to live, like for a home, cars, etc. This is basic. Also, the amount of money can't be too little if you live in Beijing ... For example, if you want to have a house in Beijing, you need at least 500,000 RMB. If you want to buy one in a good location, you'll need 800,000 RMB. [The second thing you need for success is prestige], for example, some *new rich* can't be respected because they didn't gain enough prestige. This is related to one's personality, culture and taste ... [And] the third factor is harmony within the family. In order to be successful, you have to attain these three factors ... [In my case] I think that still don't have enough money, I don't have any luck with wealth. I think my prestige is fine right now and I have a harmonious family, but I still haven't reached a level of success regarding the first factor.

Such narratives of social success are based on the concept of harmony as a (family) responsibility and, separately, the individual behaviour by intensifying the "rhetoric of neoliberal developmentalism" that "becomes internalized as a fable of self-making, what Colin Gordon (1991: 44) calls the "entrepreneurialization of the self," in the production of human capital" (Anagnost 2004: 197). However, as Tomba points, harmony also defines a disciplinary regime, something dissimilar to the institutions of authoritarian rule which "increasingly adopts governmental techniques that envisage the active participation of subjects and the agency of a wide array of players in a virtuous scheme based (when possible) on self-discipline" (2009: 594). This self-discipline that can manifest as patience and persistence must be present in every venue possible in order to achieve not only success but also SWB, as indicated by Mr. Cui:

[Harmony] is important because it's like a gene within Chinese culture. If one wants to be physically and emotionally healthy, family plays a very important role ... If you fight with them, it consumes your energy and lose patience ... [I have friends who] frequently argue with their wife. One of them is very rich, but would fight with his wife and chose to live in a hotel, but he wasn't happy. So, he returned to her and feels better now. I learned from that experience.

As Romero-Moreno (2018) notes, it is clear the correlation between the Norbert Elias's (1987) definition of the "process of civilization" and the concept of *wenmin*, translated into English as "civil, civility, civilization, civilized or culture." On that basis, *wenmin* can be understood as a social phenomenon derived in the pacification of bodies, that is, the moralization of bodily expressions, social practices and representations of self-containment —such as "manners, etiquette or courtesy"— or self-discipline (Romero-Moreno 2018: 24). For example, China's 2013 Tourism Law for included some obligations for tourists to carry out "civilized tourism" by regulating, promoting and creating of civilized and well-behaved Chinese people (Beltrán 2017). Harmony, in its different meanings —such as balance, peace, equilibrium, stability, tranquillity or equanimity—, and the material and spiritual conceptualization of civilization, compose the formula chosen by most participants in order to achieve success. Consequently, in the same way as some respondents associate the material aspect with various elements —e.g., stable

incomes, economic accumulation, work—, the spiritual aspect of *wenmin* has also been shaped by the ontological view of Chinese thought and its multiple relational variables. As Mrs. He states,

Success consists of the balance between work, family and an ideal state, who you wish to be ... The ideal state consists of what you want to be like, you must strive to be that ideal person ... As I see it, as I reach that ideal state, I have a balance between family and work. That's success.

Mrs. Kang also sees “success in life as harmony of family ... Work is important, of course, but an individual won't be in the best state possible without happiness in the family, even if successful at work.” Mr. Wen's opinion is quite similar to those of Mrs. Kang and Mrs. He, but adds an essential element in the middle incomers' lifestyle when explaining his conceptualization of success: free time. “First, you have to be healthy, and *have a harmonious relationship with your family* ... And of course, you also need to have stable incomes and *be flexible with your time* [meaning] not working every single day. I have to have time to do the things that interest me.” He points out that he often goes to the gym in order to keep healthy, which is also related to Chinese spiritual practices¹²³.

These ideas shape the conception that Mrs. Ren has of success at 46 years of age: “At my middle age ... I think that having emotional and physical health, a stable and happy family, loving what you do ... That's what I believe to be success.” Additionally, most interpretations about Chinese contemporary governability are centred around the material aspect of civilization or *wuzhi* while the “spiritual” side —individual behaviours and commitment to the values of civility, order, and stability— has attracted less attention (Tomba 2009: 591). Nevertheless, as we have seen, on the one hand the material civilization represents the growth aspect of the model and, on the other, spiritual civilization represents the social control of it” (Bakken 2000: 54, in Tomba 2009: 591) through the ideal of self-discipline (Tomba 2009; 2014). This binomial conceptualization can be observed in Mrs. Yao's statement in saying,

“Success in life for middle-aged people means understanding the true meaning of life and accepting it, not fighting against it [smiles]. Not fighting against what has been socially established, *the social trend* ... Society, human nature, must be understood. Accept it, try to accept it, and change a little ... It [success] is a kind of serenity, spiritual serenity, even when you're sad. You'll say, 'OK. It'll go away. It's just temporary. You know, it's just the way life is, ups and downs. It's fine.’”

In the strict sense of lifestyle practices, *jingshen* refers to the *spiritual* benefits that *yangsheng* practices (the art of “cultivating one's life” or healthy practices) contributes to who practice them. The *yangsheng* practices that are developed by the *jingshen* —in other words, the healthy practices which improve well-being— are ancient practices such as medicine, sexual exercises, self-cultivation, exercise and government. They became fashionable in 1990s Beijing society in the form of varied corporal practices, which were portrayed in the media as follows: from *new age* practices and belly dancing to “personal development” readings, play chess with friends, wellness techniques like *xiuyang*, exercises, traditional Chinese or imported religious

¹²³ When talking about this concept of spirituality or *jingshen*, it must be borne in mind that ‘spirit’ or ‘spirituality’ are inadequate translations into English for the term *jingshen*, due to the Christian connotations of the word in European languages (‘spirit’, ‘esperit’, ‘espíritu’, ‘esprit’, etc.). Hence, “words that convey *jingshen*'s sense a little better, although less comprehensively, are liveliness, positive feelings, intentionality, will, or (good) mood” (Farquhar y Zhang 2005: 312).

practices, photography, arts and crafts, improvisation classes where people were bound to “discover themselves,” quiet-sitting meditation at the park, ballroom dancing, choral singing, visiting art galleries, etc. (Farquhar and Zhang 2005; Rocca 2017: 135-7). These “tried and true approaches to diet, daily regimens, warm clothing, and general outlook” compose the “public life and common lore” that “are the readily available appearance of the life of *yangsheng*” and serve as indicators for post-materialist concerns (Farquhar and Zhang 2005: 307). Indeed, by referencing to spirituality as an important dimension of the middle class lifestyle, Rocca points that “[a]ccording to Chinese scholars, China follows the path described by the ‘post-industrialism’ theorists: in the course of modernization, middle incomers discover that life is not restricted to its material aspect” (Rocca 2017: 135).

As we have argued previously, once material necessities have been satisfied or, at least the most basic ones, the informants seem to express feeling an emptiness or hollowness that characterize post-industrial societies. Thus, according to the middle-class narrative of the *jingshen* lifestyle, the only way to fill this emptiness would be through spiritual development, as Mrs. Yao explains when she decided to convert to Christianity fifteen years ago.

I was searching for a truth, the true meaning of life’s value ... I began to think about life when I was in my thirties and thought, ‘Where do we go after leaving this world? What’s the point in repeating one day after the next? If professional or economic success is achieved, what does it mean?’ In the end, we will leave this world and I found Jesus. So, I think that the meaning of life is to not continue struggling, combatting. You’ll feel fine, that you know where you’re going and you already know how to understand life; I understand how to build a family [and] the most important thing for me is that I serve people, serve others. When I teach a class, I try to teach the best way possible. I help my students or, when I’m with my family, I try my best to make them feel at home [smiles].

If spiritual development implies a series of distinctive practices which indicate that those who practice them have disposable time and income to develop them, sensibility to enjoy them and a *habitus* to represent them. Therefore, it may suffice to cover the necessities of the middle class. Certainly, such social practices are a manifestation that the post-material stage has been reached, and that personal fulfilment or, in the case of Mrs. Yao, spiritual development are the new indicators for SWB. The search for happiness —that is, harmony, Jesus, normative family, professional prestige and so on— is a crucial activity as expressed among the informants. For many of them, such narratives are used to describe new forms of social self-identification, proving the increasing importance of leisure in the construction of identity in the PRC.

Similar findings were made by Rocca (2017) in interviewing Qinghua students in Beijing. Only 20 per cent “of Tsinghua [Qinghua] students consider accumulating money to be an important goal in life, and 14 per cent to have power. For the vast majority of students, non-material goals are prominent: having a happy life and a happy family, seeking an ideal, developing the self and so on.” For many of them, Rocca notes, “development and modernization seem to be parallel goals” (2017: 136). This new concept of leisure is embodied in *yangshen* practices, causing and reinforcing the transfer of such spiritual narratives to other areas. This can be seen in the link established by Mr. Qiao between social success and one’s professional career.

[Success in life consists of professional] recognition from both yourself and those you love. [Although] I don’t think a lot about it, I’m not very ambitious. As a matter of fact, I don’t have a very clear definition of what success is because I don’t care much, but I am trying to have a better job position now ... Knowledge is the most important thing. I

always want to be the one who can answer the most questions asked about my field of expertise. It's very difficult sometimes. Sometimes people have to worry about their job, their salary, what others think, so knowledge is not like food ... It's not the only [important] thing, but it's the most valuable. I need to balance between a position within this company or organization, how others see your achievements and ... salary, because you only be free with a salary that's good enough ... Freedom! ... Freedom to choose what you really want to do in your job, in your career, without having to worry about basic necessities, such as food, medical coverage and so on ... Freedom is a sensation, it doesn't mean being totally free ... I believe that being totally free is not necessarily a good thing ... I think I can be more successful, but I don't want to push myself to try harder. Actually, I already quite a lot of effort at the moment, a lot, but there are things I could do to be even more successful.

Thus, Mr. Qiao's words express an understanding of social success which is neither the result of *guanxi* nor collective work. Rather, according to Mr. Qiao's narrative of personal fulfilment, social success results from meritocracy and individualization. Indeed, one of the most evident tendency among informants when discussing *guanxi* in Chinese society is that, although most agree that it is important, upon further discussion, they claim there are different reasons as to why it is losing relevance in certain sectors of the populace and in certain areas of the country today. This opinion is held by 36 per cent of those interviewed in this study. They perceive it as a positive phenomenon, and that it simultaneously manifests the individualistic and meritocratic aspirations in their testimonies. While Mr. Cui sees population size as a determining factor of *guanxi*'s effectiveness — "In small places, if you want to be successful, *guanxi* is influential, but in big cities like Beijing being prepared, having skills, is a lot more important" —, for Mr. Wen, it is a generational issue: "I think *guanxi* carries less importance for our generation because people in my age group are independent. We have our way of doing things. We believe we can depend on our capacities, our knowledge and our skills to be successful, [and] not just on connections." Finally, the professional sector and social sphere in which an individual moves around also has a determining factor for *guanxi* as Mrs. Ai argues, "At least in the university, because we do a lot of things with students, we don't need a lot of *guanxi* or contacts to fix problems, we must be focused on publishing... but I think that in some cases like in agencies or government departments, they matter more if you compare them to working at a university."

In addition, as we have seen in Chapter III, the Chinese Dream promoted by President Xi aims to foster the belief that one can change her or his own destiny through intelligence and hard work or, as Mr. Qiao highlights, through knowledge and self-control for pushing himself to try harder. Moreover, the achievement of self-reliance (*zi li geng sheng* or 'regeneration through one's own efforts') is an important Chinese goal which has passed from being a slogan about collectivist ideology — "Mao Zedong's approach to achieving this goal after 1960 was to advocate and practice economic self-sufficiency both within China and nationally" (Tisdell 2013: 239)— to one competition in daily life (Yan 2009: xvii).

Overall, *yangsheng* practices have become one of the joys of dwelling in the mainstream for the Beijing middle incomers, and one of the clearest ways to show social success. The results of the survey on pleasure, sovereignty and self-cultivation in Beijing conducted by Farquhar and Zhang Lei's (2005) showed that, for many Beijingers, "the chief pleasures in life have to do with conformity, obedience, regularity, the predictable comforts of home, the intimate joys

and challenges of family and neighborhood, and even the patriotic glow arising from the practice of good citizenship” (2005: 308). Mrs. Wu, without abandoning the narrative of harmony, refers to those daily pleasures enjoyed with family members as constituting success, “In every moment, one has a different opinion. When I was younger, I wanted to develop my career, advance in my workplace and improve my professional skills. I wanted everything to be alright [but] now that I’m older, I prefer a balance between work and family.” In fact, Rocca notes (2017: 136), both social success and happiness can “blossom” not only at work but also in the family. Mrs. Ai also places success within the realm of daily life, far from the achievement of costly material or spiritual objectives, “Success is something that I can do best in job, teaching and doing research, while also being the best mother for my son and buying most of the things that I like...I think. I want to say that financial independence, and yeah, I think it’s that; it’s very simple.”

The middle class has always been a celebrated example of a society’s belief in success won from hard work (Wheary *et al.* 2007: 3) and the quality of “making something of yourself” (Hutber 1976; Deane 2005: 2, 12, in Hsiao and Wan 2013: 123). In the survey, we asked the informants semi-structured questions on the meaning of social success and happiness. The findings indicate that the group of Beijing’s middle incomers is not homogeneous due to the high variance of their material and post-industrialist concerns, on the one hand, and to the variety of the material and spiritual aspects of civilization. The search for social success and happiness produces a set of social practices and representations among the informants. For many of them, such lifestyles are used to describe new narratives, proving the increasing importance of leisure in the construction of identity in the PRC. There is also growing evidence that the relationship between happiness and the assorted conceptual features of social success reflects, in no small part, their codetermination by material concerns and, in particular post-industrialist representations, which manifests itself in people’s daily practices.

4.2.6 Celebrities: the new prophets of capital

Celebrity has become a pervasive aspect of everyday life in present mediatized societies, and a growing field of academic inquiry (Jeffreys and Edwards 2010). While some experts still see in celebrities the personification of trivial and deplorable aspects of popular culture, there is an ever-growing interest to comprehend the ways in which cultural and economic changes have created a mass media industry of celebrities, as well as an interest in analysing the celebrities’ social functions, particularly their relation with new forms of individual and community identity. Certainly, celebrity has become a valued resource to be used in power struggles (Driessens 2012: 641-2). In fact, there is growing debate about the role celebrity culture plays on social cohesion and identity formation (Marshall 2010; Sternheimer 2011; in Driessens 2012). Despite the extent of celebrity studies in Europe, the Americas and Australia, there is no parallel body of work for the world’s most rapidly expanding cultural marketplace: the PRC (Jeffreys and Edwards 2010: 1).

At the same time, “a new generation of storytellers” has emerged to tell people “what’s wrong with society and how to fix it.” The most powerful of these storytellers are not poor or working people, they are part of the economic elite. They are what scholar Nicole Aschoff calls “the new prophets of capitalism” —e.g., Bill and Melinda Gates (creators of the Gates Foundation),

“who decry poverty and inequality,” and Sheryl Sandberg (CEO of Facebook), “who laments persistent gender divides, but they are not calling for an end to capitalism” (2015: 11, 9). Their celebrity status gives them discursive power or a voice that cannot be ignored (Marshall 1997: x), and it is supposed to function as a general token of success (C. E. Bell 2010: 49, in Driessens 2012: 642) both outside and inside the United States.

This section focuses on the relationship the Chinese middle incomers have with new forms of social identity, that is how they, as individuals —or indeed collectives—, identify themselves in the social world. It is about how middle incomers “understand and interpret” themselves and those around them, “how others likewise and how, as a consequence, issues of difference and similarity arise” in urban China today (Parker 2009: 150). As social identity involves internal and external definitions of the self, celebrity figures and “prophets” do not emerge in a social vacuum (Jenkins 2008). Rather, “they are products of the cultural, political and historical circumstances upon which their very existence depends” (Parker 2009: 150). In short, we aim at analysing how social identities are constructed and reinforced in social figures, exploring notions of class, gender, ideology and nationalism in urban China.

On that basis, the respondents’ references of famous personalities are significant from a cultural and sociological perspective. Celebrities who engage in charitable activities —such as Zhou Runfa and Priscilla Chan— were mentioned by four among the interviewed, and scientific/academic figures like Stephen Hawking were also put forward by other four, constituting the two groups of famous individuals most admired by our respondents. Some famous sports personalities and athletes were also mentioned. Here again, one must consider the academic nature over-represented in our sample, in order to interpret the fact that scientists and academics occupy first place among the most admired celebrities. Next, among the famous figures referenced by the interviewees, those who occupy second position were only mentioned by three individuals, and they consist of: 1) historical figures of the PRC, such as Zhou Enlai, Lei Feng and Mao Zedong; 2) athletes with a large following, such as NBA players and “any Olympic athlete”; 3) artists, such as singers, novelists and actress Fan Bingbing. Finally, two of the women interviewed did not give any names at all. One of them mentions an anonymous woman who is active on the social media app *Wechat*’s timeline, called *Moments*. The other admires famous people just for their fame, and avoids providing any specific names. It should be highlighted that athletes and artists are chosen only by men —representing 50 per cent of the subjects interviewed— while the other 50 per cent were women who put forward names of academics and scientists, celebrities who do charity work and historical figures —all of which were mostly mentioned by women.

For the most part of our findings is similar to those obtained by Jeffreys and Edwards (2010) in his discussion of celebrity in the PRC. Indeed, celebrities in China, as in other parts of the world, “are admired not only for their perseverance, accomplishments good deeds, but also for their wealthy lifestyle and status-giving consumption of luxury brand products” (Jeffreys and Edwards 2010: 18). In the current world, as David Marshall suggests, the famous are more idols of consumption rather than idols of production (1997: 10). One of the characteristics of the PRC is the cultural emphasis on savings and group orientation which implies that wealth possession be a certain responsibility with the community (Jeffreys and Edwards 2010: 18). This may explain why 20 per cent of participants mentioned celebrities associated with philanthropy. In this context, and taking into account the majority opinions, first we address the celebrity philanthropy phenomenon and the statements that mention scientific/academic

figures. Later, all other social figures will be evaluated by considering them as products of the cultural, political and historical circumstances in the PRC.

Celebrity philanthropy

Interviews conducted in Beijing reveal that the most cited is the actor from Hong Kong, Chow Yun-Fat (*Pinyin*: Zhou Runfa), who is the only celebrity mentioned by more than one informant —three in total—, particularly due to his charity work, his image as a humble and approachable —high quality or high *suzhi*— person and his harmonious relationship with his wife. As Mrs. Kang notes,

First, he's donated most of his income to a [charitable] foundation. Second, although he doesn't have any children, his relationship with his wife has always been good. As a star, he's never been a yellow journalism celebrity, nor been involved in any scandals. Third, some of his works are classics, which means he's a great actor ... Fourth, he seems to be very clever. When interviewed, he has a very smart composure ... I've also read articles that say when he runs around in cities [he's a *running* enthusiast], he takes pictures with locals. He's very kind; he doesn't put himself on a pedestal.

First of all, as we have seen before, celebrity philanthropy is a phenomenon originating from Western liberal democracies —“since 1954, the UN has recruited famous people, for example actor Danny Kaye, to obtain funds and support for its causes,” but “celebrity philanthropy has expanded and altered in character in western societies since the 1990s.” Celebrity culture “shapes our thought and conduct, style, and manner” and “[i]t affects and is affected by not just hardcore fans but by entire populations whose lives have been changed by the shift from manufacturing to service societies and the corresponding shift from plain consumer to aspirational consumer” (Cashmore 2006: 6). In particular, celebrity philanthropy has expanded since the 1990s due to a combination of factors such as “the post-Cold War triumph of neoliberalism and the decline of the welfare state ideal; ... the increasing dependence of the not-for-profit sector on marketing, branding and public relations to compete for funds; ... the failure of governments to resolve the structural inequalities associated with globalization,” and “the pervasiveness of celebrity culture in everyday life,” among others (Jeffreys 2015: 21-22).

Despite the importance the interviewed give to the phenomenon of “celebrity philanthropy”, most research about it concerns Western cases —mostly, the focus of attention of academics has been the sponsoring of charities, donations or the creation of personally financed private foundations (Jeffreys 2015: 571). The debate surrounding this phenomenon pitches those who argue that a celebrity's fame helps create awareness for certain social issues with critics who insist that celebrity philanthropy only rationalizes inequality, depoliticizes it and even reinforces poverty, alienation, oppression and the environmental degeneration (Bishop and Green 2008; Kapoor 2013; Aschoff 2015). This would appear to be the case of Mrs. He, who contributes a monthly donation to a foundation, covering a child's education who lives in a poor rural area. However, it could also influence lifestyles in the form of distinctive practices for assimilation. Further, Fullilove argues that philanthropy allegedly is no longer focused on the sufferers and their plight, but rather on the personal philanthropic experiences of celebrities and donors (2006, in Jeffreys and Allatson 2015: 28). In similar vein, Harris states that celebrity philanthropy consequently is condemned as symptomatic of the individualistic, overly commercialized and unequal nature of modern (western) societies (2003: 5).

MR. Cui, a fervent *running* enthusiast, alludes to this practice he shares with the Hong Kong actor as a reason for his interest in the celebrity (“He’s very well-known among *runner* communities”). His interest also stems from the belief that Zhou Runfa personifies the concept of success that Mr. Cui had explained in the previous section of this study, saying:

[Zhou Runfa] ran in Beijing, in the same park that I go to, and in Chaoyang Park. Many people saw him and I read an article about him which said he works hard to earn money, support his family. This is related to the first factor when I spoke about success ... He has a good relationship with the entertainment industry, which is related to the second factor. [Finally] he has a good relationship with his wife, although they don’t have children, and this is related to the third factor. On top of that, he does charity work, donates his money to the country and wears sports shoes that only cost 50 RMB. His donations reach 100 million RMB.

Despite “[c]elebrity philanthropy in the PRC is further informed by Buddhist notions of compassion and the Confucian virtue of humaneness, whereby the privileged bear responsibility for the less fortunate,” and it “balances widespread public resentment of those who appear to have come by their wealth too easily in the reform period flowing from the former socialist emphasis on egalitarianism and the growing existence of socio-economic inequalities” by ensuring that parts of their wealth are shared with those less fortunate” (Jeffreys 2008; Zang 2008, in Jeffreys and Edwards 2010: 18-9), the fact that 20 per cent of informants point to a public figure for his or her charity work is not a coincidence. Moreover, celebrity philanthropy balances general public resentment during a period of growing socio-economic inequality towards those who have apparently accumulated their economic capital with exceeding ease during the reforms that took place after an era characterized by its socialist emphasis on egalitarianism (Jeffreys 2008; Zang 2008). This way, wealth in the PRC is legitimized by presenting it “as the result of hard work and ingenuity and by ensuring that parts of it are shared with those less fortunate” (Jeffreys and Edwards 2010: 19). Indeed, such narratives are present in Mr. Cui’s statement when saying “he [Zhou Runfa] works hard to earn money, support his family” and “he does charity work, donates his money to the country.”

Mrs. Yao also seems to refer to Zhou Runfa when discussing about a famous Hong Kong actor who “has built primary schools in underdeveloped zones to try and help children.” She later mentions the actress, Yuan Li, for similar reasons: “I admire these people, what they do helps people.” The fact that Mrs. Yao is a follower of Christianity might relate to why she points to “people who do charity work” when prompted to name celebrities she looks up to. In her response, she comments, “for historic figures, I admire Mother Theresa [laughs], and now I admire Bill Gates, Zuckerberg and their global charity foundations [and] also stars like wealthy Hong Kong and Taiwan businessmen, as well as some actors who get involved in charity.” The Gates and Zuckerberg “do not promote their vision of a better world for personal financial,” rather “[t]hey do it because they want to and they believe their vision for fixing social problems is true and effective ... their true believer status, combined with their aura of competence (derived from their “magical” ability to accumulate wealth),” gives their narratives widespread appeal and makes them prophets as Aschoff notes (2015: 11).

From Mrs. Yao’s response, we can see that seeing the famous as social figures to be admired is a phenomenon which presents itself with a double-current: as a self-projecting projector and, simultaneously, as a screen on which we project ourselves as Cashmore noted below (2006: 6). Therein lies the singularity of this tool: it provides a more direct understanding of how we re-invent ourselves as individuals and as a society; “how we imagine the possibilities of the

world we live in, its ethical and moral dimensions and specific social practices” (Jeffreys and Allatson 2015: vii). This more social current of celebrity philanthropy also refers to the current historical moment, since charity and the very concept of celebrity are recent phenomena in China. However, philanthropy is also part of the official discourse of middle class and the notion of civilization. Elaine Jeffreys (2015: 575) has studied this subject thoroughly and states that since 2005, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the PRC has also promoted philanthropy through a system of prestigious annual charity awards (*Zhonghua cishan jiang*). These “awards are presented to government officials and other individuals for their charitable activities, with private entrepreneurs and leaders of state-owned enterprises receiving awards for the recorded extent of their donations” (Jeffreys 2015: 575).

In the aftermath of May 2008 Sichuan earthquake, “Hu Jintao (PRC President, 2002-12) became the first leader of the PRC to introduce philanthropy as important to China’s modernisation when he announced the winners in December 2008” (Jeffreys 2015: 575). For example, top sports and commercial entertainment stars were more commonly listed on the China Charity Ranking in 2005 (*Zhongguo cishan bang*), launched by the *China Philanthropy Times* (<http://www.gongyishibao.com/>). Moreover, “the Rankings recognise corporations and entrepreneurs according to the documented extent of their donations” (Jeffreys 2015: 575); in 2015 business(men) tycoons such as Huang Rulun or the “self-made businessman” Niu Gensheng were the most prominent philanthropists listed on the top ten charity ranking (*shida cishanjia*). Entertainment stars such as the Hong Kong singers Charlene Choi and Gillian Chung, or actor Ray Lui are also listed on the ranking in 2015.

This explains why almost all the celebrities pointed out that do charity work —except for Mother Teresa— belong to the entertainment and business sectors. This reflects the efficacy of government encouragement for positive media coverage of philanthropy at certain times — and to neglect others— despite of the motivations and “authenticity” of celebrities as donors and fundraisers have been criticised in multiple media (Jeffreys 2015: 576). Indeed, this media coverage and visual dimension of fame provokes reservations with Mrs. Ai regarding celebrities:

You normally see them on television, but I think it’s just one side of their lives, you can’t see the whole picture. You can’t tell if their true values or understanding of the world are the same as yours, you know? We only see what they show the outside world. [That’s why] I don’t admire any particular celebrity.

Additionally, “Chinese media interest in celebrity philanthropy reflects not only the growth of a commercial celebrity industry, but also the dominance of government-affiliated charities in China” (Jeffreys 2015: 576). Nevertheless, as we have pointed out before, the Hong Kong actor is not the only personality admired for his charity. Mrs. Ren names Priscilla Chan, the wife of the Facebook co-founder, as a famous person she looks up to:

She [Priscilla Chan] is a lovely person ... She has the ability to love and give love, and is very independent, clever, and very intelligent ... She has a very good education and academic achievements and good family relations. I think she never, never bothers other ... She’s dedicated a lot to social programs; together with her husband [Mark Zuckerberg], they donate 99 per cent of Facebook [to] charity. They give a lot for education development or medicine. They want to make this a better world; it’s their mission. I believe she’s a wonderful person, people like her are a blessing from God. [smiles] A gift from God to our world ... She’s the kind of person I can learn a lot from, not because she’s rich or because she’s well educated, but because of her great heart.

The portrait Mrs. Ren makes of Priscilla Chan as a lovely person with a very good education, and an independent, clever woman who “never bothers other,” helps to understand the model of woman that the Party-state aims to promote. Whereas during an era dominated by the ideological formulations of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought “the typical model woman was a skilled and committed worker who had overcome all sorts of obstacles and achieved a position of eminence in her chosen occupation,” in the post-1978 era of market-based economic reform women’s liberation “has little place in the construction of a ‘harmonious society’” and in the direction of fulfilling the Chinese Dream —the PRC’s new political goals. Hence, women’s emancipation, Guo notes, “almost inevitably involves rigorous bargaining, confrontation or the transformation of oppressive status orders and value systems, which are not congenial to social harmony, whereas social harmony can be achieved through subservience” (“never bothers other”), compromise (“She’s dedicated a lot to social programs”), self-denial (“very good education”) or self-sacrifice, as traditional Chinese wisdom teaches (Guo 2010: 64).

In a similar vein, conservative views on women’s role in society and the family have even become integrated into Xi’s Chinese Dream by promoting “a masculinist, nationalist vision of a strong, rich China that is aggressive in pursuing its territories interests, and prioritises educated urban male, hi-tech, creative industries jobs rather than the production-line jobs of migrant rural women that have built the reform-era economy so far” (Hird 2017). Additionally, this gender identity is significantly constructed through the acts of female “others” such as Priscilla Chan and her “ability to love and give love” and her dedication to social programs “together with her husband.” This vision of gender identities “fits a growing neo-familism in Chinese society in which women’s career interests are largely subordinated to their husband’s and whose primary duties are domestic” (Hird 2017).

Scholars, sporting celebrities, memorabilia and artists

Due to the academic nature in our sample, scientists and academics occupy first place among the most admired celebrities, together with philanthropist celebrities. Next, among celebrities referenced by the respondents, those who occupy second position were only mentioned by three individuals, and they consist of: 1) historical figures of the PRC, such as Zhou Enlai, Lei Feng and Mao Zedong; 2) sport stars such as NBA players and Olympic athletes; 3) artists, in particular singers and novelists. With respect to individuals, Rojek points, there are three types of celebrity: *ascribed celebrity* “refers to social impact that reflects bloodline, whereby hereditary titled individuals,” such as queens and emperors “and so forth are positioned in the social hierarchy to automatically command enlarged respect and deference;” *celetoids* are individuals who attain intense bursts of fame due to the pivotal role of media communication (tabloids) in the process of becoming a celebrity; and *achieved celebrity* “refers to social impact that derives from recognized talents and accomplishments” such as the scholars mentioned by our respondents, and “successful sports stars, musicians, actors, comedians, and authors are pre-eminent in this social category.” (Rojek 2015: 1).

On the one hand, our findings indicate that some of the respondents, as Mrs. Li and Mr. Lu, understand the concept of celebrity as “a quality of individuals” or “the accumulation of attention capital” and/or social capital (Rojek 2015: 1). Hence, Mrs. Li states, “I’ve never wanted to live other people’s lives”, but she admires Stephen Hawking because “he’s and optimistic and passionate. He communicates with netizens and appears on television.” Mrs. Li

admires in Stephen Hawking for the embodiment of fame that he represents. She expresses this when referring to the scientist's representative dimension and media coverage, pointing to his communicative capacity through the Internet and television.

Mr. Lu also refuses to name someone famous for similar reasons, "Many stars or well-known figures project kindness because society demands it," and "I don't know any of them in person, I don't know what they're like in private." However, Mr. Lu explains that the first thing he notices in someone is if he/she transmits good energy (*zhengnengliang*), and admires those who treat other as equals, without differences:

Among the people I know, my PhD Supervisor is one example of someone who wields a lot of authority in his field. For me and other classmates ... he's a very kind and friendly, treats others as equals, and is always happy. The biggest difference between him and me is that I can't treat others the same way without thinking about who they are, so I admire him. He's someone I look up to.

On the other hand, trailing behind celebrities doing charity and researchers, which are the most admired by the respondents, are the athletes, historic PRC figures and artists. Regarding athletes, basketball star Stephen Curry is mentioned by Mr. Yi because, although "he's not physically as good as his teammates, he's very skinny and short, and he's been named MVP twice thanks to his own effort." Perseverance once again appears a constitutive element of an admired public figure, but it is not the only concept related to success in life which was previously discussed. Mr. Qiao also lists the values he most respects when selecting the Olympic athletes he looks up to the most:

[I admire] any athlete who is capable of competing in the Olympic Games. They're people who I admire ... it's a moment of great personal perseverance ... I've always wanted to be an athlete, ever since I was a child, because I like sports ... It's a very nice thing. [Also] winning is very good – competing against others and meeting people at competitions – making friends at those games is fantastic ... Sports aren't necessarily physical. They require a lot of wisdom, and help people improve both physically and mentally.

As such, Mr. Qiao's testimony demonstrates the duality between the material and spiritual aspects, or physical and mental dimensions, discussed in the previous section when analysing the concept of civilization. These two aspects are at the core of the "civilizing process" which has overwhelmed society in the PRC (Rocca 2017; Tomba 2009; Romero-Moreno 2018). This civilizing conversion can only be driven if the nation can overcome its own obstacles through "personal perseverance," and be victorious ("winning is very good"). The discourse surrounding sports reflects that "[m]asculinity has so dominated the rules of the game, who plays and who wins," due to patriarchal values that "are perpetuated by decision-making that excludes women's participation and marginalises women's (Cinderella) sports" —such as netball or synchronized swimming. As a result, male sports like soccer and basketball "have not only taken over the playing field but become national symbols of unity" (Burnet 2001: 71) and, in the case of patriarchal societies such as the Chinese, the existing parallelisms between social representations and the ideological lines followed by the Party-state are obvious.

In Mr. Wen's case, who declares himself an "NBA fan," emphasizes another ideal: "I like Yao Ming, Kobe Bryant, Jason Kidd [laughs]. I'm a big fan of the NBA. Basketball is a very *cool* sport, people can work in a team to win the championship. It relies on speed, team spirit ... I think that many of us young people like basketball." The team spirit he mentioned, the group body-

building or group mentality, and the contribution to the formation of national identity are another high-valued characteristics explored by some investigations about the culture of celebrities in China and the “narrative of the self” (Combs and Wasseerstrom 2013; Xu 2018). Mr. Wen’s mentioning of group mentality, which is also present in values of patriotism (*aiguo*), philanthropy and public property, is related with the third group of famous personalities – artists.

Mr. Bai explains that, above all others, he admires several novelists from Sha’anxi province, such as Chen Zhongshi, because “people from Sha’anxi write good novels,” and “they have a sense of social responsibility, of passing the baton and their knowledge down to future generations, doing good for mankind and society.” According to Mr. Bai, artistic creation implies a social responsibility of doing good for others. Similarly, Mr. Yang also refers to this when commenting about his love for the Taiwanese band, *Mayday*, because “many of their songs instil something in you, connect with you. They give you positive energy.” Also, Mr. San says that Cai Yilin or the Taiwanese singer Jolin Tsai inspires him, “I’ve been a fan since I was a schoolkid.” As “the modern form of popular music began to enter China through Hong Kong and Taiwan,” pop musicians from those areas — “that are foreign to the PRC” — still appeal “to the new youth and the post-revolution generations,” that is the sense of modern culture (Fung 2007: 425, 426, 429).

Another feature of the PRC’s celebrity culture, Jeffreys and Edwards notes, “is the high value placed on attributes such as public propriety, group orientation, academic achievement, resilience and thrift” —the most obvious examples of this moral economy of virtue are found in the state-sponsored celebrities such as the military celebrities (2010: 17). Indeed, three participants point to three historical figures of the 20th century in the PRC, albeit for different reasons. All three were former soldiers, considered by China’s official historiography as people of great importance for the PRC. Firstly, Mr. Duan admires Lei Feng because “he was a revolutionary of the Chinese Communist Party who helped Mao” and, more importantly, “he helped the people without asking for anything in return.” Lei Feng (1940-1962) is the main “hero and model to men who service the People” and the PRC, and his influence over future icons cannot be underestimated. He’s the point of reference for all “soldier celebrities”, as Edwards highlights (2010: 23), from the 1960’s to the present, due to his daily acts of service to society and the PRC “without asking for anything in return.”

Secondly, Mrs. He also talks about a national historical character: “I admire Zhou Enlai. He was wise, but also humble and ambitious, which are the most important characteristics,” and adds “He served important causes.” Thirdly, Mrs. Yin explains that, although when just a child she’d admired her father for being an expert at manufacturing liquor, now that she is a university professor, she admires Chairman Mao.

When I was young, the distance between him [Mao] and me was great, very far. They’re old memories, but when I read biographies about these people, I think they were extraordinary. I don’t admire them for being leaders, but because they overcame difficulties despite weaknesses. They were able to turn their dreams into reality; they were very persistent in what they did. When I read president Mao’s biography, I learned that he didn’t have any money to make ends meet, but he would say it was fine that way, that if he could just read books then he’d just go on reading them ... despite there being many mosquitos [laughs] at night, and no light back in those days ... I think, ‘Wow!’ I have all of these modern tools in my office and everything, and sometimes I just feel like watching TV and doing something fun instead of ... I think it’s

not that they were successful, but ... their dreams, [they] took them very seriously and only focused on that without much help or material wealth. They didn't have anything at that time. That's why, in one way or another, I look up to them ... I simply admire those who overcome their personal weaknesses, and the difficulties surrounding them in order for them to do what they have in mind. Maybe that's what spiritual strength is.

Mao's status as posthumous celebrity due to the emergence of new technologies, new spaces of leisure and tourism and the so-called "Mao fever" (*Mao Zedong re*) has been explored by several scholars (Barmé 1996; Hubbert 2006; Dirlik 2012; Lago 1999). As reforms gained speed in the 1990s, Dirlik notes, "now stimulated by a new awareness of globalisation, Mao was no longer the threat he had been earlier, as suggested by the regime's mostly tolerant response to the 'Mao fever' ... that accompanied the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Mao's birth in 1993" by culminating in the Party history published in 2011, in time for the 90th anniversary of Party's founding (2012: 19). However, beyond the current popularity of Mao's image, Mrs. Yin's words lay bare the existing discursive spaces in the PRC, while celebrities and heroes of Mao-dominated era were having scope for overlap and remaining compatible with market reforms and Party-state strategy.

The fact that three informants, 15 per cent of the sample, chose three "socialist models" as celebrities they admire indicates two factors one should keep in mind. Firstly, as Louise Edwards notes, these 'heroic and model servicemen' "are exaggerations of the real individual and are presented for consumption as inflated depictions of human abilities, attributes and talents" (2010: 23). In so doing, the challenges the "Party-state faces in its goal to continue to have ideological influence and moral guidance over its vast population becomes apparent" (2010: 24). However, the CCP presents "these 'heroes' and 'models' to achieve (primarily) distinct moral and political, as opposed to commercial, goals" (Edwards 2010: 23). Through this, the CCP legitimizes its aspiration to continue exerting an ideological and moral guidance over the PRC's vast population, and simultaneously promotes "the relationship between the military forces and ordinary Chinese people through the widely promoted analogy of 'fish in water'" —People's Liberation Army's (PLA) soldiers "are like fish integrated into the ordinary people, represented by water; fish cannot live without water and the PLA cannot live without the people" (2010: 26). The three historical figures mentioned by our respondents personalize "[s]elf-cultivation and the endless scope for self-improvement," or ambition in Zhou Enlai's case, which are central to the CCP's "soldier celebrities". These military heroes "are 'made', not 'born', and the CCP and PLA rockets them to celebrity-like visibility through an equally conscious crafting" that partly "involves reasserting their proximity to the ordinary person through discourses of humility" (Edwards 2010: 30).

Secondly, all the values put forth by informants are fit into a public discourse about civilization and harmony. As Tomba (2014) points, governing has always implied, for the CCP, "the aspiration to create citizens in harmony with the existing developmental project of the nation and willing to support it" (2014: 88). As is the case of Aschoff's "new prophets of capital", the ideals of public service represented by Lei Feng, the mix of ambition and humility of Zhou Enlai and the overcoming of "personal weaknesses and surrounding difficulties" portrayed in Mao, do not conform at all to a call to change. Nor do they constitute a mere call to order.

Although "harmonious society" does not appear to constitute a departure from traditional paternalistic patterns of governance, as a goal of social policies the search for "harmony" is essentially different from the simple call for "order"—it argues for the conscious and rational removal of the causes (be they economic, social, or behavioral)

underlying conflicts rather than for their institutionalization and repression. It is therefore accompanied by a stress on individual conduct, self-improvement, virtue, and responsibility. It also defines a disciplinary regime, which is different from the capillary penetration of society generally associated with the institutions of authoritarian rule. This disciplinary regime increasingly adopts governmental techniques that envisage the active participation of subjects and the agency of a wide array of players in a virtuous scheme based, whenever possible, on self-discipline.

(Tomba 2014: 144)

This is confirmed, indeed, by Woronov (2003, 2009) through an analysis of the discourses and practices of "Education for Quality" (*suzhi jiaoyu*) in contemporary Beijing. In particular, Woronov elucidates techniques and disciplines used in schools as moral education to raise the "quality" of the capital's children in order to raise the "quality" of the Chinese nation and its future. Woronov frames *suzhi jiaoyu* as a form of governmentality, dedicated to teaching children the "conduct of conduct" by attempting to define and raise children's "moral quality" as a linking to changing form and practices of state power (2009). According to Woronov, these educational techniques teach Chinese history through exemplary figures, such as Mao Zedong and Zhu De, not because of their revolutionary fervour, but because of their rigorous self-discipline and the care they expressed towards others.

Finally, two informants avoid mentioning any names of famous individuals. Mrs. Tang admires the famous simply for their fame, without offering any names, specifically. Meanwhile, Mrs. Gong points out the increasingly common phenomenon in the PRC, such as "a process of *re-subjectification* via mediated expression, social interaction, and circulation of their own media stories" (Yu 2006; 2007: 47), saying "What I admire most is benevolence ... I don't know anyone [famous] who can be labelled as 'good'." Hence, she refers to an old college friend without an ounce of fame,

She posts very interesting images in her *Moments* on *Wechat* every day ... She doesn't pressure her kids to study. She takes them around the world on vacation ... [and] she's a volunteer in her neighbourhood community. Twice a week, she teaches children to read newspapers. I think that's wonderful.

The PRC's rapid technological expansion has generated new spaces and "new media such as the Internet and mobile phones" that "can create new venues for individuals to exercise cultural citizenship, but neither primarily nor necessarily through acts of overt resistance to the Party-state" (Jeffreys and Edwards 2010: 13-14). In the case of Mrs. Gong's friend, she exemplifies how new formats like *Moments* of popular Chinese mobile messaging app, Wechat, allows for a cultural citizenship through the process of *re-subjectivization* using her own stories within media not only as an example for interactive activities within her community, but also as distinctive practices and normative representations. Far from the PRC's new cyber-celebrity figures that "represent rising individualism and resistance to an all-controlling state primarily through their seeming defiance of media censorship and former restrictions on public expressions of sexuality," such as Chinese sex blogger Muzi Mei or the "rebel" nature of the singer Li Yuchun and her indirect critique of CCP rule (Jeffreys and Edwards 2010: 13), Mrs. Gong's friend exhibits distinctive practices that reflect normative practices and social representations that works with the official discourse of middle class as a part of the normalizing apparatus —the concept of harmony, gender hierarchies, the "civilizing process" and so on.

In this case, new formats like *Moments* on Wechat can reinforce heteronormativity based on “[a]n assemblage of culturally nationalist Confucian, Han-centred, authoritarian socialist and media-savvy marketplace masculinities,” in which gender identity “fits a growing neo-familism in Chinese society” and combining the “decreasing numbers of women in leadership positions” with the “increasingly large gender pay gaps” (Hird 2017). One of the most publicized state projects to establish and promote gender hierarchies through “exemplary motherhood as a means to encourage moral regeneration and social harmonization is China’s 10 Outstanding Mothers (*Zhongguo shida jiechu muqin*) campaign conducted in 2006 by the All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF) and sixteen other co-sponsors” (Guo 2010: 46). In order to respond to China’s social “crises”¹²⁴ and the gap between what remains of the Chinese socialist value system and the changing social environment, this campaign established and promoted an ideal motherhood by selecting the desirable attributes amongst famous Chinese women (Guo 2010) that goes hand in hand with the social representations and aspirations pursued by urban women such as Mrs. Gong.

4.3 THE SOCIAL SPACE OF GENDER

Throughout the different sections of this chapter, the evidence from this study provides further evidence for the emergence of an increasing heterogeneity of the urban middle incomers in the PRC. Indeed, we have outlined a series of “boundaries” associated with social origin, geographic origin, education and occupation which can be seen to relate to the interests, aspirations, tastes and leisure preferences of particular social groups (Bourdieu 1984; Wynne 1998: 94). Nevertheless, class is not expressed directly, but through various categories of social differentiation such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality or race (Hanser 2008: 16). Also, social identities may no longer be understood as classes in terms of occupational position but rather as a configuration of individual choices made available by that social differentiation, lifestyle distinctions and the destabilisation of cultural hierarchies (Sáiz López 2001). Such social identities and class re-configurations in urban China need to be examined in the daily context of the households and intimacy through which the informants’ lives are lived (Giddens 1992; Wynne 1998).

Over the last four decades, Ji, Wu, Sun and He (2017) highlight, the PRC “has transitioned from a socialist centralized economy to a productivity-and-efficiency-oriented market economy, so too have the country’s public and private spheres become increasingly differentiated” (2017: 265). Recent studies have “provided strong evidence of a revival of patriarchal tradition and its alliance with neoliberal ideologies emphasizing personal choices and responsibilities” — whereas “young women tend to be more gender-egalitarian, young men seem to be less progressive” (Ji and Chen 2015; Pimentel 2006, in Ji *et al.* 2017: 275). Women’s disadvantages

¹²⁴ China’s social “crisis” of the conceptions of family values, “female virtues” and motherhood as social fabric have been highlighted in the last two decades or so by Chinese academics and the media. Examples of China’s “moral crisis”, “family crisis”, “marriage crisis”, and “motherhood crisis” (Liu 1999) include: “rampant prostitution; prevalent extramarital affairs; growing numbers of de facto second wives; increasing divorce rates and domestic violence; the common practice of unmarried men and women living together; declining interest among young people in getting married or having children; deteriorating bonds between mothers and babies as more mothers reject breast-feeding and pass on most postnatal care to nannies; and the spoiling of children by parents (Liu 1999)” (Guo 2010: 46).

in the public and private spheres— in the labor market and within the family—mutually reinforce each other” (Ji *et al.* 2017: 265). Moreover, while the *danwei* system was largely dismantled in the late 1990s, becoming increasingly differentiated the public and private spheres due to the restructuring process of marketization in post-reform urban China. As a result, “the present separation of spheres has been propelled by the retreat of socialist state welfare and weakening of state ideology promoting women’s liberation in the socialist era;” the new interaction between these two spheres has exacerbated Chinese women’s disadvantages in both spaces; and this new scenario of separation of spheres involves “an underlying ideological transformation —the waning of Marxist egalitarian ideology and a rejuvenation of Confucianism in conjunction with newly adopted neoliberalism—” that “has both enabled and justified increasing gender inequality” (Ji *et al.* 2017: 266).

Although we argue that to better understand gender dynamics in the public and private spheres in contemporary China, we must contextualize them in the socialist heritage (Ji *et al.* 2017: 275), this section will not follow the “market transition” framework for two reasons. The first is for the specific objective of exploring the relationship between productive and reproductive labour and gender differentiations within the urban middle incomers. Although the discontinuities apparently represented by both before 1978 under state socialism and after 1978, when the decision was taken to move towards a socialist market economy are occasionally compared in this section, the socialist ideals inherited, and their continuity will be placed within the context of present-day. Therefore, this section examines the structure of households with regard to the goals in Chapter IV and the relationship between gender differentiation, everyday domestic labour, the conceptualization of romantic love between males and females obtained from an analysis of data extracted from the semi-structured interviews. As a result, it will not be a comparative analysis of two historical contexts implied in the concept of “market transition.”

Secondly, what the market transition framework lacks “is attention to the equally profound changes that have transformed gender relations in the private sphere, resulting from the state’s reallocation of social reproduction and care responsibilities to individual families through privatization” (Ji *et al.* 2017: 266). As noted earlier, another objective in this section is to analyse the social practices and representations elaborated by urban middle incomers concerning love conceptualization, which requires an approach towards intimate relationships established in the private sphere. Here, the perspective provided by the market transition framework has proven insufficient in this regard.

As in the PRC, women, the majority of whom, in the “Maoist middle class”, have traditionally acted as an unpaid domestic work force, primarily involved in the reproduction of the middle-class household, this section will pay particular attention to “the ways in which paid employment affects women’s leisure, a feature that Deem [1986] suggests may be important in ‘allowing’ women the right to a leisure space.” (Wynne 1998: 95-96). On the one hand, in addition to examining women’s use of their spare time, we will also examine some of the other activities associated with domestic labour and the interaction with other women —such as female neighbours, grandmothers, nannies, aunts and so on— in creating of “leisure spaces.” On the other, this section will also aim to detect and describe a common “core” structure of romantic love and to discover and explain variations in terms of gender differentiation.

Furthermore, as Wynne (1998) suggests, given the importance of the urban middle class as an indicator of the changing class structure of urban China, it is perhaps not only on cultural

frames but also on new social representations that we might witness examples of the changing nature of household structures and gender relation in the PRC. In this section we will consider such leisure variations, activities and interactions associated with domestic labour, discourses about love relationships and social changes, in the context of the analyses previously undertaken, namely their location within class structure in urban China and the differentiation already observed with regard to cultural capital, occupation and social origin. In evaluating the link between social practices and representations and the social construction of identity we have argued, as Wynne indicates, that “for the new middle class work is becoming a less salient feature in identity construction and that as working conditions and income become increasingly less differentiated within the new middle class or ‘middle mass’ (Roberts *et al.* 1977), so leisure practices” or post-industrialist social practices and representations will become increasingly important and decisive for a middle-class social identity in urban China.

As we have seen in Chapter I, Bourdieu makes the point in his conceptualization of gender asymmetries as separate, but interactive, forces structuring social practices and representations from other principles of “vision and division” such as class or race asymmetries. This intersectional approach goes beyond the concept of “market transition.” Further, Bourdieu’s ontological position that links the realist tradition —class habitus— and social practice and representation in the objective conditions that structure everyday life contains a strong dualism of structure and agency, which has been central to feminist, *queer*, women’s, and new masculinity or men’s studies. In addition, the concept of field, in conjunction with habitus and capital, can help explain how individuals experience social practices differently depending on their legitimate forms of femininity/masculinity, their positions within the field and their ability, and willingness, to accrue culturally valued forms of capital (Thorpe 2010). Finally, adopting a gendered reading of Bourdieu’s class theory illustrates “that moments of disalignment and tension between habitus and field may give rise to increased reflexive awareness,” providing a tool to question the dissonance of social representations and narratives in patriarchal societies (Thorpe 2010: 207).

Regarding the sample, 50 per cent are women. Age is an important variable in this section to contextualize the differences in thought and practices with respect to the formation of classes following the 1978 reforms. The women informants aged between 25 and 35 years old represent 20 per cent of the sample; those between 35 and 45 are 60 per cent, and 45 to 55 years-old constitute the remaining 20 per cent. Indeed, the majority of participants were born between 1973 and 1983, during a key period that coincided with the initiation of economic reforms (1978). The average profile of the women interviewed is 40 years of age (born in 1978), married, has one child, is a Beijing resident but native of another province, and her profession is related to the academic world (Academic Administrator).

Although this section examines differences in the contributions to reproductive labour made by men and women, it will be primarily concerned, in line with Wynne’s book, with locating “gender” within the social stratification in the PRC, pointing towards social and cultural differentiation within the middle incomers and the increasing importance of leisure and post-industrial practices in the construction of a middle-class identity. However, such inequalities will be analysed to determine to what extent they are related to a “Chinese middle class”. Therefore, our concern will be to uncover any differences with regard to the social origins, geographical origins, accumulation of cultural capital and occupational positions of the informants as an essential relation to reproductive labor, gender differentiation and the conceptualization of love in Chinese couples.

4.3.1. Domestic household and ‘*haoyong* femininity’

Although far fewer studies have examined the changes in the private sphere of family in post-reform urban China, this section provides an outline of the structure of the domestic household obtained from an analysis of the interviews conducted in 2017 and 2018. Also, as a patriarchal society, in the PRC there are some notable differences in the structural characteristics between males and females, particularly with regard to cultural capital, income and occupation (see Table 4.3). In relating our findings to the power relations between men and women, our examination is primarily oriented around three aspects: 1) the reproductive sense through the mother-grandmother inter-generational exchange process illustrated in this case study, 2) the productive sense following the narrative of segregation based on the notion of *haoyong*, (‘useful, effective’) that imposes a double form of social stratification among middle incomers women in the public sphere of productive labour; and 3) characteristics of the structure and lifestyle in domestic households of Beijing’s middle incomers.

Scholars and recent studies regarding gender inequalities in both public and private spheres simultaneously and interactively, and changes in gender ideology in the PRC, “generally agree that marketization has reshaped gender inequality, although they disagree over the nature of the changes” (Ji *et al.* 2017: 265-266). However, the principal concerns expressed can be summarised by examining two remarkable details that our results reflect. On the one hand, the only respondent whose profession has been codified as “Liberal profession / Director” — the most elevated variable used in the occupational hierarchy of the Chinese middle class— is a man. On the other, the only informant who acts as an unpaid full-time domestic worker is a woman. Mrs. Gong is primarily involved not only in the reproduction of her nuclear family’s household, but also her reproductive labour is associated with care giving and domestic roles in extended family.

I think I have my own specialty [Labour Laws] that allows me to make a living and care for my family, but I think that the responsibilities between women and men are different. My husband spends little time at home, and he has a high salary ... For him, it’s easy to have a high salary. The reason I left my last job is because the salary wasn’t very high, so I thought it wasn’t necessary that both of us work. I returned home for my family, and during that time, an opportunity presented itself to study a doctorate’s degree. When my daughter was a child, my parents would take care of her, but now she’s grown up. It’s not easy for them to take care of her now, they can’t keep up with her needs. My main duty is to take care of my parents and my daughter.

For the most part our sample is dominated by members of nuclear families with relatively young, school age children (55 per cent). So, whether 55 per cent of participants have relatively young, school age children, but only 9 per cent of them (Mrs. Gong) is engaged in domestic labour, including child care, the question here is: who is in charge of both care giving and domestic roles such as cleaning, cooking and the unpaid domestic labour force? In most cases these responsibilities are given to women. Mrs. Yin’s words once again point in the same direction as our findings when responding about habits of family consumption.

I don’t do the grocery shopping because I have someone who helps at home. She does the cleaning and cooks the food. I’m in charge of buying clothes and other products for the family. I buy things for my son, my husband and I, but not a lot because there’s nothing I need to buy. I think I have everything I need.

The person who does the buying for the family and is in charge of reproductive labour in Mrs. Yin’s household is her aunt. “My husband doesn’t do housework ... But I know other men do

chores more than him. He's a bad example [laughs] but, in general, men do little." Indeed, according to the testimonies about this topic, the PRC is not an exception. Even when a woman balances both spheres and, if her work schedule allows for it, or when a woman abandons part of the reproductive labour to take on paid employment, another woman — grandmothers, aunts, maids, nannies, housekeepers, domestic staff— who substitute her to continue the reproductive labour.

For example, Mrs. Wu manages the double burden of productive and reproductive work. She works as an academic administrator at a university in Beijing, has a fixed schedule that allows her for dedicating some of her free time to perform household duties after leaving the campus, "I have a daughter who's in second grade. So after work, I have to go pick her up, cook and help her with homework, and I do all the chores." Like other patriarchal societies, domestic labour is not usually recognized socially or economically and, in cases when it is a paid work, belongs to the informal economy. Indeed, domestic work belongs in the informal labour market, is unregistered and does not show up clearly in official employment statistics. In other words, such domestic workers are excluded from social security schemes and they are not provided by sufficient workplace protection. In most cases are migrant domestic workers, who face additional challenges due to their immigration status, precarity and lack of labour rights. Mrs. Ai explains her experience about a female migrant worker who works at her house, and offers her opinion about this social group.

Hmm... Nowadays, working migrant women live relatively better now than before, like the babysitter I have at home. I pay her 6,000 RMB (770 euros) monthly, which I think is quite a reasonable salary for them, even higher than what some graduates earn [laughs]. However, she also has experience to take care of my daughter, so I think that she's paid fairly for both her effort and work duties.

Nevertheless, according to research done by Goh (2006) in Xiamen, "a woman's job and the salary she brings home enhance her status in the society," and "[f]ull-time motherhood is possibly a very remote choice" (2006: 14). In addition, "[t]he perceived necessity for a dual income in the family and thus women's participation in the workplace takes away the women's role as the main child care providers" (2006: 14). As a result, many women therefore find a solution to this problem within the family by engaging the help of grandparents in providing child care and, at the same time, as some informants in our study pointed, to "keep an eye on the parents' health and ensure that they had a materially comfortable life" (Zhang 2016: 14). Also, Goh, Tsang and Chokkanathan argue,

The cost of providing the best possible care can be a financial burden for families, one that can only be alleviated if both parents are working outside the home. In view of the lack of childcare facilities, especially after-school care, and wide-spread mistrust towards domestic helpers, parents find it easy to insist that the best person to care for their only child is the grandparent. And because Chinese grandparents tend to consider the welfare of the family before their own interests they are often willing to compromise their own lives to help their children. Also, it is common for Chinese adult children, even after forming their own nuclear family unit, to continue their membership in their parental family. The extended family household is viewed as a common enterprise where members from both generations (older parents and adult children) have a vested interest to ensure *chuang zong jie dai* (pass on the family line).

(Goh *et al.* 2016: 2)

Regardless of duration of care, it is evident that grandparents are often involved in care —and “grandmothers are twice as involved in care as grandfathers” (Goh *et al.* 2016: 7). According to the informants, while grandparents take care for their grandchildren in the morning and afternoon, the middle generation take over the chores (grocery shopping, cleaning, cooking and so on) when they return from work in the evenings. As Mrs. Yin explains, this unpaid reserve labour force of older family members who act as domestic workers is comprised, as mentioned earlier, mostly of women.

It’s normally a woman’s job, but in China, it’s the grandfathers who do a lot. Grandfathers help out a lot. In my case, it’s not my mom, but my aunt works for me one way or another, in my home ... She helps me with the house and is like a grandmother to my son ... It’s a norm for the grandparents’ generation. They help our families settle in, but there are exceptions, like my neighbours. They don’t have a grandparent to help them out. In that case, working mom’s do a lot more, but sometimes they hire someone to help them because they work somewhere else and must go to [school, neighbourhood] meetings, so they’re not always at home ... Maybe this is a very Chinese thing ... Us working moms don’t do much at home, [but] men do even less.

Mr. Lu also discusses this phenomenon, saying, “I’m very grateful for my in-laws and my parents for taking care of our kids. I have two children, the oldest is in a day care and the youngest stays at home [since] my parents and in-laws take turns coming to Beijing to take care of them.” He explains that he and his wife, thanks to assistance from their parents, are able to focus on their careers without worrying about their children’s well-being or domestic duties. In fact, according to Goh and Kuczynski (2010),

The advantages of the joint parenting coalition, as indicated by the middle generation, were: helping them to focus on their work (32.5%); reducing overall family expenses (27.5%); enhancing intergenerational ties (24.5%); and the superior domestic help provided by grandparents, as compared to engaging domestic help (14.3%). The middle generation perceived a number of benefits of this arrangement for grandparents, including: facilitating close bonds between the grandparents and the child (55%); helping to occupy the grandparents’ minds (29.7%); and keeping the grandparents occupied (13.3%).

(Goh and Kuczynski 2010: 223-224)

This is a very common phenomenon in China’s cities due to an increase in life expectancy, falling birth-rates and women’s participation in the labour market which, despite its decrease from 73 per cent in 1990 to 61 per cent in 2018, puts it on par with Norway, Canada, Sweden, Ecuador, Thailand and Australia who hover around 60 per cent. However, this percentage is still higher than those of Spain (52 per cent), Germany (55 per cent) or the U.S. (56 per cent). Evidently, the percentage of women in the PRC who also perform productive work continues to be among the highest in the world (*The World Bank* 2018; Sáiz López 2018: 15). In the PRC, child care from —mostly paternal— grandparents is considered a voluntary exchange for the help they get from their children. In the Confucian system, roles and duties of each family member are connected through mutual interdependence throughout their life cycles. For a woman, becoming a mother-in-law and grandmother after overcoming previous stages in life —daughter-in-law and mother— is itself considered a gift for having dedicated herself to a life of care and service towards others (Sáiz López 2001: 35-6).

At the core of the extant studies of intergenerational exchange in Chinese families is the intuitive relationship between the concept of reciprocity and the Confucian value of filial piety (Goh *et al.* 2016: 1). The reciprocity-filial piety binomial has governed family relationships in China and, as we have seen, the Chinese state has recently “adopted a series of actions to promote *Chinese* culture and traditions, of which filial piety is at the core” (Zhang 2016: 21). As we discovered in a previous section, the informants, both female and male, strive to be filial children —spending in one’s hometown a reasonable period of annual holidays visiting one’s family, a filial activity that can be “costly and psychologically exhausting, because it involved a large amount of driving, gift giving, banquets, and intense interaction with family members and distant relatives” (Zhang 2016: 22). Simultaneously, the informants strive to be responsible parents, juggling their preferences as a couple, individual wishes, and —nuclear and extended— familial expectations within the material concerns and constraints of contemporary city life.

However, our findings indicate that the commitment of middle incomers to family ethics is illustrative of what it means happiness and social success in urban China (see Section 4.2.5). Grandparents are not regarded as an extra burden or an additional chore, scholarly “depicts Chinese grandparents as likely to think of caregiving as a way to ‘enjoy family happiness’ and as something that is willingly exchanged for the help they receive from their children” (Goh *et al.* 2016: 1). They take care of the grandchildren free of charge to spare their adult children from any economic and social burdens, including in the long term. This establishes a reciprocal relationship in which grandparents give more than what they receive. As Goeh *et al.* (2016) point, in intergenerational relationships, lack of reciprocity tends to be considered as an act of omission and not an act of commission —“adult children acting filial is a pride and desire of older parents and admitting that one’s adult child is not filial is a dishonour. So, omission serves as an excuse for grandparents to explain away any lack of filial act from their adult children.” Indeed, the symbolic value of voluntary acts of consideration are symbolic values of reciprocity through expressions of consideration (Goh *et al.* 2016). In

The reality, however, can be more prosaic. The most studied among the changes in intra-familial relations is the importance to maintain good relations, first and foremost, with married daughters as a grandparent’s conscious strategy due to his/her old age (Sáiz López 2009). Adult children show their appreciation and respect when assigning menial tasks to their older parents, which strengthens *guanxi* between two generations and, when this is not done, “a sense of being exploited and a feeling of bitterness” emerge among the grandparents (Goh *et al.* 2016). According to the “market transition” framework, although emotional expressivity has increasing in domestic life —e.g. showing respect and appreciation—, filial piety has stumbled into crisis due to the emerging new morality of individualization, which focuses on the pursuit of personal interests and individual accumulation (Yan Hairong 2003). However, despite the existing literature often depicts the Chinese child, as well as female caregivers, as a passive recipient of a one-way process of intergenerational transmission, Goh and Kuczynski alert that family practices are more complex, and that children and caregivers “are agents with capacities to influence and interpret each other’s behaviours” —e.g. recent depictions of only children as “little emperors” provide support to this approach (2010: 229).

Scholars generally agree that the state has played an important role in the formulation of urban middle-income women. First, the PRC initiated its family planning policy in 1962 and the strictest one-child policy in 1980, and it allowed all couples to have two children as of 1 January 2016 in order to alleviate the aging problem (Wang *et al.* 2016). During the one-child

policy from 1985 to 2015, “birth quotas were more stringent for the urban *hukou* population than for the rural *hukou* population” (Wang *et al.* 2016: 35). Although the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CCP “Central Committee issued a communiqué on 29 October 2015 to declare the comprehensive implementation of a new family planning policy that allows a couple to have two children” and the benefit of late marriage regarded with longer marriage and maternal leave was cancelled in the amendment to induce more births, “the new policy has in general imposed strict restrictions on three births” (Wang *et al.* 2016: 36).

As a result, the PRC’s birth control policies have greatly contributed to the prevalent urban family form of two sets of grandparents, parents and, until very recently, a single child (Zhang 2016: 7). This explains why scholars have shown that the middle-class family in cities, unlike Western contexts, is multigenerational in most cases. As a result, family is still a crucially important institution in the PRC, not only as an emotionally realm but also a field of practices that shapes middle-class subjectivities and lifestyles (Zhang 2016: 7). Similar findings are provided by our investigation on repertoire of cultural values and social practices that shape the middle-class representation of the family. On this point, however, our findings show that as most of middle incomers in Beijing come from other provinces, they have nannies, and multigenerational family no longer is the most common family form in urban China. Nevertheless, despite the multigenerational is not the prevalent family form among middle incomers in everyday life, grandparents are often willing to compromise part of their time to help their children for short periods of time. That is, grandparents do not usually co-reside to provide indefinitely childcare.

Certainly, there are other reasons for grandparents’ participation in their adult children domestic life than the causes previously mentioned in this chapter which are also found in other post-industrialist societies or social groups —increase in life expectancy, reduction in birth-rates and of participation in the labour force—. For instance, as the majority of women in the PRC, including mothers of young children, are in the labour force, the unique situation “is one of limited flexibility in work arrangements, especially in waged jobs” (Goh and Kuczynski 2010: 221). Previous surveys conducted in eight provinces in the PRC have indicated that “women’s involvement in multiple economic activities has consequences for both work-child care compatibility” (Short *et al.* 2002: 31). One of the reasons that mothers in the PRC are able to maintain their involvement in multiple productive tasks despite of “the shortage of child-care facilities and a general mistrust towards domestic helpers (Goh 2006) lies in the availability of grandparents [that is, grandmothers] to serve as alternative child care” (Goh and Kuczynski 2010: 221). As a result, like in post-industrialist societies, reproductive labour is a gendered endeavour: women’s attachment to high priority to their work can be explained to the availability of other women to serve as alternative childcare.

The existing literature indicates that the gendered redundancy suggested by our findings is the culmination of a transgenerational transfer of gender inequalities in the PRC. On the one hand, “[a]s the first female offspring of the Only Child Generation, young urban women benefited from unprecedented educational investment from their parents” (Liu 2017: 143). However, unprecedented educational investments by parents to create a generation of women with the best economic conditions in China since 1950 (Sáiz López 2009); being educated with barely any gender differentiation in their education as only child compared to post-industrialist societies (Tsui and Rich 2002; Sáiz López 2009); having numerous opportunities in the flourishing third sector that resulted from structural reforms and China’s economic growth; possessing considerable emancipatory potential; and promotion through state-run media and

the public culture of neo-liberal gender identities known as "white-collar beauty" associated with China's new millennium appear that all this was far from enough to stop the transgenerational transfer of gender inequalities in China.

Indeed, despite all of the abovementioned factors, as the first female offspring of the Only Child Generation,

[o]nce in the workplace, [these young urban] women found their prospect narrowed and dominated by a masculine hierarchy. Despite holding the same qualifications as their male counterparts, women were more likely to channel into secondary positions that denied them access to opportunities and economic resources. The legitimization of the gendered division of labour was established through gendered connotations of 'career' and 'job' and naturalized gender stereotypes, similar to those experienced by older urban women. By making sense of their own self-centred experiences in the natal family and education, young women questioned gendered expectations at work. However, a biological determinist understanding of gender naturalized men's physical superiority over women, which in turn contributed to reinforcing a belief in the legitimacy of the masculine domination in the company.

(Liu 2017: 143-4)

Indeed, this hierarchical legitimization is based on gendered division of labour and the formation of masculine identities around neoliberal imperatives. This is evident when listening to Mr. Qiao, a graduate of Medicine,

In Beijing, people aren't conscious that if they want to be productive, they have to exercise. You have to be strong in order to work, that's why women work worse than men, they aren't so strong, they're not suited for work. Even in office jobs, you have to sleep, eat and exercise in case you have to work extra hours later and earn more ... Women are physically weaker, and if you have to work twelve hours a day or sleep little because of long work hours, women can't handle as much as men; they're weaker, physically speaking. They get tired sooner, they lack concentration, they have to pay attention if they're children get sick, if they're family's fine. Men can focus more on their jobs, but if they don't exercise, neither can they withstand such a tough pace in the workplace, working so many hours at a time.

Such narratives can be described as gendered and classed identity positions and is available for men to take up, as Walker and Roberts state (2017) in their analysis on masculinity, labour and neoliberalism. Thus, they argue

being a 'proper man' who is a worthy citizen in a learning society; an 'independent man' who is autonomous and holds a professional job; and an 'honest man' who is able to identify moral integrity. Differentiated access to cultural and social resources, however, ensures that these discursive locations are not equally available to all.

(Walker and Roberts 2017: 15)

Similar discourses help promote traditional gender power relations where men are assumed to be "naturally" physically superior, transmitting and legitimizing values, such as physical prowess and labour incapacity, as well as representations of women caring for their families, allowing for social practices of discrimination, power and subordination to be perpetuated (Sáiz López 2009).

Whilst women were brought into the paid work by state socialism, important assumptions about women's domestic nature remained unchallenged. In their married lives these women simply reproduced the division of labour they had experienced in their natal family. Within the work setting, whether in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution or in the urban work unit, women were considered 'naturally' weak and deemed to be best suited to 'light' work whilst 'heavy' work was more appropriate for men. This gendered differentiation in turn cast women as less capable than men in paid work, so it was taken by both sexes as 'natural' that women should be selected to 'return home' when economic restructuring required job cuts in the state enterprises ... For this reason, Chinese feminists at first saw the economic reforms of the 1990s as an opportunity to raise women's consciousness and to realize their individual social worth (Li 1994). As the economic restructuring advanced, workers (including women) were found to be increasingly prepared to defend their class values towards enterprise management, 'exhibiting a continuing attachment to the egalitarian values which in the past were assumed to have been foisted on them' (Morris *et al.* 2001: 713). However, the challenge to gender discrimination in the economic reforms still largely remained with individual female entrepreneurs, women academics and cadres ... Indeed, in reply to a question as to why women were particularly selected for redundancy, both mothers and daughters attributed it to the 'natural' difference between men and women.

(Liu 2007: 144)

However, this sort of narratives of gender discrimination in the private spheres is not so evident within the academic world. As Mrs. Ren notes, "Within universities ... it's women who take care of the family because we have more flexibility. We don't have to work every single day, we can adjust our schedules because it's not mandatory to work every day; you can work from your home." When being interviewed, female professors and researchers from the public sector are conscious of the organizational flexibility in their profession when compared to the division of labour by gender within the private sector. Discrimination in the business world manifests itself in diverse narratives, such as Mr. Qiao when referring to female workers' incompatibility due to family duties, or with jobs requiring trips to countries whose predominant religion is Islam since they are not considered safe for women. Mr. Ren, then, explains the presence of discrimination in her husband's company:

Being a university professor is a decent job, especially for women ... The gender gap or gender discrimination is maybe more obvious in some areas, but among others it's more hidden ... For example, it's not as obvious at university campuses, but in companies, since my husband operates his own business, when employees are selected, they prefer to hire young men. Young candidates because ... First, women don't make good engineers. In technical work, creativity, they doubt women's capacity for this in the engineering field. On the other hand, employees have to go on business trips, so women who have families have to stay and take care of their children ... The result is that you are not so *haoyong* [useful, effective]. I don't think it will change in the near future. Maybe in twenty or thirty years, I don't know.

This concept of *haoyong* woman or "useful woman" relates to narratives of gendered division of labour in patriarchal societies. In post-reform China, such narratives are reinforced by neoliberal imperatives that ensure that gendered division of labour and any kind of inequality is legitimized by making clear that the women, the poor, the socially immobile and the unprivileged groups are to blame for their plight, having failed to work hard enough to achieve the desired material gains (Walker and Roberts 2017: 1). Indeed, as Mr. Qiao said,

“they[women]’re weaker, physically speaking. They get tired sooner, they lack concentration.” Not surprisingly, middle-class women who are young, urban, Han, heterosexual and university graduates, have adopted an identity and *new feminized practices* identified with productivity and modernity which, in turn, justify and mask inequalities between women and men, and between *haoyong* women and the non-useful or *bu haoyong* (Hanser 2008: 17; Liu 2017: 18).

As a way to measure a woman’s value as a worker, Leslie Salzinger’s (2003) develops the concept of “productive femininity,” which could be related to what we call “*haoyong* femininity”. As Hanser notes,

Leslie Salzinger (2003) has termed this relationship between production and gendered meanings “productive femininity,” whereby workers are understood, and understand themselves, through notions of femininity that shape both hiring and labor control practices. But as Salzinger points out, productive bodies are not simply docile bodies. The construction of productive femininity involves a process of “subject-making,” in which the individual actively shapes the self (Foucault 1988, 1990 [1985]). Indeed, in the workplace, gender, sexuality, and femininity form the basis of regimes of workplace control, which, as Aihwa Ong noted in her study of women factory workers in Malaysia, revolve not only upon direct control of workers’ bodies but also upon “the ways young female workers come to see themselves” (1987: 4).

(Hanser 2008: 97-98)

Simultaneously, the *haoyong* narratives of gendered division of labour imposes a binary distinction on working women in the public sphere: on the one hand, jobs with a high degree of female discrimination and sexualization, which are mostly offered by private companies to *haoyong* women, and jobs with a lower degree of gender division, which are designated for *bu haoyong* women or “non-useful women”. This division in the professional world seeks to naturalize the imposition of a choice between two abusive options, of which only women in the PRC must face, resulting in the normalization of inequality. It is through the normalization of this binary classification —married vs. single women, and discriminatory workplaces vs. less discriminatory workplaces— that masculinity legitimizes its dominant symbolic position in the public sphere. Each one of these *haoyong* classifications are associated with different social practices and representations that reflect an imposed inequality, and which women themselves perpetuate when distinguishing between each other.

In the private sphere, and following market logic, some women may feel more *haoyong* than other because they prioritize personal fulfilment or, vice-versa, other women following the logic of discriminatory workplaces will feel more agile or possessing more class *habitus*, since they had not chosen the private sector characterized by jobs divided by gender and in which one must accept a situation of abuse. For example, Mrs. Ren explains that academic work is better for women than the private sector because in the latter, one suffers from discrimination. Therefore, Mrs. Ren considers herself more *haoyong* for acquiring a job that is more suited for women rather than the young women aspiring engineer. Consequentially, Mrs. Ren not only distinguishes herself from female engineers without *haoyong*, who she sees as incapable of competing under equal conditions in a market that is in itself unequal towards women, but she also normalizes the discriminatory discourse that both she and the young engineer suffer from, whether through omission or commission (actively taking part in it). Therefore, gender inequalities, as class inequalities, must be understood not only as a result of market transition —that is, transition from an era characterized by its socialist emphasis on egalitarianism to productivity-and-efficiency-oriented market economy characterized by its neoliberal emphasis

on the spirit of competition extended “to individuals, who become simultaneously the repositories and drivers of state goals (Roberts and Evans 2013) through a project of responsabilization” (Walker and Roberts 2017: 1) or, in the case of the PRC, harmonization and ‘middleization’ of society.

Both *haoyong* narratives and the “struggle to impose representations” of the harmonization and middleization of Chinese society “that create the very things represented, which make them exist publicly, officially” are forms of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1987: 13). Indeed, when the Party-state tries to turn their own vision of the ideal Chinese society in order to legitimize their position in the social world, “and the principles of division” such as gender or class “upon which it is based into the official vision, into nomos, the official principle of vision and division” (1987: 13) is a form of symbolic violence. In addition, as we have seen in Chapter I, in his later works, Bourdieu states that gender is a form of symbolic violence that results from the combination of the habitus—that is, internalization of gendered schemes and perceptions—and the relative autonomy of the economy of symbolic goods—including the institution of family and/or marriage—as illustrated by the *haoyong* narratives of gendered division of labour.

In conclusion, the structural and cultural heterogeneity of middle incomers in Beijing is best understood not solely as productive of an emerging “middle class” but rather as a process that has implications for the multidimensionality of unprivileged subjects’, such as the *haoyong* women and reproductive workers, lived experiences in the public and private spheres in the PRC. This process has not only implications for the very concept of class itself, but rather for the multidimensional notion of intersectionality. As a consequence, analysis on the public and private sphere and household structures of middle incomers’ homes in urban China must take into account the existence of various power structures that act in concert, and where the situation determines which form of oppression gains the upper hand, whether class, gender, *suzhi* embodiment, ethnicity, racialization, and so on (Holgersson 2017: 11).

In this context our argument is not that the reforms of the 1990s have simply assigned a set of new social practices and representations to the group of middle incomers but it has destroyed many of the common elements previously possessed by, or understandable as, the middle class as a post-industrialist and ethnocentric concept. In relating the findings of this section to the relationship between the concept of class—as a concept examined to firmly linked to elements such as region of origin, racialization or gender to developing them further as Bourdieu suggests in his later works (see Chapter I)—and contemporary China’s politics it is suggested that some of the processes illustrated in this case study indicate a more complex cultural transformation than can be understood simply as an emergence or reconfiguration of the middle class.

4.3.2. Loving relationships: romantic love and marketization

As a basic social unit and institution, the family retains a central position in the PRC. As we have seen, despite massive changes and reforms wrought largely by the Party-state, globalization and other macrosocial forces, the family performs many functions for both its members and the larger society. However, the family not only provides “reproduction, economic support, socialization of children, care for the young, the ill, and the aged,” but also performs functions that “can ease or exacerbate a host of social problems” (Sheppard 2009: 99). In addition, the family reinforces the intergenerational transfer of privilege and inequality

that characterizes the low social mobility in contemporary China (see section 4.1). Simultaneously, some anthropological studies (Halskov Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Constable 2009; Yan 2009, 2011; Moore 2005) have contended that the process of marketisation launched in 1978 has profoundly transformed the very family units and the social fabric within which urban middle incomers conduct their lives. In particular, these scholars have analysed from the “market transition” framework the commodification of intimate and personal relations in the private sphere —“especially those linked to households and domestic units, the primary units associated with reproductive labour” (Constable 2009: 49)—, concluding “that there is a growing individualisation across all sections of Chinese society, from the changing perceptions of the individual to rising expectations for individual freedom, choice and individuality” (Xie 2020: 181).

At the same time, these anthropological and ethnographic studies on problematisations of “intimacy” and the sociology of family life have demonstrated growing scholarly interest in the complex meanings of romantic love and gender inequalities. In the case of the PRC, gender inequalities make marriage based on romantic love a struggle for women’s pursuit of social success and happiness, as some of the respondents note. According to Illouz (2012), the romantic considerations involved in this conceptualization of happiness aims first to “search” for a romantic partner and who individuals consider to be the “right person”, and then “to achieve individual fulfilment, realise individual’s ‘destiny’ and accomplish emotional inner balance” (Carter and Arocha 2020: 4-5). The first only-child generation born in the 1980s may have experienced romantic love containing both sex and intensive emotions as part of the attempt to fulfil the ideal of a happy complete family. Most of our respondents are part of this first only-child generation, “living in the ‘third world’ but enjoying the first-world consumption standard bred by their family expectation to succeed” (Croll 2006; Fong 2004, in Xie 2020: 182).

Romantic love can be defined as “the idealization of another, within an erotic setting, with the presumption that the feeling will last some time into the future” (Jankowiak and Paladino 2008: 3). Thus, romantic love is understood as the basis for a lasting —and erotic— relationship. McKenzie summarizes the contemporary debate about this theme of ‘lastingness’ and its decline in romantic love relationships on contexts like North America, Western Europe, and their former colonies, as follows:

In her book, *Why Love Hurts*, Illouz (2012: 89) acknowledges a ‘cultural ideal of a long-lasting committed relationship’ yet adds that presently there are ‘sparse resources for achieving these ideals’, leading to couples’ rising fear and anxiety. It is crucial, she continues, to comprehend the many ways in which the ‘cultural resources required for commitment’ are being depleted (Illouz 2012: 89). For her, the intrusion of capitalism into people’s intimate lives, and the commodification of relations that accompany this, play a key role in this depletion. Social scientists like Illouz (2017 [2007], 2012) as well as Bauman (2003) tend to envision this purported shift away from long-lasting relations as detrimental to people’s social lives, yet others have more positive assessments. For instance, sociologist Anthony Giddens (1992) suggests that people are now moving beyond romantic love relationships towards ‘pure relationships’: family relations, friendships, and partnerships that can be freely entered into and exited. He sees fulfilment and ongoing choice—or contingency—as increasingly central to modern social relations. Yet, as with Bauman’s (2003) ‘liquid love’ and Illouz’s (2017 [2007]) ‘cold intimacies’, he posits the decline of commitment and lasting, love-based relations, and ultimately assumes that the ideals of lastingness and fulfilment are necessarily opposed and contradictory. Meanwhile, anthropologists Quinn (1996) and

Strauss (Strauss and Quinn 1997) point to an ongoing, historically based tension between expectations of lastingness and fulfilment in people's shared understandings of marriage ... They posit that there are culturally patterned means of resolving tensions between ideals, including those between lastingness and fulfilment (Strauss and Quinn 1997: 213).

(McKenzie 2020: 41-42)

In the case of the PRC, despite some scholars such as Kim and Hatfield (2004) argue that dictated tendencies by Western cultural patrons present within globalization are ever more evident in China, others state that marriage currently has a more elevated status in the hierarchy of family ties, and that Chinese weddings are not mere copies of the Western tradition (Pimentel 2000). For instance, Zheng's (2017) study on women's mate selection shows a new generational pattern of intimacy around the term *gan jue* (feelings) that has three defining characteristics: the increased emphasis on the desire for affection, the increased equality between the two sexes, and the increased agency in modern Chinese individuals' pursuit of love, in contrast to "the conventional purpose of 'marrying a bread earner' (*jia han jia han, chuan yi chi fan*). Marriage is no longer the means of survival as it once was" (Pan 1994; Zheng 2017: 65).

This section looks into romantic love aspirations of the informants in Beijing, who are urban university-educated women and men, both married and unmarried. However, most interviewees in this study are married, and many of their responses come from their experiences in marriage. We analyse their conceptualizations of romantic love as a romantic choice in order to uncover their understandings of love and gender identities by drawing some comparison with the results achieved in Xie's (2020) survey on the marriage aspirations of urban university-educated Chinese women who self-identified as heterosexual; Illouz's (2012) analysis of love's great transformation in Western societies, as discussed above; and Rothbaum and Tsang's (1998) comparison study between Chinese and American love songs.

Romantic Love

Despite relationships were neither free nor equal, the "embryonic state" of Western romantic love in China can be placed in the 1920s, when "modernising elites constructed unprecedented conceptual links between modernisation, understood as the process through which China could become a strong and prosperous nation, and the topics of sex, reproduction, women's liberation and eugenics" (Aresu 2009: 533). Nevertheless, the emergence of the so-called sexual revolution, a term to describe the changes in sexual norms and practices in China since the market-oriented reforms of 1978 and increased individual choice (Pan Suiming 1994; Pan Lynn 2015), represents an iconic marker of attempting to push the boundaries of the existing conservative discourse and sex education that was a monopoly in the hands of the "abstinence lobby" (Aresu 2009: 540). Indeed, "today's younger generation seems to have fully taken the concept of romantic love on board" (Farrer 2014; Zhang and Sun 2014) as proven by the fact that "some well-educated women started to take romantic love as their major sexual purpose" in the 1990s (Pan 1994, in Xie 2020).

According to Zhang (2011), romantic love re-emerged in the 1980s after the Cultural Revolution, then female desires awakened in the 1990s, and the new millennium's pleasure-centred sexual practices to enhance individual happiness (Xie 2020). However, although "romantic love, containing both sex and intensive emotions, is hot in the air" in the PRC (Xie

2020: 183), the conceptualization of romantic love as “one-night fling” is not the most desirable lifestyle to be achieved, as some of our single respondents suggest. Similar findings were made by Xie (2020). On this point, therefore, Xie (2020), in offering an explanation as the most desirable romantic relationship to be obtained according to her participants, suggests that “it is the relationships that could lead to the happily-ever-after which carry the most powerful allure, since these promise to preserve romantic excitement into a stable future” (2020: 183).

Although the relationships that could lead to the happily-ever-after are the ones that carry the most powerful allure among the informants, the great majority do not consider such romantic excitement as a promise to ensuring a stable future. Material difficulty and the desire for affection are the central concerns showed by our middle-aged informants regarding younger citizens in Beijing. That is, all the informants are aware of the difficulty face by the younger generation to settle down and start a home. In addition, as cited by Marshall (2010), Chinese culture’s collectivist spirit emphasizes a strong commitment with the in-group, including nuclear and extended family. This can be observed in several testimonies, such as Mr. Lu who says, “After getting married, love mixes with family.” Mr. Lai, too, explains that happiness in a marriage is not only the responsibility between the two spouses, “It also depends on my parents and her parents.” As such, it is strange that 50 per cent of couples in the PRC get married not because of romance, but because they are expected to marry (Pan 1993) or because romantic love might be less valued by Chinese couples compared to Westerners (Pimentel 2000). As a result, our findings show that most of the informants position themselves within a concept of love and marriage associated to aspects of Chinese marital culture which emphasis commitment and, to a certain extent, gender hierarchies. Similar findings were made by Jankowiak and Moore (2012) and Farrer (2014). On that basis, they found that the ideals of romantic love are rooted not only in expressing “true love” feelings, but, above all, in long-term commitment through marriage. This is made clear in Mrs. Tan’s narrative when expressing the importance of families when personally looking for a partner. She comments that depending on the type of life you want for yourself, it can be easy or difficult to find the right person to marry: “It’s not easy for me ... Maybe I want it that way [laughs], I expect a lot from my marriage ... First, I looked for my true love, but at the same time, I wanted there to be harmony between the two families. Meeting these two requirements is difficult.”

However, in most of the informants’ narratives about marriage, romantic love and its most recognizable romantic manifestations are not their main concerns. For example, Mrs. Kang believes that if this kind of love and demonstrations of romance exist in a couple “then even better, but if not, that’s fine, too.” The way in which Mr. Lai answers a question about love is quite insightful: “complementing economic power between both families means a lot for people of my generation.” Mr. Bai shows his class consciousness when discussing romantic love beyond cultural reductionism.

Human beings are all the same ... It [romantic love] is important to everyone, but sometimes more so. You don’t have any chance, you’re not allowed any romantic relationships ... Ask construction workers whether they married for love, if they have a romantic partnership. One’s romantic life can be different than others, it means to one person can be different to another.

The comparative analysis on the nature of romantic love undertaken by Rothbaum and Tsang (1998) between Chinese and American love songs concluded that, despite “there was no

evidence of cultural differences in the pervasiveness of intense desires,” some well-defined differences also exist which, in our case, coincide with the interviews recorded. While North American songs revolve around the individual who is loved and ignore context, in Chinese songs, love appears as different manifestations of the natural world. The concept of *yuan* (contextual forces) is a characteristic feature rooted in Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist traditions, and a cultural emphasis on interdependence. *Yuan* emphasizes the belief that success or failure in relationships is something predestined and not under our control. The Chinese pessimism about romance, Rothbaum and Tsang note, which also “may reflect the Buddhist view of not resisting the greater contextual forces and the Taoist view of aligning with nature ... contrasts sharply with the American belief that personal agency can overcome all barriers” (1998: 316). This is evident in Mrs. Kang’s testimony and her reference to a poem by Shu Ting about a tree, dealing with ideas of equality and interdependence. She explains what love between partners consists of:

First of all, there’s attraction. Otherwise, why choose him? Second: equality. Shu Ting wrote a poem, *To the Oak Tree (Zhi Xiangshu)*, about equality within a loving relationship. Third, you also have to take into account the support between both partners. Fourth: to compromise. This last one concerns the relationship between love and marriage. It normally ends up in marriage, but during married life there are daily problems that emerge. It’s possible for there to be some coordination or that both people are not truly equal. Maybe one of them has to let go of some things. Compromise is not antithetic to the support that had mentioned before.

Mrs. Ren is the only participant who clearly associates a couple’s love with happiness in way very similar to the cultural values associated with the West, but she also understands love as a feeling of interdependence mentioned. She explains that,

It [love] is very important [laughs], very important ... It’s the pillar of the sense of happiness, yes. I think romantic love is: there are two of you in the relationship, but you’re both also one single person; you are one, but also two ... You don’t cease to be independent from one another, it’s more to do with being integrated with the other, completely trusting the other, and taking care of the other ... [This is] real love because the love experienced brings out the best in you.

According to Mrs. Ren, “love is an ability” that must be learned, “It’s not an inborn knowledge, you have to learn how to love and if you’re sufficiently fortunate, then there’ll be someone who loves you very much and you’ll know how to love others.” In fact, love is something that is given and received, as Mrs. Ren explains. “I think I learned a lot from Erich Fromm, about the essence of love ... He knows exactly what is felt with love and what is believed about love.” In the book, *The Art of Loving* (1956), Fromm argues that love is an art and, therefore, requires knowledge and effort. According to Fromm, love is the answer to the problem of human existence.

The fact that Mrs. Ren is the only participant who clearly associates romantic love with happiness without skepticism in way very similar to the cultural values associated with the West indicates that, on the one hand, her views of love could come from her readings, and, on the other, negative expectations about the relationship related to the embeddedness of the Chinese view of romantic love, as Rothbaum and Tsang (1998) found. According to their study, Chinese love songs transmit more suffering and present more negative expectations towards romantic goals compared to American ones, in which negative expectations are less an issue as we have seen above when discussing the concept of *yuan*. Our findings show that the

informants do not equate love with joy nor with happiness, except for Mrs. Ren, saying “It’s the pillar of the sense of happiness.”

Mrs. Yin and Mrs. Kang mention the *feeling* of physical attraction as the greatest difference of the type of love that exists in couple’s relationship. Some even remark about the difference in love they had experience with their partner when they were merely dating and that experienced after getting married, such as Mrs. Yao and Mr. Lu. Mrs. Yao, thus, sees the love shared in a relationship as one based on respect.

I expect the two respect one another [and] to honor one another, serve one another. They can help with each other’s weaknesses, I think that’s very, very important ... Romanticism is very important, but when you’ve already made a family, building one is not something romantic [laughs] ... Romantic love is a part of it, but I think that real life entails managing normal, everyday issues.

Similarly, Mr. Lu explains,

Before getting married, I got along with her [my wife], but then the feeling becomes different from friendship ... You say “she’s attractive,” but after getting married, at this moment, I think love is mixed in with family. I still like her, but it’s different from when it all started. It’s related more with the responsibility for my family, mutual trust, as well as with the kids ... In this sense, love is a relationship of responsibilities, it’s like a contract.

Certainly, Chinese cultural tradition, according to Hsu (1981), blinds the individual into a web of responsibilities and dependency on others, thereby defusing the intensity of emotional experience, particularly romantic passion (Hsu 1981, in Rothbaum and Tsang 1998). Although most informants do not equate love with joy or happiness, they still show a high degree of companionship when describing their partner. For example, Mr. Cui states, “It [love between partners] consists of *xiangjing rubin* [a relationship in which both partners respect each other and one treats the other as a guest], which means to be at the same level, no one’s superior or inferior to the other.” Similarly, Mrs. Wu also emphasizes the companionship shared in her 10-years of marriage. For her, love “first consists of admiring each other, you can argue or fight, but it’s based on trust, on supporting each other during difficult times. Second, your partner should be the first person you wish to share all of your happiness with.”

This tendency is also pointed out in the comparative analysis conducted by Rothbaum and Tsang (1998) by concluding that “aspects of embeddedness that were emphasized in the Chinese songs —particularly devotion, commitment, and loyalty— are values closely tied to the family and to the broader social network” (1998: 314). The informants *understand* love mainly through values like equality, respect, caregiving or communication. For instance, Mrs. Kang and Mrs. Yin mention an additional element in their concept of love, “Having similar experiences, like being able to talk and share,” and, as previously explained by Mrs. Kang — equality, mutual support and compromise. In the same vein, Mrs. Tang believes that love is based on “the understanding between the two, taking care of and supporting one another, to offer each other happiness,” without foregoing any romanticism which, although “isn’t very important,” it is “slightly necessary.” However, Mrs. Ai points,

It [love] consists in understanding one another and having shared commonalities ... You have to talk everyday ... You have to at least have something to talk about beyond small family issues, like one’s work, values, opinions about social problems. I think these should at least be similar between the two. Communication is very important, I

tend to spend a while with my husband every day after putting my son to bed, talking about things that occurred that day, what's happening in society, and we just talk ... We organize activities with the family, like where to vacation during New Year's and those sort of things.

Mrs. Ai's conception of love is based on communication — “you have to talk veryday” — highlights a psychological way of thinking — “you have to at least have something to talk about beyond small family issues” — by appealing to individuals looking for new ways of understanding themselves and making sense of their emotional lives from a capitalist approach, as Illouz points (2017 [2007]: 28). Illouz's *Cold Intimacies* (2017 [2007]), outlines her analysis on how emotions and capitalism have become closely bound in global societies. Illouz “relates this binding to the rise of a strong and pervasive therapeutic discourse, arising from psychology, which has come to shape most aspects of our lives” that, together with “the growth of internet technologies have reshaped how we love and make choices in love” (Thwaites 2020: 20), as Mr. Ai's conceptualization of love based on communication illustrates.

In consequence, the language used by Mrs. Ai, Mrs. Ren and Mrs. Yao (regarding young people's use of Wechat instead of face-to-face interaction, see below) shows a clear tendency among urban middle incomers to apply more subjective criteria in the conceptualization of love. In this regard, the psychologization of romantic perceptions of love described by Illouz (2017 [2007]) when analysing loving relationships on contexts like Western Europe and North America, are similar to those already developed in relation to urban China. However, as Xie (2020) indicates, “[w]hat makes the Chinese case different from its postmodern individualised Western counterparts is the co-existence of the traditional moral framework built within family structures and upheld by the state,” through policies and laws such as the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly, which that took effect on July 2, 2013, and states that it is adult children's duty to provide care for their parents (Xie 2020: 185; Zhang 2016). In addition, “the state with its controlled media joined with market forces” to promote a discourse of marriage and family based on a particular type of family unit: “a happy complete heterosexual family (美满家挺 *meiman jiating*), as a desirable object for the masses to pursue” (Xie 2020: 184-185). This discourse based on the notions of modernisation encourages married couples to avoid family breakdown (Wong 2016) and “to embody certain ‘traditional values’ substantiated by the Confucian discourse, such as filial piety and harmony.” Throughout media, market forces and Chinese law, the Party-state promotes and enforces these values “functions as a powerful institution to regulate individuals' romantic choice” (Xie 2020: 185) and, consequently, romantic love conceptualizations, as Mr. Lu pointed out when defining love as “a relationship of responsibilities, it's like a contract.”

Gender in the disciplinary market of love marriage

As we argued in the previous section, the state-engineered public desire to marry is based on the combination of two different factors. On the one hand, the co-existence of the traditional moral framework built within family structures and values which are enforced by Chinese law and, on the other, the promotion of a discourse of marriage and family based on a particular type of monogamy —a happy complete heterosexual (Han) family—. However, such state-engineered public determination to marry entirely relies, as Xie points, “on placing women at the centre of its disciplinary control” (2020: 186). The Party-state has assumed Chinese women's productive and reproductive labour in its policymaking to promote the different

discourses of legitimization since the foundation of the PRC in 1949. Currently, the official discourse of middle class is also based on the Chinese women's position within the hierarchical order.

Since a Chinese woman's self has historically been shaped by her relational positioning to others, within a hierarchical order formed under a long Confucian patriarchal and patrilineal family tradition, the party-state has long assumed Chinese women's dual roles as worker and mother in its policymaking to build a strong nation (Evans 1997). Hong-Fincher (2014, 2018) argues that the state deliberately pressures well-educated middle-class women to marry and give birth in order to procreate a strong stable high-quality nation with the lowest public cost, as reflected in the stigmatisation of single women as 'leftover' in the state media ... Unsurprisingly, young women's individual freedom is under constant renegotiation with traditional ideologies.

(Xie 2020: 187)

In the case of middle-class women, their individual freedom is currently under renegotiation with Confucian patriarchal and patrilineal family narratives and the politics of lifestyle based on the "entrepreneurialization of the self" as a key component in the politics of lifestyle in contemporary China. The tension created by these contradicting social representations and narratives —Chinese women's individualistic dreams of autonomy and traditional gendered aspirations— "is acutely reflected among sufferings experienced by middle-class women's romantic pursuit for marital bliss" (Xie 2020: 187) as the aforementioned stigmatisation of single women as "leftover" in the state media illustrates. However, some middle-income women attempt to overcome such a binary framework —happily married woman versus "leftover" woman, as Mrs. Ai points when explaining that getting married in Beijing is not an easy task.

Young people still consider them as very important but for, I want to say, people above 30 years of age, I think worry more about quality of life – if it's guaranteed or, as one of my friends said, if she can't achieve a high quality of life after marriage, then she'd prefer not to marry. So, I believe that's a different case. Quality of life and also, as I've mentioned, if people's values are similar, that's what worries them the most, more than social status, job or professional career.

Indeed, as a friend of Mrs. Ai points, she hopes to settle into fulfilling a romantic relationship in the future, retaining their aspirations, and achieving "a high quality of life." We may consider her psychological narrative as forming part of the idea of a "high-quality" relationship, interacting with the concept of "equitable exchange" that forms part of processes of rationalisation to intimacy. This is set, as Morris highlights, "in a context of rapidly expanding emotional literacy, resulting in increased calculation, decontextualisation and objectification of emotions, amounting to an 'intellectualization of intimate bonds'," (Illouz 2017: 37, in Morris 2020: 265) in line with what Colin Gordon (1991: 44) calls the "entrepreneurialization of the self." The forming of this marriage market means that in the PRC's postmodern society, women are placed to face overt competition with others like in a market, where different —horizontal and vertical— variables and attributes of a woman could be traded. As Mrs. Ai also argues,

Especially for some educated women ... Especially those who've studied a doctorate's degree, they also work at other universities in Beijing. For them, particularly when doing post-graduate studies, it's very difficult [laughs] to marry because I think that in China we still have traditional opinions about women who have a very high education.

That is, that they're very independent and strong [laughs]. For men who are accustomed to a traditional family, maybe they'll think this is a problem ... [For men], especially the young ones from Beijing, also stress about buying a house or a car, which is also another requirement from parents to consider if he's the right match or not ... It's easier to get married in small cities. Cost of living is relatively lower and so, people have many friends in common there and parents normally have more *guanxi* and can provide an easier life than in Beijing, for example.

Mrs. Wu indicates another variable to keep in mind. According to her, in smaller cities and "in towns, it's very difficult for men [to find a partner] because there's a higher number of men in the countryside than women. On the other hand, the number of well-educated women living in Beijing is higher than men, so it's more difficult for women there." Indeed, it seems difficult for heterosexual women in the cities to find a partner because heterosexual men have lower cultural capital. Likewise, heterosexual men in rural areas have difficulty marrying because the number of women is lower than men and many will not be able to form a conventional family. In the end, even for privileged heterosexual middle-class Han women, the message is clear: the loss of social capital is the price to be paid for ignoring the state-engineered public desire to marry.

However, the rampant rise of "the new ideology of consumerism" (Yan 2009: xxxv) in Chinese society has promoted the public idea that not only the capacity to consummate romance through marriage and motherhood constitutes a woman's self-worth in the market economy (Wen 2013, in Xie 2020: 187). So, once women are married new demands of the state-engineered public desire emerge. Married women carry social responsibilities not only to provide care for China's "rapidly ageing population, but also to mitigate public risks posed by low birth rate with a severely imbalanced sex ratio" (Wang 2010; Bell 2010, in Xie 2020: 186). As a result, as Mrs. Tang notes, married women feel pressure to have children, "The pressure I feel comes from society. When I have kids, it'll go away. I also feel pressure coming from this feeling of responsibility, which is why I want to have them ... It's really difficult to raise them." Indeed, beyond the desire to become a parent, the pressure when marrying and having children also possesses a social and economic character, as Mr. Lai says, "I like children. We've spent a while wondering whether to have our second child, but we feel that the pressure of having the second one is greater because of our age and our job."

Indeed, despite their relatively privileged position on the social ladder, middle-class couples face material issues in raising "the happy complete heterosexual family" in urban China. Most interviewees who were asked about the pressure to commit and have children agreed that, beyond the public desire to marry and comply with the reproductive norm, the current situation for younger people getting married is more difficult now than it was in the 1990s or in the first decade of the new millennium. According to them, material concerns are a key reason. As Mrs. Yao indicates,

They [young couples] have more things to worry about, nowadays. Fifteen years ago, if two people wanted it and wanted to build a deeper and more intimate relationship, then OK, we're now a couple, we live together, we support one another. But the younger generation nowadays is more worried because if they get married, where are they going to live? ... Plus, the cost of raising kids, and younger people today don't really have free time to relax and interact, to associate with other people. They're too busy and most of their time is spent on work ... I think it's really important for people to be together and because of the Internet, people are more centred on their own

lives. Even when they talk, they do so through Wechat instead of face-to-face. I think young people have a hard time.

The role of technology in contemporary China is included in the current debates about the relationship between individual subject, the public and the private sphere, and class in contemporary settings. It contests the “market transition” approaches proposed by scholars such as Yan Yunxiang. As we have seen, in *The Individualization of Chinese society* (2009), Yan makes his argument that the PRC has been undergoing a process of individualization and erosion of family values, “what makes one’s life meaningful has changed from a collective ethics to an individual-centred ethics” (2009: xxxv). This is because a transformation of China’s political economy and “the new ideology of consumerism” (Yan 2009: xxxv) around the turn of the century, coinciding with the PRC’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) — China officially became WTO’s 143rd member on December 11, 2001.

As a result, “the ethics of everyday life shifted from an emphasis on self-sacrifice and hard work for a greater goal, such as building the new socialist society, to a new focus on self-realization and pursuit of personal happiness in concrete and materialistic terms” (Yan 2009: xxxv). In this respect, some of our respondents agree in highlighting this new ideology of consumerism in China since the turn of the century. For example, following the idea of the “entrepreneurialization of the self,” Mr. Qiao indicates that, “In the larger cities, it’s easier to live as a couple” than single, and that is why people there tend to marry more easily. Also, he considers that “people marry to easily,” because “they want to buy a house together, so they can marry ... so then get married.” Or, as Mr. Lai explains, “Cost of living is expensive, be it renting or buying a house. Added to that, people are more egocentric,” adding, “In my team, many of my acquaintances born in the 90s are very different. They prefer to do things that revolve around themselves.” In a similar vein, another important component of the politics of lifestyle has been the increasing competitiveness in the professional world which, as Mrs. Yao mentions, hinders couples from relaxing and communicating with each other, a social phenomenon that is in line with the classic model of second or reflexive modernity — especially the individualization thesis— suggested by Giddens (1991, 1992), Bauman (2001), Beck (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001).

In this manner technology has impacted on the private sphere. Mrs. Yao also points that the massive usage of new communication and information technologies has created an obstacle for interacting. Indeed, technology has impacted on choice, commitment and marriage markets as some scholars have analysed (Illouz 2012, 2017 [2007]; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2014; Horvat 2015; Palmer 2020). For instance, the arrival of digital dating technology, such as the digital application for dating Tinder, has “enabled and promoted short-termism in relationships (or ‘commitment phobia’ in men) because of the appearance of abundant choice, ... the ongoing gender inequalities in sexual fields” (Carter and Arocha 2020: 6, 7), and the high demands made by all in the ‘marriage market’¹²⁵, as Mrs. Ai has explained above. According to Mrs. Yao, everything revolves around the individual now. Similarly, Mr. Lu also perceives changes compared to his youth:

I see that they [my brothers and youngest cousins] don’t have much motivation for marriage like when we got married ... In the past, we thought marriage before 30 was

¹²⁵ According to Illouz (2012), the forming of the marriage market means that in a postmodern or global individualised society, “the process of choosing a mate becomes defined by the dynamic of taste: that is, it becomes the result of the compatibility of two highly differentiated individuals, each looking for specific attributes in a free and unconstrained way” (2012: 52, in Xie 2020: 188)

a must, but now there are many people past that age who haven't married yet, like a niece of mine who's already 28 or 29 and everyone is introducing her to potential boyfriends.

Mr. Lu is 37 years old and considers this hesitation to get married among younger citizens in large cities is due to the "economic pressure" of buying a house,

Another reason is that people now have more forms of satisfaction, they can enjoy multiple things: news, tabloid gossip, many, many things. It's not like when I was a university student, when we thought it was necessary to have a boyfriend or girlfriend to go to the movies or travel together. Now, I think that young people have a lot at their disposal to enjoy alone and at the same time be satisfied.

As we have seen, material concerns and uncertainty are issues that urban couples must face. That is why, Mr. Bai, 64, points, having a partner is difficult, "they have different values, both sides' social class must match," since "matching economic power between both families means a lot to people of my generation." As Mr. Bai observes:

It seems that traditions are changing. Young people are getting married later, they don't want to have more children. The government has now shifted policy to allow for a second child; young people are changing ... There are many reasons that explain why younger citizens are taking longer to get married ... If they can't find a roof to put over their head, then where are you going to live? Where can you raise children?

Class has been and remains central to the understanding of Chinese young people's mate choice criteria. According to Mr. Lai, 37, the "industrialist" perception based on material concerns about sentimental relationships is a determining element in current times.

My parents worked at a large factory that would manufacture tanks. It was very big, there were 50,000 workers, and there were several factories in one single city. It was an industrial university that manufactured large things. My parents were workers at one of them, they were lower middle class ... My wife, my father-in-law was a soldier, an army officer, and my mother-in-law works at the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Maybe we're middle class, so we're compatible, but I'd never choose a woman who's from a higher class than me. It might be difficult for me to accept a woman ... Happiness is not only her and my responsibility, it's also both of our parents' responsibility. It's not just a relationship between the two of us, it's also between two families.

Similar findings were made by Xie (2020). On this point, what equally matters in these narratives about class, family and harmony

is the importance of matching social ranking (门当户对 *men dang hu dui*), which could literally be translated as matching doors and windows. It indicates that a partner's 'objective standing', including education, family background, occupation and financial status, still matter, if not even more so in a society where volatile class reformations are still ongoing under marketisation and people are fearful of downward social mobility (Zurndorfer 2016).

(Xie 2020: 188-189)

On that basis, notions of class, harmony or romantic love are appropriately reflected in social practices and representations in contemporary China. For example, Mr. Cui considers marrying

“now is more difficult than before. I’ve gone to several weddings lately, and they’re very extravagant. Wedding ceremonies have become very sophisticated.” According to him,

In the past—in my day—we’d only put on what we had and it was easier. Now, people spend a lot on their wedding, and you also need to buy a house and a car. Plus, the man has to give his fiancée’s family a *caili*, or money, as a dowry. This makes finding the right partner more difficult.

Beyond these negative expectations based on the concept of *yuan* in viewing love, particularly intense love, with scepticism, and the belief that success or failure in loving relationships is predetermined by class and family—and is not under control of the individuals—we have been able to document significant differences in the conception of romantic love and in the public and private spheres of men and women. In the same vein, while the majority of women in our study in Beijing can be observed to operate under similar constraints with regard to the public and private spheres, and while differences in constraints and opportunities can also be explained in terms of occupation, geographic origin, child care, extended family and the developmental stages during lifetime, nevertheless significant “differences *between* women” can be seen (Wynne 1998: 120). However, as we have discovered in this section when we examined our informants’ narratives about love, marriage and parenthood, that women face struggles to reconcile the multiple and often oppositional ideologies arising from the intermingling of traditional and modern discourses of romantic love and marital happiness in contemporary China (Xie 2020). This is in line with Brigitte Vasallo’s (2018) understanding of monogamy and polyamory in contemporary societies as organizing systems of individual affections and social ties that places “the reproductive nucleus” as the highest expression of social identity. In the case of the PRC, the historically relational positioning to others of a Chinese woman’s self reflects a deeply rooted hierarchical order formed under a long Confucian patriarchal and patrilineal family tradition, which the Party-state has long assumed in its policymaking to reinforce its legitimacy in the PRC (Xie 2020). As a result, such deeply rooted patriarchal, normative and disciplinary structure is underpinning gender inequalities in both the public and private spheres in contemporary China.

4.4. THE SOCIAL SPACE OF THE COMMUNITY

Social scientists have addressed the civic link between the built environment and social practices over urban space in order “to understand how urban neighbourhoods are transformed, organized and perceived in contemporary global societies. In an unprecedented era of urbanization, we often observe that communal life becomes increasingly disintegrated” (Zhu and Fu 2016: 2). In fact, in less than two decades, the social structure in the PRC had changed considerably. In the 1970s, the PRC had approximately 80 per cent of its population living as peasants on or off the land, but by 2018 almost 60 per cent of the total population lived in towns and cities across the country (Goodman 2014: 2; Parish and Whyte 1978; *The World Bank* 2019¹²⁶) (See Figure 2.2, Chapter II). In the PRC, although “the central government

¹²⁶ Urban population refers to people living in urban areas as defined by national statistical offices. The World Bank, United Nations Population Division (2019). “World Urbanization Prospects: 2018 Revision. Urban population (% of total population) – China.” The data are collected and smoothed by United Nations Population Division. Available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=CN>, accessed 1 August 2020.

has begun to restructure urban neighbourhoods, and has encouraged residents to govern themselves by means of democratic procedures,” this “reorganization of neighbourhood committees was actually conducted and find that opportunities for participation were far more limited than initially promised” (Heberer and Göbel 2011) while “once-vibrant interpersonal ties are also eroding China’s urban neighborhoods” (Zhu and Fu 2016: 2). Possibly as a tool to establish the technologies of the self by combining self-government and self-discipline techniques, or as an antidote to loss of community, “the rise of gated communities has become a predominant feature of the urban landscape” (Tang 2018a: 1) that has drawn much attention from sociologists and urban anthropologists.

The Chinese terms assigned to neighbourhoods or communities do not have direct equivalents in western societies. The *xiaoqu* (literally, “small area”) refers to a residential compound, either private or run by a company, while the *shequ* (literally, “social area”) is often translated as “community” or “urban community” because it encompasses the territory and people under the administration of a resident or community committee (Tomba 2014: 4). The concept of *xiaoqu* indicates a type of residential complex associated with the emerging middle class, the *shequ*, on the other hand, refer to the urban communities in which “residents take care of their own affairs by means of a semi-official organization” —“similar to the innovations in village self-governance undertaken since the late 1980s in rural China”¹²⁷ (Heberer and Göbel 2011: 2). Both contain “shades,” Tomba notes, “of meaning that do not really correspond to those of the English word *neighborhood*” (2014: 4), but “they provide a window on the flexibility and variations that characterize governmental practices in present-day China” (2014: 5).

The living space most associated with the Chinese middle class is the gated community. In the PRC, as we have seen, private homeownership had not been the norm until the 1990s. Similar to its western counterpart, gated communities in China represent “‘high status’ symbols with enclosed and restricted residential areas, exclusive community parks and recreational facilities, and professional management and security services” (Tang 2018a: 1). But different from western societies where gated communities usually exemplify “luxurious lifestyles only limited to a small group of people (e.g., Blakely and Snyder 1997; Atkinson and Blandy 2005), in urban China gated communities have become one major form of supply in the housing market and one of the most popular and desirable choices for homebuyers¹²⁸” (Tang 2018a: 1). Simultaneously, the middle class and the newly rich —including business elites, the higher-level managerial class, and well-positioned officials— “are taking over prime locations in the urban core, while lower-income families are being pushed out into the peripheral areas”

¹²⁷ The purpose of these self-governance measures in rural areas, as Heberer and Göbel point, “was not to democratize China, but to enable villagers to solve conflicts directly at the grassroots level without involving higher-level government, as they had done for centuries in imperial times ... In 1987, elections were reintroduced mainly because the return to family farming and the necessity to regulate newly emerging private markets required a degree of regulatory flexibility at the grassroots level greater than the township level could provide. The conservative reformers calculated that these time-tested measures would disburden the central government and make the villagers more amenable to central policies” (2011: 1).

¹²⁸ As Tang notes, “the diversities of gated communities in China illustrate different social groups’ access to housing resources.” She discusses three types of gated communities in urban areas, “namely commodity-housing communities, work-unit communities and the mixed communities,” based on “the distribution and mobilization of urban housing resources in a housing market with strong intervention by the socialist state” (2018: 44).

(Zhang Wei 2004: 51). The rise of these gated communities, thus, has become a predominant feature of the urban landscape in urban China (Tang 2018a: 1).

A result of the privatization of housing market and large-scale relocation is the spatialization of class in the city. In her book *In Search of Paradise* (2010), Li Zhang provides an ethnographic account of the profound spatial, cultural and political effects of privatizing homeownership and living in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province. Zhang “focuses on the transformative role of homeownership, new residential space, and lifestyle practices in shaping middle-class subjects and activism as well as urban governing strategies” (2010: 3). She also illustrates how

[t]his emerging regime of urban living is built on a radical remaking of the spatial, social, and moral order and encompasses several key aspects of the way life is reorganized and made meaningful in post-socialist China —the spatial and architectural form of residence, domestic configuration, the cultural milieu of community, forms of sociality, and the management of these privatized spaces.

(Zhang 2010: 2-3)

A key concept that Zhang develops in her book is “the spatialization of class,” by which she means “that the production of commodity housing (as it is known in China), gated communities, and private living provides the physical and social ground on which the making of the new middle classes become possible” (2010: 3). Therefore, the phenomenon of “regimes of living” has enormously impacted the process of social identification, representation and formation of the middle class in the new geography of class in the PRC. Beyond the material impact, private homeownership in general and gated communities in particular are significant driving forces “in myriad social changes that are turning China into a global economic and political power” because their effects have altered social practices and representations in the PRC, that is “the way many Chinese live and think about class, status, social space and selfhood” (Zhang 2010: 3). In order to understand how such social practices and representations of Beijing’s middle incomers, and the Chinese society as a whole are evolving, it is essential to unravel “the mutually constitutive and transformative relationship among three key aspects of the emerging urban regimes of living: spatial form, class-specific subjects, and modes of community governing” (Zhang 2010: 3).

Certainly, (semi)public spaces in Chinese cities “have been viewed as important civic venues for social encounters, associational life, and political discourse” by providing “physical settings not only for a sense of place to grow in the form of meaning, identity, and memories, but also for a civil society to develop and function” (Douglass and Danieri 2009; Low and Smith 2006, in Zhu and Fu 2016: 2). Indeed, as we have seen in Chapter I, Weininger notes that Bourdieu maps out a class structure that postulates, first “a causal connection between class location and habitus;” secondly, the class location a person holds has an indirect impact on their actions or social practices “situated in different domains of consumption —practices which cohere symbolically to form a whole” (a “lifestyle”),” as the social practices in gated communities reflect; thirdly, although “these practices serve to constitute social collectivities, or ‘status groups,’ by establishing symbolic boundaries between individuals occupying different locations in the class structure,” they are also daily consumption practices which become a contentious process (or a “classification struggle”). Indeed, as Tomba (2014) noted, social practices and identities in many middle-class neighborhoods are not as homogeneous as they used to be when the *danwei* was in charge of residential arrangements, rather the new life in these new residential communities requires newly defined values of coexistence and social practices of distinction such as cultural consumption. And, the fourth part of Bourdieu’s

analytical schema, Weininger points, “demonstrates that this struggle amounts to only one of the many modalities through which ‘symbolic power’ is exercised” by individuals and social groups (2005: 86).

Although the role of the space in social stratification and power relations have proven to be critical (Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1989), it is far too often overlooked in the discourse of the building of a new social management system and neighbourhood governance since 2004, when the CCP called for the “advancement of social management innovation” (*shehui guanli chuangxin*) (Zhu and Fu 2016; Tang 2019). This section thus has two objectives in terms of the productive factors of the informants’ class identities, interests and connections. First, it investigates the social practices and representations through which communal space is perceived, recognized, and understood by the informants as residents in Chinese urban neighbourhoods, based on Zhang’s concept of “the spatialization of class” and the focus of Zhu and Fu’s (2016) study on the civic virtue of communal space. Second, according to Bourdieu’s analytical schema on symbolic power and social collectivities mentioned above, this section examines the relationship between communal space and neighbourhood participation and whether or not communal space serves as a source of neighbourhood attachment that motivates participation and can ultimately influence civil society formation beyond existing semi-official organizations. The interview questions mainly covered information on neighbourhood participation, considerations when searching for residence, neighbourly relations, and their social life within their resident communities.

4.4.1 Spatializing the concept of middle class

Through the housing reform, Beibei Tang states, the PRC “has embarked on a pattern of urban spatial reorganization that recognizes a correlation between status and housing consumption patterns, and spatial and residential segregation have thus become fundamental markers for the analysis of social stratification and the emergence of new classes” (Tang 2018a: 44). While studies which solely use objective criteria in their definition of the middle class have considered the “location” merely as a backdrop where the middle-class phenomenon has developed, studies which also take definite subjective criteria into account and examine the “everyday practices of power” established in these private compounds, consider location as a determining factor (Tomba 2014: 3). As we have seen, Chinese neighbourhoods in the early twenty-first century have become “a significant arena for the simultaneous analysis of a multiplicity of social and political relations” (2014: 3). In Chinese gated communities we can find a set of comprehensive criteria for analysing privileged status in post-reform China that “include both monetary rewards and in-kind rewards, both nominal salaries and latent benefits,” both homeowners “within the system” (*tizhi nei*) and homeowners “outside the system” (*tizhi wai*) (Tang 2018a: 15). As empirical evidence for market transition points, “economic reforms, socio-economic transformation and the accompanying rise in social mobility significantly altered the structure of many residential areas” (Heberer and Göbel 2011: 27). Mr. Lai’s narrative may suggest the impacts of such reforms when discussing about his community in Chaoyang,

Before, it was a town with villagers, whose customs still remain today, like keeping chickens. I like dogs, but not chickens. We had avian influenza in China. [Also] some local Hebei customs continue, such as their funeral processions, where many tables are laid out at sunset and burning bank notes along the pathway. Their ancestors did it this

way, and it still continues in the gated community ... [Other neighbors] are employees of public enterprises with customs from the city. There're all kinds of backgrounds in a neighborhood ... I like that a lot. Neighbours who practice ancient customs are very friendly. For example, some of them take their children to dig up dirt in the yard and they like it. Others have dogs. People from Beijing like to have dogs both big and small. I like dogs ... [But] it's not a tranquil community ... Chinese are very noisy.

In contrast to Mr. Lai's narrative about his lively neighbourhood, "there is a well-established social hierarchy between the gated-community residents "within the system" and "outside the system" which is based on *suzhi* (human quality) (Tang 2018a: 110). As we have seen, high quality (*gao suzhi*) is associated with university education, good manners, white-collar jobs and urban residence, as a way to draw "a sharp distinction between the educated middle class and the unemployed or rural migrants" (Tang 2018a: 110). Between these two extremes, there is a whole series of subcategories of *suzhi* behaviours, as Mrs. Yao argues.

They're not bad [my neighbours], but I wouldn't say I like them. I think it's normal because many types of people may live in your neighbourhood. Some are very arrogant, others are very self-centred, and some have poor character. You can hear them shouting and when you hear people arguing with each other at night —husbands and wives— those kinds of environments aren't very nice. In most cases, however, they are generally fine [smiles]. Some are friendly.

Indeed, the *suzhi* narrative also exists among urban middle-class individuals. Generally speaking, Tang (2018a) notes, *suzhi* distinction was drawn mainly between two occupational groups: individuals who were employed in "within the system" sectors and who were self-employed, that is, public servants and professionals —better educated and better behaved than the rest— on the one side; and private entrepreneurs —wealthy business-people, particularly non-high-tech private-business owners— on the other, mainly because of their lower education and what the well-educated salaried individuals consider as poor manners — use of coarse language as Mr. Qiao said when describing migrant workers and the way they point the finger, and selfish behaviours: they only cared about their own interests and ignored other residents' benefits and feelings, as Mrs. Yao points above— (Tang 2018a: 110-111). Mrs. Gong goes further and expresses dissatisfaction with her home's location situated in a residential zone at the outskirts of Beijing, the community's large size and the more affordable housing prices:

It's not about whether I like it or not. The house where I live now is comfortable because it's very big ... I wouldn't be able to buy one this size in the city's centre, so comfortable, [but] it's just cheaper in the suburbs. I'm fine with that [although] you can tell you're living in the outskirts, far from the city centre, sometimes it's inconvenient going there every single day. Since I don't work right now, it's not an issue, but maybe in the future when I do have a job, it'll be very tiring ... [My neighbours] are separated into two types: some are the property owners and the others are the ones paying rent. Many who rent a home share it with other people ... I'm not happy because a house is divided into ten rooms and many live there. Some of them throw trash into the community garden, or make a lot of noise when returning home at night and do so at different hours. They don't all come back at the same, fixed hour.

Despite Mrs. Gong's deep understanding of the PRC's legal and social systems, it is remarkable that she avoids discussing the economic grounds behind her neighbours' behaviours. According to Jacka (2009), there are three key reasons for this. First, this is because *suzhi*

works as a justification for worker exploitation and, at the same time, it reinforces, legitimizes and hides systemic causes behind the high levels of social inequality in the PRC. As a result, *suzhi* becomes “central to neoliberal governmentality and global capitalism” (Anagnost 1997a, 1997b, 2004, 2008; Yan Hairong 2003a, 2003b, in Jacka 2009: 525). In the case of Mrs. Gong’s narrative, not only she is not satisfied with her neighbourhood, but she also establishes a distinction between the neighbourhood’s residents: property owners and those who rent the homes. As a result, *suzhi* has gradually become a marker of class (Anagnost 1997a, 1997b: 75–97, 117–37, 2004, 2008; Yan Hairong 2003a, 2003b). In this case, being a homeowner is a value coding used to differentiate and highlight gaps between, for example, the good and bad, rich and poor, civilized and uncivilized (Jacka 2009: 525).

Secondly, from a different approach, Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005) “view an increasing attention to *suzhi* in population governance as a key part of a largely positive, though incomplete, shift away from direct, coercive state intervention to a ‘neoliberal’ governmentality involving less coercion and a greater degree of ‘self-governance’” (2005, in Jacka 2009: 526). On this point, however, Tomba (2004, 2014) suggests that such neoliberal governmentality, rather than involving less coercion and a greater degree of democratic “self-governance,” reinforces “[t]he emergence of a private discourse of reliable, responsible, self-disciplined, ‘high- *suzhi*’ citizens justifying their grievances through the need to improve the nation” and contribute to the construction of a new form of modern and ‘advanced’ “subject, disciplined and in tune with the goal of the ‘community’ project¹²⁹, that is, the transition to a form of government that relies on the responsibility of private stakeholders in administering the management of society” (Tomba 2014: 57). Finally, from a radically new perspective, Sigley (2009) notes that the technoscientific regulation of human bodies and conducts implicit in the concept of *suzhi* is just as important in the current socialist market economy as it was in the planned economy in Mao-dominated era of China’s politics. Sigley’s essay “shows, however, that through technoscientific reasoning the human body was transformed from a revolutionary agent into an object of planning and administrative regulation” (Jacka 2009: 528).

As we discovered in previous sections when we examined social origin, lifestyles and gender inequalities, the informants’ social practices and representations, together with other aspects of their life experiences due to gender inequalities, social origin or class background, shape — by reinforcing or undermining— their social representations, behaviours, perceptions, narratives, values, and preferences in accordance with their class location and class interests. In the case of the conceptualization of *suzhi*, and like housing ownership or money, it enables one to draw equivalences between very different kinds of value and value differentials (Kipnis 2006, in Jacka 2009: 525). It is central to neoliberal governmentality and global capitalism the recognition of *suzhi* not just as “a normative goal or substance, supposedly attainable by all,” but, as we have seen, “[i]t is also a value coding used to differentiate and highlight gaps between, for example, the good and bad, rich and poor, civilized and uncivilized” (Jacka 2009: 525), such as Mr. Yang when discussing about his neighbours.

¹²⁹ During the fieldwork for his study in Shenyang city, Tomba describes how “[t]he formalized principles of *shequ zizhi* (community self-governance) are “self-administration, self-education, self-service, and self-discipline” (*ziwo guanli, ziwo jiaoyu, ziwo fuwu, ziwo yueshu*). This mantra of the self is often reproduced on large signs that tower over community offices and is emblazoned on banners inside the communities, much like other slogans have done in earlier times” (Tomba 2014: 82).

My neighbours, most of them, are not very educated. They belong to the last generation and only care for their own things and their own family. Environment is not of any concern to them ... There's a small yard and a communal area which neighbours occupy ... They want to put their scooters there and leave a lot cardboard boxes laying in a corner. I always educate my parents and tell them to not do that, or at the very least, to not be the first to do those things in a communal space. If my parents do it first, other neighbours will copy them and then we're off to a very bad start. I ask them to never do that ... It [my neighbour's behaviour] has to do with education, but on the other hand, for example, they help others. They like to lend others a hand, I think. You can't judge them, it's to do with their education ... I don't want to say I like them because of their academic titles. I mean that I just don't like the way they do things ... I hope I can move to another neighbourhood, soon [laughs]. My neighbours are enthusiasts, self-centered and little nosy. I'm not too fond of them.

As Mr. Yang highlights, residents' cultural capital mark the most significant difference in the *suzhi* hierarchy, and acts as a barrier for socialization among neighbours, which is consistent with the findings of Jacka (2009) and Tang (2018a), among others. Urban dwellers "tend to communicate with residents who are considered of similar or higher *suzhi*, rather than a similar socio-economic status" (Tang 2018a: 111). That is why *suzhi* hierarchies go hand in hand with Zhang's concept of "spatialization of class," and Bourdieu's conceptualization of class as a multidimensional space shaped by not only the volume but also the composition of different types of capitals. Therefore, the *spatialization of class* discussed by Zhang demonstrate that "private home ownership and increasingly stratified residential space serve as a tangible ground on which class-specific subject [a consumer-oriented professional middle class (Tombs 2004) and cultural milieus are fostered" (2010: 107). In other words, Zhang illustrates a space not as a mere passive receptacle of social interaction, but as a place where a series of symbolic forces and materials interact with subjectivities.

In the same vein, *suzhi* consists of taste, good manners, judgment, and the acquisition of cultural capital by a social group through housing choices and a set of social practices and representations —that is, lifestyles (Zhang 2010: 15). Simultaneously, Zhang also argues, "[t]aste, as reflected in residential choices, has a productive role here in that "it classifies the classifier" (Bourdieu 1984: 6) —in this case, the latter refers to the *suzhi* of a subject or a population. Therefore, "[l]ike habitus (Bourdieu 1977a), *suzhi* is neither idiosyncratic nor completely predetermined by the socioeconomic position of a social group; rather, both *suzhi* and habitus mediate between the conditions of existence and subjective experiences" (Zhang 2010: 15). Consequently, gated communities and the new regimes of living provide enable the cultivation of a legible official discourse of middle class, *suzhi* hierarchy and "people like us" narratives central to middle-class making (Zhang 2010). For Beijing's middle incomers, the vision of modern middle-class living is a key marker of class used to describe and identify "people like us", as Mr. Yi indicates when speaking about his community.

Yes, yes. [I'm happy with my neighbours] because the community is small, not too large, and for my family, it's a midpoint, I think. Many people there are quite wealthy and have some power, powerful. Neighbours are normally... How should I put it?... Easy to communicate with. They don't have any bad habits and are very understanding of others. So, it's easy living inside. You don't have to worry too much about the neighbours because they all belong to the same class as you, or even above you.

Mr. Yi prefers to have as neighbours middle-class residents and "higher quality or "the same class as you, or even above you." 'People like us' "are considered trustworthy because of their

transparent occupational background, their willingness to share information with other residents” (Tang 2018a: 112) —as Mr. Yi points, “easy to communicate with”—, and with good manners — “They don’t have any bad habits and are very understanding of others” —. Similarly, as we have seen in the first section of this chapter, Mr. Wen reports:

The community where I live is in the CBD (Central Business District). It’s very convenient, very convenient for shopping, going out for dinner, go to the movies. Very convenient, and people in my community, most of them are middle class ... [But] people are more indifferent now. It’s just that I barely see my neighbours, so I don’t have an opinion of them, but I’m happy because we don’t bother each other [laughs] ... [I don’t have a relationship with them] because during the day, we’re working and return home too late. We barely see each other, that’s why we don’t have any contact ... I don’t know them, and they don’t know me.

Despite the common image of the “good life,” luxurious lifestyles and high *suzhi* often attached to gated communities located in the CBD or on the outskirts of the city of Beijing as Mr. Yi’s neighbourhood, their residents lack a common basis for identity and interaction. Similar findings were made again by Tang (2018a), Heberer and Göbel (2011), and Tomba (2014). Moreover, many informants such as Mr. Yang, Mr. Lai, Mrs. Gong and Mr. Yao “who live in a mixed community, which accommodates both workplace-sponsored residents and commercial-housing residents,” share similar social practices such as child care or spiritual practices and “consumption patterns such as housing and education expenses, stratified consumption of leisure activities, which is considered a marker for structural class formation,” as noted earlier, “does not have a bonding effect” (Tang 2018a: 112, 113). The analyses also reveal that the communities described by the majority of informants show a great variety of social practices that contrast with the traditional work-unit housing during the Maoist period. Compared to the interactions with their friends, family and colleagues, interactions between gated-community residents are much less frequent, as the next chapter will reveal.

Despite the informants do not talk about their communities in terms of high *suzhi* or low *suzhi* (because “the word *suzhi* is not appropriate” as Mrs. Li expresses), a *suzhi* distinction is drawn in most of the interviews by using *suzhi* narratives when describing the residents of their neighbourhoods and their social practices. They use both high *suzhi* and low *suzhi* narratives: “people are more indifferent now,” “they are quite wealthy and have some power ... they are easy to communicate with,” “my neighbours, most of them, are not very educated,” “my neighbours are enthusiast, self-centred and little noisy,” “some are very arrogant, others are very self-centred,” “it’s not a tranquil community.” Indeed, as we have argued, such discourse of ‘distinction’, and “a high rate of segregation and polarization within individual neighbourhoods naturally makes it difficult for a common identity to develop among the community residents as a whole” (Heberer and Göbel 2011: 29-30).

While *suzhi* is gradually becoming, as Beibei Tang notes, “the most important criterion for evaluation of other social groups within the community” (2018a: 112), material concerns influence people’s housing-consumption choices mostly. When asked, when looking to rent or purchase a home, the price and proximity to schools and/or workplace are the most chosen variables. For example, Mrs. Ai bought an apartment in Liangmaqiao for a low price thanks to her mother-in-law’s status as an employee at a *danwei*. The price was her main motive, and she reduces the importance of neighbors’ *suzhi*, “It’s not that important because people often rent out their homes, so you have lots of types of neighbours, including within any given year ... Quality is also an aspect, but it’s not very important because we don’t have a lot of contact

with neighbours.” Also, keeping in mind the point of view of those who rent apartments —as in Mrs. Ai’s case, who lives in a “compound” far away from the city centre— there are economic reasons lying beneath the implicit distinctions made by *suzhi*, “I can’t buy a house. I don’t have enough money for it [and that’s why] I live in a rental. The important thing is convenience regarding my workplace, the price and size. This is what I take into consideration [along with] the community environment.”

The fact that consideration for neighbours is not important demonstrates that lifestyles of an urban community’s residents have individualized enormously compared to the collectivist nature of the *danwei*. Community, as Lash states, requires a telos, its own goals and purposes, and cannot simply be a fragmented collection of individuals (Lash 1996: 256, 271, in Heberer and Göbel 2011: 31). Rather than exhibiting growing homogeneity, as Tang concludes, “the urban housing-status group members have grown increasingly diversified in terms of group membership” (2018a: 114). Indeed, residential areas are no longer communities of solidarity with very different social attributes, but rather “lifestyle enclaves” shaped by a conglomeration of strangers shaped by their individualized lifestyles and postmodern uncertainty (changes of residence, change of jobs, changes of marital status and so on), and this stands in stark contrast to the collectivist orientation of the *danwei* (Lash 1996: 272, in Heberer and Göbel 2011: 31).

Nevertheless, “[w]hen moving into new residential areas (a common experience for many urban dwellers over the last two decades), solidarities often need to be reestablished around shared economic interests and newly defined values of coexistence” (Tomba 2014: 12). Although coexistence is not confined to mere tolerance of one’s neighbour, distinction narratives, conflicts and social coexistence in the new residential communities in urban China often require access to a familiar set of structured arguments to apply to each situation in order to acquire, internalize and finally perform collectively in neighbourhood life. In addition, Tomba highlights three main factors which affect such process of “collective performance”:

the long-term lived experiences of the residents; the governmental discourses on social order percolating through the system, from the center to the remotest periphery; and the bounded societal autonomy (or the appearance of autonomy) allowed or denied by the physical, mental, and administrative boundaries of the neighborhoods.

(Tomba 2014: 12-13)

Therefore, these factors can lead to various attitudes, social practices, behaviours and social representations of different groups when it comes to class-status attainment and collective-interest formation. By examining the middle-class groups’ participation in local governance, both neighbourhood and residential community governance, next section “re-floats the traditional split on class” as Bourdieu suggests (Inda and Duek 2005: 5). As discussed in Chapter I, Bourdieu deeps the distinction between a class in the objective sense or class “in itself” —the economic description of class which existed as a historical reality— and subjective, sociological, consciousness-made class or class “for itself”—that is, a class which had acquired a consciousness of its identity and capacity to act (Crompton 1998: 13; Katz 1992: 50). This helps to understand, as Tang (2018a) indicates, not only how but also why the so-called Chinese middle class might or might not become a driving force for political change.

4.4.2 Middle-class participation in the community

This section explores the political life of the Chinese urban middle class by examining their participation in and influence in neighbourhood governance and homeowner activism in their residential communities or gated communities. One of the topics included in the design of our questionnaire was the political opinion of the respondents. Despite having included questions relating to government, political participation and issues of democracy into the initial draft, and after conducting two pilot interviews and previous chats with our respondents, it was apparent that many individuals would only accept being interviewed if political issues were avoided. Consequentially, a guide was drafted substituting the previous questions with others focused on community participation, in order to understand the political life of the urban middle class in the PRC in a number of different ways.

In addition, existing studies tend to analyse the participation of this group from “a state versus civil society” approach “in which the middle class is usually considered a homogeneous group and has potential conflicting interests with China’s one party-rule” (Tang 2018a: 116). The previous sections have identified, however, different social practices and representations associated with a heterogeneity in the sample discovered in our explorations of geographic origin, social background and occupation. Moreover, as Salmenkari seems to indicate, there is a conceptual issue in discussing civil society in the PRC. Beyond the fact that some “scholars are still dubious about whether civil society—a concept that originated in the West—can be readily transplanted in a non-Western context” (Hann 1996; Taylor 1990, in Fu 2014: 201), she suggests that “China studies over-simplistically presume that civil society only creates social spaces that can countervail the government’s power” and this lack of analysis promotes “those elements the Westerners find desirable for China” (Salmenkari 2018: 210). This section then adopts a “public, open, horizontal, voluntaristic,” supportive and do-together-with-others’—including other social agents such as collectivities, social groups and organizations—perspective of civil society (Salmenkari 2018: 29, 202) by examining how our respondents interact with the state through official and semi-official organizations operating within their neighbourhoods, as well as how they interact with each other and “do-together-with-others” in their residential communities and neighbourhoods during this process.

As this section focuses on how the informants, as gated-community residents, respond to community governance as a whole, as well as to what extent urban middle classes participate in homeowner activism, we examine the two main mechanisms of participation in neighbourhood governance and homeowner activism: the Residents’ Committees (*jumin weiyuanhui* or *jueweihui* or RC) and the homeowners’ committees or homeowner associations (*yezhu weiyuanhui* or HC), which coexist in a community’s social space. Residential communities in the PRC “are not the same private realm of urban life as in most other countries,” rather “they are the sites of urban administration and active governance in which citizens and the state interact on a daily basis over practical pursuits” (Tang 2018a: 118). The interests of the citizens and the RC—on behalf of the state—are articulated in governing neighbourhoods in the pursuit of conflict resolution in community governance, “in relation to how specific and practical actions should be undertaken, rather than in relation general political claims” (Tang 2018a: 118). As Tang argues,

The state has been intervening in the life of urban residential communities through its agents: Residents’ Committees ... which are composed of staff hired by local government. With concerns that increasing homeowner activism will exacerbate social instability, local government most of the time through Residents’ Committees in gated

communities— actively monitors disputes within the community and endeavors to intervene in and mediate situations of conflict to prevent community conflict from escalating into large-scale social unrest.

(Tang 2018a: 118)

Neighbourhood governance in urban China functions as the “roots of the state” (Read 2012) in the form of “government next door” (Tomba 2014)¹³⁰ (Tang 2019: 2). When conflicts arise, the RC acts “as a coordinator and facilitator for neighborhood deliberation”¹³¹ and deals “with disputes between residents and issues in relation to the community environment in general” or “with conflicts between residents and property management companies or between residents and the state” (Tang 2018b: 667). Thus, “both deliberative and non-deliberative activities took place to shape a system where authoritarianism coexist and interact with each other” (2018b: 667). However, our respondents do not see the RC as an intruder into their private sphere —perhaps because of “the high security offered by management companies” in the middle-class communities makes it difficult for RC staff members to approach them (Tang 2018b: 668).

At the same time, middle-class homeowners face concerns regarding their housing properties, but different from their western counterparts, the formers “are facing a new and ill-regulated market and inadequate government policies that do not provide channels and support for homeowners to pursue their collective interests” (Tang 2018a: 117). Consequently,

middle-class homeowners in China often find themselves having to deal with mismanagement or fraud on the part of property developers or management companies. There are few formal channels and scant support provided by government policies to aid these homeowners to protect their collective interests. This has led to the rise of “rights defence” (*weiquan* 维权) activism among middle-class homeowners across the country, spurred on by residents’ representative organizations — homeowner associations [i.e., HC] (*yezhu weiyuanhui* 业主委员会)— which organize community-based collective actions against the misconduct of developers and property management companies. In this scenario, residents’ committees face new challenges in establishing a leadership role in middle-class neighbourhoods and containing the conflicts associated with homeowner activism. In particular, how to acquire residents’ support and effectively resolve conflicts in middle-class neighbourhoods before they escalate to larger-scale social unrest has become a priority for social management innovation at the grassroots level.

(Tang 2019: 3)

¹³⁰ As a major component of the comprehensive innovation scheme, Tang (2019) notes, “the so-called ‘grid governance’ (*wanggehua zhili* 网格化治理) has in recent years been widely implemented as a grassroots governance tool in urban China. The grid governance scheme centres around a comprehensive governance structure at the grassroots level. This structure brings municipal administration, public security and social service management into one wide-ranging governance network that includes district-level government (*qu* 区), street offices (*jietao* 街道) and residential communities (*shequ* 社区). Under this scheme, street offices and residential communities are divided into grids (*wangge* 网格) according to their geographical and administrative boundaries, with each grid being assigned government personnel for all three levels (district, street offices and residential communities.)” (Tang 2019: 1-2).

¹³¹ The residential communities would “set up their own Community Deliberation Committees (*shequ yishihui*) to group proposals to different categories” in organizing neighbourhood deliberative activities (Tang 2018b: 669).

Although the activities of the middle-class homeowners' rights-defence have taken place within the frame of grassroots governance —their activities are monitored by the local government—, “homeowner associations [that is, HC] generate relatively independent associational life in China, and enjoy increasing autonomy” (Tang 2018a: 117). Therefore, both the RC's focus on practical matters and the emergence of organizations that represent homeowners in gated communities in the form of homeowner associations —which are “absent elsewhere and in other in urban residential communities” (Tang 2018a: 124), offer opportunities and incentives for ordinary urban dwellers “to participate in collective decision-making regarding community affairs” and, in specific living environments, “influence the homeowner activism of middle-class residents” (Tang 2018a: 118). Similarly, such activities to participate in collective decision-making provides an approach to describing the development of new bio-politics in local “governance” (Derleth and Koldyck 2004; Tomba 2014), and to analysing the mechanisms of homeowner activism and the governance structure at urban grassroots in middle-class gated communities in urban China.

Neighbourhood governance and the RC

As we have seen, the RC is “a mass organisation for self-government at grassroots level (*jiceng qunzhong zizhi zuzhi*) created in 1954 to ensure local neighbourhood monitoring,” as established in December, 1989 under Article 2 of the Organic Law of the Urban Residents' Committees of the PRC (Audin 2015: 1). These organizations were traditionally formed by unelected “activist” residents, and although they were not members of the CCP, they actively showed their support “for maintaining moral and political order in the neighborhood” (Whyte and Parish 1984, in Audin 2015). During the economic reforms, these marginal organizations became ever more central in Chinese communities as the *danwei*-based urban management evolved towards local governance based on place of residency. As such, Judith Audin argues,

In the 1980s, services for those in need were progressively developed at the neighbourhood level. In the 2000s, regulations officially refer to the pluralisation (*duoyanghua*) of society and the emergence of social problems (*shehui wenti*) in the introduction to a new policy: “neighbourhood community building” (*shequ jianshe*). The RCs, responsible for this new “community building”, thus saw themselves as having to provide both administration (*guanli*) and services (*fuwu*).

(Audin 2015: 1-2)

Indeed, in 1987, an ancient imperial practice was attempted: local self-management (*difang zizhi*) through direct elections and self-governance at the district level, allowing locals to resolve conflicts directly at the local level and not involve the central government, as well as raise awareness among the rural populace about central policies (Heberer and Göbel 2011: 1). Stemming from these innovative forms of political participation in the rural areas, the Community Construction (*shequ jianshe*) campaign was implemented in urban centres as part of the reforms which took place in the 1990s. Through this campaign, an attempt was made to reorganize urban residential communities through a new contract of urban residents' representation with the state.

As we have already seen, the *shequ* became one of many organizational novelties designed to approach the shifting socio-economic circumstances and maintain the stability of a country which, at that time, was experiencing rapid increases in inequality and social tensions provoked by economic marketization and the erosion of China's urban base: the *danwei*

(Heberer and Göbel 2011: 3). As a result, the construction of these urban communities, or *shequ*, also had a clear objective of community service following the disappearance of the *danwei* and its extensive social mission – to organize, regulate, control, train, educate and protect (Heberer and Göbel 2011: 3).

Commenting on Bray's definition of *danwei* as the "foundation of urban China" (2005: 5), Heberer and Göbel (2011) explain that the erosion of the *danwei* due to the marketization of the Chinese economy, which caused the closure of inefficient state enterprises, and many urban residents found themselves without work, and the privatization of the real-estate market, which allowed people to choose their place of residence more freely, was correlated with an increase in street crimes, as well as protests by the unemployed and they "new underclass" (2011: 3). These developments seem

to bear testament to the centrality of this organization to social stability in China, as do the attempts by the central government to create substitute organizations in areas where the *danwei* lost influence. In particular, the construction of 'communities' was aimed at providing a new locus for welfare provision and social control, and thereby compensating for the lack of social security systems, an inadequate legal framework, the absence of social control, and eroding values. The core organizations of urban self-governance in these communities were the Residents' Committees (*jumin weiyuanhui*), which have existed throughout most of the history of the PRC. They used to consist of mainly elderly volunteers surveying the neighbourhood for breaches of birth control regulations, violations of residency laws, illegal cohabitation of unmarried couples, and other issues of public security. These volunteers were generally not elected, and although they functioned as the extension of China's public security system, they did not have any political powers and did not enjoy much social prestige, generally. The significant restructuring of the RCs, however, was an integral part of the 'community construction' (*shequ jianshe*) that commenced in the late 1990s. Their name did not change, but the tasks, composition, and the process for member selection of the restructured RCs were completely different from those of their predecessors. Thus, by flexibly creating compensatory institutions that were inspired by traditional structures of local governance, the Chinese government reacted to the challenges of a changing economic and social environment (Schäfer 2007).

(Heberer and Göbel 2011: 3)

As a new century arrived, "regulations officially refer to the pluralisation (*duoyanghua*) of society and the emergence of social problems (*shehui wenti*) in the introduction to a new policy: 'neighbourhood community building'" (*shequ jianshe*)" (Audin 2015: 1). Under this scheme, the name of RCs or Residents' Committees (*jumin weiyuanhui*) in some Chinese cities, such as Shenyang, have been replaced by Community Committees (*shequ weiyuanhui*), "and Community Committees began to take on the responsibility on behalf of the city government for addressing welfare needs. Nationwide, similar schemes shifted grassroots-level administration and welfare provision from work units" to *shequ* or residential communities (Tang 2018a: 118-119). Therefore, the *shequ* became responsible for this new community structure, took charge of administrative duties (*guanli*), and providing services (*fuwu*) that compensated for the lack of a social safety system and the erosion of values (Heberer and Göbel 2015: 3-4). For example, RCs "play a significant role in facilitating the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee (*dibao*) system —China's national financial-support scheme for low-income families— in communities that accommodate laid-off workers and other unemployed residents" by identifying, organizing evaluation, providing recommendation opinions for the

city government identify regarding which households are most in need of welfare relief and should receive the *dibao* (Tang 2018a: 119-120). As stated above, while the main organizations of urban self-governance in these communities (*shequ*) are the RCs, the *shequ* became administrative structures that provided security and services when necessary. However, although the RCs were mainly aimed towards offering social services and maintaining public safety, the lack of funding complicated the adequate implementation of these tasks. Also, the RCs “are also required to report to higher-level government on community conflicts that could threaten the regime” (Tang 2018a: 119).

In terms of participation, although regulations allowed for direct elections to be held, they were not always done because members of the RCs were elected overwhelmingly from the top-down. The *shequ* idea is far from the “Western” egalitarian conceptualization. The *shequ* project “is founded on the belief that communities can be created in a ‘top-down’ fashion and that they can be instilled with values and beliefs that serve the aim of the Party-state” (Heberer and Göbel 2011: 8). The *shequ* values are allocated from above: the candidates in the *shequ* predominantly indirect elections are selected by the RCs, which they in turn elect (Heberer and Göbel 2011: 14). At the same time, the RC members are overwhelmingly chosen from above (Heberer and Göbel 2011: 14), if elected from the bottom of the hierarchy, but through indirect indications to voters, as Mr. Qiao explains when referring to the minimal utility that the RC means to him:

It doesn't have any impact on me ... I don't vote. Why should I vote for someone who I don't know at all? I'd rather avoid using this right because I might choose the wrong person. I don't want to vote for somebody I don't know ... I spoke about this with my friends and they also shared their experience with voting. For example, in some communities they ask you to vote, then indirectly suggest who to vote for because that candidate belongs to the same neighbourhood ... So, if I don't have enough information, I'd prefer not to vote.

But it should be noted that, in contrast to low-income communities where RCs usually successfully mobilize resident volunteers to facilitate their work—for example, on days when there is heavy snow, the RC in worker communities can easily find resident “volunteers” that usually are *dibao* applicants, to remove the snow—, in gated communities where the *dibao* “is not a concern of the well-off residents and the management company is in charge of community services,” the RC “has a less significant role to play in community governance” (Tang 2018a: 120). As a result, for the informants, the RC's administrative duties and its function as community-multi-service provider are very distant from their needs. This may explain why the participants did not show an active participation in their RC election. Mr. Yang clearly expresses his disaffection with the system when he refuses to discuss politics, “I'm not interested in politics. In China, it's false.” Despite of being requested by local authorities instead of going to vote voluntarily, Mr. Duan also perceives voting for RC in much the same way as Mr. Yang.

I once participated in the voting process. Community members arrived with their voting cards, and I had to confirm their identities and hand them to the community officials. Everything took about an hour. It was simply done to familiarize myself with the process, but it's all just theatre. Voting doesn't have any value.

This apathy towards political participation shows the lack of confidence that respondents share regarding the election of the RC's Director and the Party Secretary. Beibei Tang found

that the resistance to the RC's intrusion into residents' private life¹³² resulted in an extremely low participation in the RC election among gated-community residents (2018: 122). Our findings indicate that distrust in the election/RC system also explains, in part, the lack of interest some members of the middle class have with participating in their community's government. Among the informants, 39 per cent affirm having participated in elections, another 39 per cent do not tend to vote or have never voted, and 23 per cent did not answer or "didn't know about voting," as is the case with Mrs. Tang. Indeed, similar findings were made by Tang (2018: 122), some of the informants had never heard about the RC election and a majority of them knew nothing about the candidates for Director or the Party Secretary position. Nevertheless, these results cannot be interpreted as a binary opinion poll between those who view the democratic system favourably or unfavourably because the reasons expounded surrounding participation in their community's voting events are quite varied.

Regarding the impact that RCs have had on their lives, the general trend can be summed up in Mr. Lai's words: "It's partially useful, more so when you have to do paperwork ... It exists, and it works as intended. It's not a matter of whether I like it or not. It's been there since I was a child, and I'm not sure if it will improve or get worse." Similar findings were made by Audin (2015) —according to her, "generally speaking, the residents rarely question the existence of this body [the RC]; they consider it 'useful, if problems arise'" (2015: 13). RCs, on behalf of the state, does not exert a big impact on mobilizing political participation among middle-class residents in Beijing. While, participation in a RC's election might sound as an administrative duty rather than an exercise in participating in a democratic and collective decision-making, below its surface lies the assumption that "RC employees should deal with residents' concerns and problems in a polite, respectful, and non-bureaucratic way, effectively representing an important step in the creation of acceptance, trust, and identity-building and, by consequence, legitimacy" (Heberer and Göbel 2011: 66). "The development of voluntary social engagement among people," active participation in a RC election, "taking care of one another, and following one's beliefs are cited as further criteria for the harmonious *shequ*" in general, and *guanxi* in particular as we discovered previously (Tang 2008: 10ff, in Heberer and Göbel 2011: 59). Indeed, the conceptualization of *shequ* has been designed to create trust in the system, and as the starting point for "trust" in the government, as expressed in *Renmin Ribao* (Hu and Wang 2005). Thus,

In February 2005, an article in *Renmin Ribao* exhorted increased interaction and contact between residents. This was seen as being of central importance for the development of the *shequ*. It was promised that this would create a shared identity and would reduce misunderstandings and conflict. Moreover, such a social identity would create affective relationships based on equal rights, mutual assistance, and neighbourly trust (Ding 2005).

(Heberer and Göbel 2011: 66)

¹³² In her seminal book *China's Housing Middle Class* (2018a), Tang explains an additional function performed by the RCs: collect household information. Middle-class residents also see the RC, Tang points, "as an intruder into their privacy, who arbitrarily carries out its administrative duties. Most gated-community residents are not willing to provide personal information, and are irritated" by the RC's "intrusion into their home to collect such information, such as the number of people living in the apartment and the relationships among them, their employment situation or whether they have married children living with them and whether the married couple have applied for permission to have children (*zhun sheng zheng*), and so on" (2018a: 121).

Mr. Cui dislikes the RC because “it doesn’t do much for us most of the time, but the HC does.” Mr. Cui, Mr. Duan, Mr. Qiao and other participants’ interview material neatly illustrate a point made by Tang (2018a) and Heberer and Göbel (2011). Based on their data obtained by conducting qualitative interviews in Shenyang, Chongqing, and Shenzhen in 2003 and 2004, Heberer and Göbel (2011) found similar findings that illustrate that middle-class residents have their own associations [HC] in gated communities, so their support for the *shequ* and RC seems to be correlated strongly with the personality of its leader —if its leader is charismatic and good problem-solver, individuals are more likely to support the *shequ* as a whole—, and their age —“older people are more likely to participate actively than younger people and residents in neighbourhoods where the *danwei* had disintegrated comparatively early” (2011: 13). In the same vein, Mrs. Wu, who lives in a rented apartment, but owns a property away from the city centre, explains:

In the neighbourhood [mostly composed of professors] where I live, we no longer have them [a RC]. What we have is a homeowner’s committee. On the other hand, the neighbourhood where I actually own a property does have a RC. The homeowners’ committee gets to choose the service company ... My [current] neighbourhood [the one where I live] doesn’t have one [a homeowners committee]. I think us professors aren’t used to organizing ourselves and participating in such a committee, but I believe it’s better to have one. It’s very important ... The Residents’ Committee, in reality, is not charged with neighbourhood issues ... Activities like voting are scarce in our [current] neighbourhood. Because we don’t have a homeowners’ association [HC], we never vote, but they tend to organize events that seem like a body of the Party. For example, publishing information about security, water, etc. As professors, we vote in the university. Those who vote in the neighbourhood are mostly the retired or other residents.

Mr. Wu lives in what Tang (2018a) calls a “mixed community.” That is, a gated community in which “commercial housing and workplace-sponsored dwellings coexists” (2018a: 40). “In those mixed communities, the majority of the residents are employees from the same administrative system,” in this case employees form a university in Beijing, “and other residents are from different backgrounds” (Tang 2018a: 40). According to the specific functions of the communities, each of them serves particular groups of residents in terms of lifestyle, prestige, security-zone, RC’s services or voting. Likewise, Mr. Yi also explains:

Voting tends to be done in the area wherever you work, so if you work over there, you vote there; if you work here, you vote here. It’s not done where you live because I’m a college student, and if I have to vote, I have to vote here [in the university] ... [However] it depends. If you’re freelancing, then you can vote where you live.

Within the variety of gated communities in urban China, in reality their distinctions and characteristics in terms of neighbourhood governance are bounded with collective interests derived from their class. As we have seen, gated communities are “status communities” that form spaces of spatialization of class, “where the residential communities become the social context for privilege and distinction as the Chinese middle classes” (Tang 2018a: 117). Thus, as Heberer and Göbel argue,

[I]t needs to be stressed that *shequ* activities are in practice targeted at the urban underclass. Middle- and upper-class respondents are largely ignorant of their RCs and very frequently do not even know their leaders by name. Their interests are represented by other organizations, such as the house-owners’ committees. Thus, a complex picture of state–society relations in urban China emerges. The Chinese Party-

state has quite flexibly reacted to the social differentiation in urban China, with different status groups enjoying different degrees of participatory autonomy. Whereas the upper and middle classes are indeed gradually integrating themselves within governance networks, the relationship between state agencies and the underclass is, with the exceptions outlined above, still one of classical, paternalistic 'government'.

(Heberer and Göbel 2011: 13-4)

Despite some informants' unwillingness to discuss political topics, Mr. Lai who admits to voting, but questions a hypothetical voting system similar to liberal democracies occurring in China.

We Chinese don't consider voting to be useful. We don't make decisions through voting because it's not a good method. I don't think votes can solve any problems; I prefer talking to voting. Do you know the concept of *benfen* (to fulfill one's own responsibilities)? Society under Confucianism is stable because we all obey our *ben*. However, there are those who approach your door, hand you a paper with several questions, and ask you who you like. It only takes one minute. I'm a traditional Chinese person. I believe in Confucius and think he was right. If many people are allowed to vote, they could really stir up some problems. Maybe we need a *society of citizens*. In Chinese, it's called *gonggong* – *Gong* means 'government' and the second *gong* means 'common'. It's a single concept. I think that in Eastern societies, *gonggong* is an objective reality (*keguan cunzai*).

Mr. Lai's narrative is significant for several reasons. First, he doubts the implementation of a democratic system in China such as the current voting system, arguing that Confucian values are best suited for the country. Second, he resorts to talking and the use of rational media to solve problems instead of voting. Third, he does not consider all Chinese citizens to be equipped with the ability to choose the most ideal candidate to fulfil everyone's general interests. And finally, despite his criticism towards the ideals espoused by democratic systems, Mr. Lai still admits to participating in elections. Interestingly, Mr. Lai's opinion is not an exception among our informants, as evidenced by other during an informal chat,

We *do* vote at a local level, but the elected representatives' power isn't much. Why ask if we want to vote if the government has already chosen for us? We don't have any other option, I don't know much about this field of study. In any case, it's normal that city people don't want those from the countryside to be allowed to choose their future. They're not qualified to vote; they don't know what's good for everyone, for the country. Look at what's happening in the United States with Trump. That guy is a real problem and was chosen democratically, which is proof that people don't know how to vote.

The proactive role expected from the middle-class contrasts with the attitude present in these testimonies regarding unprivileged groups. Coinciding with Rocca, the informants believe that "the establishment of a democratic system could endanger social stability —on which the rise of the middle class is based— and could give more power than expected to (yet) 'uncivilized' people" to choose the political elite (2017: 144). These groups are said to not have sufficient information to decide the ideal candidate because farmers and other members of the lowest classes have a "very low ability to represent and pursue their own interests," to have few resources and, "despite their sheer number, not [to be] able to voice their interests" (Feng 2005, in Tomba 2014: 149). These include the "*xiagang* (those laid off from state-run enterprises who nevertheless still enjoy social welfare benefits), people "outside of the system"

(*tizhi wai*) who have never belonged to the state sector, and rural migrant workers” (Tomba 2014: 149).

If, following Hurst (2008), we understand the conception of frames and framing processes, or “mass frames,” to interpret aspects of these middle-class dispositions regarding democracy, it is observable that these frames are not a simple result of a strategic election that allows justifying the subordination of classes formed by people with low *suzhi*, but rather are a structural characteristic of the relations between the state and society. This structural extension of frames where middle-class urban residents and the most disadvantaged groups converge becomes reminiscent of what Gramsci called cultural hegemony (see Chapter I), imposed by the dominant classes in collusion with the intermediate groups over the unprivileged groups (Tomba 2014: 13-4), instead of establishing *middle class* positions for the sake of liberal and democratic political leadership.

However, it is revealing that, although some of the informants who conditioned their participation in the investigation to not addressing political issues, they did not refuse to address the issue of voting organized by the RCs. Beyond the debate about political activity’s contemporary meaning raised by Arendt, this would mean that middle class citizens do not consider this committee to be a political body, which reinforces the lack of trust in the system previously argued. The low participation in the elections and other self-administrative activities of the RC indicates a rising rely on management companies for the provision of services in their privately managed middle-class gated communities in particular, and a rising autonomy of the private sphere of housing compounds in general. It also discloses that our informants’ conception about the *shequ* is limited to the residential space in which they reside. This illustrates “how the state has gradually lost ground in the private realm of privileged-status groups, where the latter has gained more autonomy in their everyday life due to their higher socioeconomic status” (Tang 2018a: 136).

4.4.3 Homeowner activism

Along with the rise of a new and broad class of urban property owners —by the early 2000, about 70 per cent of urban households in China were said to have acquired residential property (*Nanfang Zhoumo* 2003)¹³³— and urban middle-class residential estates, disputes and conflicts have risen between the residents, their HC, “the unholy alliance of real estate development companies (*kaifa gongsi*) and the companies in charge of administration and repair of these estates, the *wuye gongsi* (property management companies), which were often offshoots of the former” and provide private services to the gated communities (Heberer and Göbel 2011: 51), and the local government. As Tang (2018a) argues,

What characterizes the distinctive governance mechanisms in gated communities is the emergence of resident-representative organizations in the form of homeowner associations [i.e., HC], absent elsewhere and in other in urban residential communities. Common to most gated communities in China, the real-estate developers usually take for granted their right to leave in place a property-management company that would operate indefinitely. In the absence of any competition, these firms are well positioned to reap handsome profits from management fees. As a result, the management companies have become the main target when residents are dissatisfied with

¹³³ *Nanfang Zhoumo* [Southern Weekend], 29 May 2003. Guangzhou.

problems such as poor maintenance of the housing-estate facilities, excessively high management fees, and poor quality of services. Incompetent management also makes middle-class homeowners worry it will devalue their housing and lower their community status.

(Tang 2018a: 124)

Consequently, as we have seen, “many wealthier urban dwellers today rely on management companies for the provision of services in their privately managed compounds,” while *shequs* “are concentrated mostly in poorer and dilapidated neighborhoods,” and “hardly achieve a transition from direct ‘government’ to more participatory ‘governance’.” (Tomba 2014: 9). Since March 23, 1994, only the newly constructed residential areas could undergo self-management and be autonomous through the homeowners’ committees (*yezhu weiyuanhui*). Formed by elected representatives through the votes of the owners and residents of the neighbourhood dwellings, the purpose of the HC is to represent and defend the rights and interests of voters under the direction of real estate administrative authorities (Read 2008: 43). Indeed, “[r]ooted in this collective interest of a privileged lifestyle and a status associated with their gated community residency,” HC “emerged as a self-governance organization among the residents, through which middle-class homeowners pursued their requests collectively” and “organize community-based collective actions against the misconducts of property-developing or management companies” (Tang 2018a: 124, 117).

At the same time, however, the HC is an official organization monitored by the local government. Therefore, the HC

were to be “formed of elected representatives of the residential neighbourhood’s property owners and occupants,” and would “represent and uphold” their legal rights and interests, “under the direction [*zhidao*] of the real estate administrative authorities.” Among the powers explicitly assigned to these organizations was the right to select and hire a property management company, to inspect and oversee its work, and to review and discuss “major matters of management service.” The Methods thus illustrate how the Ministry of Construction envisioned the formation of a new type of local representative body to defend the collective rights and claims occasioned by the emergence of a new category of property holder. The way in which *yewehui* came into existence has not followed directly from this central government document, however. City governments, as instructed by the Ministry of Construction, wrote detailed rules (*xize*) for implementing the Methods. These local policies, and the ways in which they have been put into practice, tend to diminish and restrict the homeowners’ ability to organize (Davis 2002; Fraser 2002).

(Read 2008: 45)

Indeed, beyond establishing “self-governing and self-elected bodies to administer the residents’ relationship with the private management companies and to organize homeowners’ interests inside the neighbourhoods,” the capacity of the homeowners’ committee to represent broad societal interests is very limited (Tomba 2014: 9). However, HCs “generate relatively independent associational life in China, and enjoy increasing autonomy” (Tang 2018a: 117). Such features are immediately apparent in the informants’ testimony reproduced below which records responses made to questions about the perceptions about HCs.

It [the homeowners committee] is not a government department, officially [nominally] it is a spontaneous organization of the neighbours, but in reality, the government controls it. It is supervised by the government ... We’ve been voting and have recently

lately decided to change the management company. The owners committee organized a vote and we chose a better company [since] every time we have important issues to decide, we organize a vote. We voted to decide the best service company ... We vote every three years to decide whether to continue hiring the same company or change it. We voted on this matter ... [because] we have public funds to keep the community in good condition, and we voted to decide if we will use public funds. We have a Wechat group comprised of the people of our community. If we want to vote on some issues, the organizer asks the group and we vote ... This is done two or three times a year.

(Mr. Wen)

Sometimes, they [HCs] do surveys, but I don't vote often. However, lately, as the service and security company [management company] that is responsible for maintaining our community wants to increase the price of services, they want more money because each floor has to pay a fee for the maintenance of the communal areas, the garden, and the security of the whole community ... They asked us for more, and so we're collecting signatures to see if we all agree to pay them more, but we didn't agree because we think they don't offer a good service. It's like a struggle, they ask us for more, but we don't want to pay more ... Maybe next week or at another time they'll ask us to vote, they usually give us a paper: *Do you agree or not?* And then we check a box ... In China, these types of companies are private, and make money with these maintenance services, it's the norm in China. In other countries, maybe the management companies are somewhat self-organised and the owners manage it as a self-organized company, but [in China] this is a private company and our relationship with it is that we are customers and they offer services. It's like a contract, but ... if they want to raise the price, even if they don't have our signatures, they can do it anyway [and then] the next step will be to ask ourselves what to do: *do we throw them out?* ... I am not sure that we can throw them out. This type of relationship is agreed upon, it is not an open market in which there are different companies and I can choose as a family owner ... It is not so simple. When you buy the house, this company was already there, I think it cooperated with the builder. We have no choice. The builder told us, *'Oh, this company is very good, and has a lot of maintenance experience.'* Then we wanted to buy the house, if the management company does not have a good reputation, then you say, *'Huh, this community is not so good, I don't want to buy here,'* but now it is a simple management company. As time went on, the builder left because we bought the house more than ten years ago and only the management company has worked with us. Maybe things will change.

(Mrs. Yin)

Mrs. Yin's testimony shows that conflicts between homeowners and property management companies continue after the huge increase in urbanization during the first decade of this century (Yip 2019; Cai 2005). According to state regulation, management companies have to sign a contract with a democratically elected HC that usually acts autonomously, depending on the situation (Tomba 2014: 51). In the event of disputes, the HC "act openly and autonomously to protect owner rights and, with other spontaneous and more radical associations, engage in protracted conflicts with the management company," as Mrs. Yin foresees will happen in their neighbourhood (Tomba 2014: 50). Otherwise, the residents and the property management company invite the RC, which is perceived as an independent and neutral party, to step in and mediate the situation by mobilizing participants with different interests (Tang 2018b: 670, 671). Sometimes management companies avoid conflicts by controlling the formation of HC through their elections and the financing of their activities. Hence, as Tomba indicates, "one of the

principal goals of this form of management remains, to be sure, the manipulation and control of the consumption of goods and services by directing residents' consumer choices toward specific forms of consumption and specific providers" (2014: 51).

Between 2003 and 2010, many scholars believed that homeowners' movements protesting against infringements of rights, and in defence of their legitimate interests as homeowners against what can be called the "political/real estate complex," namely real estate developers, local authorities and property management companies could be the spearhead of the democratization process in the PRC (Rocca 2017: 92). In more recent years, despite homeowners movement sometimes employs tactics of collective protest "to mount collective claims and assert control over the administration of their neighbourhoods" (Read 2008: 43), scholars have become "more cautious" about the political impact of these middle-class movements (Rocca 2017: 92). Also, Mrs. Yin's attitude when explaining the dispute with the service company highlights the great effort for many middle-class residents to organize collectively and bring about changes in their community.

When Mrs. Yin states that "In other countries, maybe the management companies are somewhat self-organised and the owners manage it as a self-organized company," but in the PRC the management company is allowed "to raise the price, even if they don't have our signatures, they can do it anyway," points to two issues. First, as we have indicated above, Chinese middle-class homeowners, different from their western counterparts, are facing ill-regulated market and inadequate government housing policies, both at the time of home purchase and as homeowners handling the misconducts of property-developing or management companies, that do not provide administrative channels and legal support for homeowners to pursue their collective interests (Tang 2018a: 117). As Mrs. Yin's narrative illustrates, "[n]ationwide, middle class-homeowners have encountered mistreatment or fraud by developers or property-management companies" and, consequently, the "rights defence" (*weiquan*) activism of middle-class homeowners, by establishing their representative organizations—the so-called HCs—, has spread out across the country (Tang 2018a: 117). Second, Mrs. Yin also questions that HCs elected with the help of a management company or RC are more likely to represent the management company's or HC's interests rather than those of the resident; in some communities residents consider their HC actually acts against their interests when conflicts between the management company and residents eventuate (Tang 2018a: 125). When such conflicts arise,

Those who feel their rights are violated generally become the activists, and agree to be candidates in the homeowner-association election [that is, the HC election]. They question the legitimacy of the existing homeowner association [HC] (if there is one), and start sending messages to other residents through posters or organizing petitions [or Wechat messages]. The residents who have encountered problems with the management companies usually become the organizers and activists of the homeowner association [HC] ... The elected homeowner association [HC] then plays a significant role in leading, organizing, and facilitating homeowner activism. During this process, the Community Committee [RC] gradually loses its dominant position, and instead becomes active as a mediator in order to prevent collective actions and maintain stability within the community.

(Tang 2018a: 125-126)

The impotence expressed by Mrs. Yin coincides with the aforementioned informal talk with Mr. Qiao regarding votes organized by the RCs: "Why ask if we want to vote if the government

already chooses for us?" The nature of neighbourhood organizations is hard to classify because, as Read points, they "fall between the poles of the oppressive Leninist mass organization on the one hand and the wholly self-initiated and independent citizens' group acting in civil society on the other" (2012: 252). Despite of such co-existence of oppressive organizations and the increasing activism of middle-class residents, Mrs. Yin and Mr. Qiao's narratives manifest the inability of semi-official organizations to represent and make citizens' interests prevail, causing political impotence and distancing of them towards participation; secondly, "by providing possibilities of interacting in collective endeavours and "a sense of taking part in an important civic project and a national mission," neighbourhood organizations may "soak up the citizen's participatory energies like so many widely dispersed sponges" (Read 2012: 272, in Tomba 2014: 170).

Beyond the optimistic speculations of some scholars in the first decade of the century that homeowners activism may lead to a growing civil society in the PRC (see Chapter II), "to date, research findings show that homeowner activism rarely goes beyond communities to challenge state legitimacy, and its impacts remain within the gated communities" (Tang 2018a: 126), as Read (2007, 2012) or Rocca (2013, 2017) suggest. Indeed, in the case of Rocca (2017), he argues that these conflicts of homeowners could be more significant for political change in China than any attempt to create a liberal revolution that imposes democracy (2017: 91-6). On the other, for Tomba (2014), the HCs and other associative spaces constitute a consensual arena of interaction —where there is not necessarily a confrontation against the state— different from that of a civil society.

In the civil society model, the rules of interaction are provided by legal regulations, formal organizations, autonomy from state influence, and a free representation of interests across society. In consensual arenas of interaction, the state is not necessarily confronted, "rules" can be quite different in different spaces, and interaction is limited to local and practical problems. Autonomous mobilization is constrained and is often unable to transcend the limits of material interests or to achieve broader territorial coordination at a level higher than the limited autonomous space of the single neighborhoods.

(Tomba 2014: 170)

To overcome the difficulties that a structural, linear, ahistorical, ethnocentric and methodologically defective definition of civil society (Grugel 2002) presented by many analyses, we use the approach proposed by Amelia Sáiz López (2015) in her study on Chinese women's associations in Spanish society, which is in line with Tomba's (2014) perception of civil society as a set of "consensual arenas of interaction." Thus,

Civil society is the set of activities carried out by society outside of the initiatives proposed by the political parties and the state. So, it must be considered that civil society mediates between established powers and citizens, being a kind of regulatory mechanism that corrects the drift of political life in democratic countries and defends citizens' political interests in those that are not.

(Sáiz López 2015: 8)

In the similar vein, Taru Salmenkari (2018) highlights the deficiencies inherent in applying western-embedded political concepts and theories to the Chinese context (Payton 2018) by combining the *Neotocquevillian* definition of civil society based on association, with the theory of Modernization —civil society as a structural condition for democratic transition (Salmenkari

2018: 6). Indeed, in her book *Civil Society in China and Taiwan* (2018), Salmenkari introduces a new civil society conception in order to look into social practices and political activities beyond a limited set of actors (2018: 202). On that basis, she defines civil society as “public, open, horizontal, voluntaristic, and done together with others” (2018: 29) by referring “to a bigger community, not to individual associative activities,” for the common good or based on principles of openness, publicity and solidarity (2018: 202). Such conceptualization of civil society is well aware of the inherent tensions in the civil society concept itself, as it simultaneously expects not only individualism, autonomy, and the recognition of pluralistic interests and visions, but also civilized sociability, mutual solidarity, and concern for the public good (Sáiz López 2015; Seligman 1992, in Salmenkari 2018: 65). As a result, Salmenkari highlights that “[i]t is not always well understood in China studies that civil society comes into being through various fragmented and localized collective activities that do not automatically develop in one direction” (2018: 65). As in the case of Mrs. Ai’s civility when she practices her political role in her community’s public sphere and acting for the collective good (Clarke *et al.* 2007: 1-4).

I participate in some activities because sometimes I volunteer teaching English to older people. [laughs] [And] that is one of the activities organized by our community because we are all registered. We all have to indicate our work and basic information, so they inform you about those opportunities, but you decide if you want to do them or not. If I have time, I tend to do them.

The increasing conscience and modern ties of solidarity of middle class in urban China (see previous sections about celebrities, social success and social relationships) lacks sufficient “legal protections of civil society against state interventions and strong state involvement in the associational sphere” and “underlines problems of sustaining critical networks in an open social context” (Salmenkari 2018: 649). According to the definition of Sáiz López (2015), the sphere of civil society is formed by the set of practical acts of sociability and collective actions carried out by society, but outside the initiatives proposed by the Party-state. Indeed, such perception permits “inquiry into various civil society boundaries, not just the boundary with the state” (Salmenkari 2018: 203). This is consistent with the fact that “civil society activities are always ways to organize society, but not always ways to relate to the state” (Salmenkari 2018: 66).

In this respect, the role of the state is not the only barrier to collective activities such as the initiatives organized by the middle-class homeowners. Consequently, “the economic reforms in China have not only brought resources and opportunities for organizing independently, but also distractions from political involvement and solidary ties” (Salmenkari 2018: 64). In this respect, Mr. Lu’s civil society practices are focus on the organization of society. Civil society’s activities, therefore, can as much provide platforms to challenge the state as they can assist it to maintain order, as Mr. Lu explains.

I’ll tell you about a very interesting activity ... I’m a member of the Party [laughs], and now all the members that live in Beijing have to participate in some activities organized by the residents committee in order to improve the environment of the area, so I’ve participated in them ... It’s a very special activity; in others, I don’t participate often [smiles] ... The one in which I participated was to organize the shared bicycles, I think it is an activity for the public interest, and it served to improve the environment of the area. Many activities such as these have been organized, but I only participated once ... I have seen in the group chat ... that they’ve helped the elderly to use mobile

phones. The activities are varied, and I'm in favour of them, [although] since I don't have much time, I only participated once.

Depending on the concept employed, the state of civil society in the PRC can be understood in different ways, something very similar to what happens with the defining criteria of the middle class. For example, the distancing of the Chinese state from the associative space that began three decades ago with a policy of "small government, big society" that was "the chief political dimension of the economic restructuring which led from state ownership of enterprises to the so-called socialist market" (Lei and Walker 2013: 17). Like its economic counterpart, it reflected the PRC's adoption of neoliberal ideology by encouraging "both civil society and the private market to provide social welfare and, thereby, to restrict demands on public expenditure" (Lei and Walker 2013: 17). Although, it failed to realise these goals at the highest level, the CCP largely prefers governing at a distance, leaving subjects governing themselves at the local level (Zhang and Ong 2008; Hoffman 2009: 119-136; Ong 2006: 78), consolidating new social identities such as the homeowner identity of middle class based on the technologies of the self, combining personal autonomy with self-discipline (Tomba 2014; 2009; Bray and Jeffreys 2016, in Salmenkari 2018: 209).

According to Salmenkari, the CCP already recognizes civil society as a relevant actor. That is why, "[a]s long as civil society is defined in the way it is in China studies, it is questionable whether and to what extent it can be a positive force for democratization. China studies puts its hopes in too narrow a set of actors to support robust democracy" (2018: 212). Indeed, putting the full weight of democratization on business associations and NGOs is not realistic, in addition to not taking into account the parts of civil society active in pro-democratic movements. Moreover, "[d]ifferent kinds of civil society organizations are needed in different stages of democratization and to achieve different aspects of democracy" (Jenkins 2001, in Salmenkari 2018: 213). Much of what civil society can do for China's democratization does not derive from the liberal conception of civil society as an opposing force to the state, but rather as a complementary force of the state (Salmenkari 2018: 213). In Ong and Han's (2018) recent work on the reasons that drive people to protest in an authoritarian country such as PRC, significant conclusions can be drawn that help to understand the associative nature of the Chinese middle class, which can be extended to other analyses on the existence or not of a Chinese civil society from a liberal and republican approach¹³⁴. First of all, the type of social movements and associations that is being formed shows the tendency of Chinese citizens to participate in protests to preserve or increase only their personal benefit and focus, above all, on material grievances rather than a demand for democratization (Göbel and Ong 2012).

¹³⁴ Much of what civil society is supposed to do for democratization, as Salmenkari notes, "is not derived from the liberal understanding of civil society as a counterforce to the state, but from the republican understanding of it as complementary to the state. For republicanism, civil society is a site where democratic values can be learned, and conventional political participation can take place (Hahn-Fuhr and Worschech 2014). Therefore, Chinese civil society organizations might be fostering civic participatory skills and promoting democratization of the state better when they build relations with the state than without links to it" (2018: 213). In the PRC, such conceptualizations of associating are not new. The Chinese, especially the older generations, as Putman points, are not "bowling alone" (Putman 1995) "but have rich social capital needed in civil society." The Chinese themselves distinctive activities "organized among the people (*minjian*) from those organized by the state (*guanban*). Such informal but public collective activities provide opportunities for ordinary people to challenge official interpretations, renegotiate social categories and spatial ideals, and express identities ... Not all activities organized in this *minjian* society are politically harmless" (Salmenkari 2018: 8).

These data do not contradict the emergence of protests with an increasingly broad and transversal base of citizens within cities, especially those related to the environment, such as opposition to the construction of chemical and waste incinerator plants, as several studies have witnessed (Johnson 2010, 2013; Göbel and Ong 2012). However, any demonstration or moves to protest will most likely gather a greater number of informants if the action is directed at non-state entities, as is the case with homeowners' movements, since it carries a considerably lower risk compared to actions directed against the government or institutions related to it. And we must not forget the opinions of our informants concerning the poor and other disadvantaged groups that coincide with several investigations conducted in the PRC (Li 2009a; Lu 2011), which show a middle class that supports the fundamental principles of the regime and government policies, expressing more confidence in state institutions than, for example, subordinate classes. Despite their position as a subgroup among social groups that benefit from being "within the system" or being part of the economic elite, they support dominant political values, paternalistic authority, *status quo* and social discipline.

However, the control of such groups by state organizations and the Party is very narrow since the institutional environment and the legal framework in which civil society organizations operate are also very restrictive. This "underlines the high cost of participating in contentious politics in China, where demonstrators and protestors are routinely rounded up and constantly face threats of losing their jobs and social status" (Ong and Han 2018: 9). Another characteristic pointed out by Ong and Han is that "personal resources matter a great deal in explaining one's involvement in contentious politics" and, unlike in liberal democracies, the educational level is negatively related to this participation —"the more educated one is in urban China, the less likely one is to protest" (2018: 9, 12). However, in the case of the group of homeowners with middle incomes and higher education, while also taking into account their participation in local elections, the study conducted by Liu Xin and Zhu Yan (2011) suggests that the middle class participates in politics more than other groups. Therefore, within the negative relationship between educational level and political participation in general, the middle class would be the group most willing to participate.

Also, legal and judicial knowledge is positively associated with participation in demonstrations while the level of income is not significant. Conversely, it has been observed that as urban residents accumulate economic capital, they are less likely to participate in protest (Ong and Han 2018: 17). Protests in China are conventionally about material claims rather than a demand for democratization (Göbel and Ong 2012). And it is necessary to bear in mind that there are few among experts who do not see any kind of class consciousness in the intermediate groups and, on the other hand, there are many scholars who consider that this awareness manifests itself in a more obvious way in lifestyles and consumption rather than in political participation (Li 2011a).

In short, our findings show that civil society —understood as both from Western theory and from the Chinese perspective of the concepts of *minjian* and *guanban*— in the PRC manifests itself through forms restricted to the *shequ*. Apart from Mrs. Yin's narrative, there has been no other mention of any type of association that collectively defends certain political interests of citizens, nor in the realm of consumers, homeowners or workers. In addition, while some of the respondents show a clear empathy towards the most disadvantaged people, we also observed that the "proactive role expected from the middle class" in matters of community participation contrasts sharply with the attitude that other informants express toward other members of their neighbourhood or the "vulnerable groups" (*ruoshi qunti*) or those with low

suzhi (Tomba 2014: 148-9). Therefore, Beijing's phenomena of civil society appear latent within the *shequ* but, beyond this scope, the respondents have not alluded to any other form of unofficial associationism.

In conclusion, the *reconfigurative* function in the process of the social construction of identity within the middle class by analysing semi-structured interviews collected in Beijing in 2017 and 2018 within a theoretical context associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu is both decisive and complementary to the function of the other spaces such as the intellectual and the discursive spaces examined throughout this thesis. Likewise, the Bourdieusian approach applied and the reflection accumulated throughout our study have allowed us to consider both culture and economy at once, without putting them in conflict with each other. Thus, it considers the extent to which social identity within China's middle class can be considered to relate not only to experiences related to productive activity, but also, increasingly, to experiences associated with consumption. In the theoretical context associated with Bourdieu's theory of class and, in addition to economic and cultural capital, other different factors—including the effects deriving from a given demographical context and one's location in social space— might be considered in class formation and relations of domination and subordination, and in the formation of discursive spaces in which the lifestyle of middle class is present, while forming a substantial number of elements of sociological reflection, and, consequently, of the contributions to China studies and class analysis.

Conclusions

In this concluding chapter and, on the basis of the research hypotheses validation of our study on the social construction, practices and representations of the urban middle class in the PRC, we can, synthetically, in the form of observations, draw several general conclusions and suggest possible directions for future research.

First, the leading hypothesis proposed by this research project is that the “Chinese middle class” can be considered to relate both to a set of social practices and representations —that is, a common lifestyle group or shared identity— associated with leisure and cultural consumptions, and to experiences related to productive activity. This approach that treats social groupings as emerging out of similar social practices and representations lays at the core of Bourdieu’s theory of class. For Bourdieu, linking objective structures to more subjective orientations —i.e., behaviours and thinking— is a key element in his conceptualization of class. Class, according to his formulation, is not reducible to the objective social and economic conditions —that is, income, economic wealth, political position, level of education, occupational category and so on— but rather is realized through the interaction between objective and subjective factors such as class identity and bridge the complex divisions between both “class in itself” and “class for itself” (Marx), material structures and historic actors (Weber), in other words economy and culture. In addition, we analyse whether or not the social phenomenon of the “Chinese middle class” is a “real class” in terms of Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of “theoretical class” and “real class.” That is, for Bourdieu “a theoretical class, or a “class on paper,” might be considered as a probable real class, or as the probability of a real class, whose constituents are likely to be brought closer and mobilized (but are not actually mobilized) on the basis of their similarities (of interest and dispositions)” (Bourdieu 1987: 7).

In Chapter I, in the general framework of contemporary Social Sciences, we therefore propose two hypotheses.

(h1) The importance of class analysis as a means of understanding social change and social inequalities in contemporary societies.

We have seen how the modern class narrative, shaped in particular since the emergence of the works of Karl Marx and Max Weber and of the political positions and movements they have inspired, has constructed “true narratives” about social inequalities and injustices in social life, and the subjects and social groupings which should be included in the fight to overcome them (Holgersson 2017). The analysis of different ideological taxonomies highlights the fact that class is a social construct determined by point of view and by the criteria in which a definition of class is based. However, class as classification to describe social change and inequality from

a particular perspective,” subjective” or ”objective” —that is, partial— does not make such form of categorization meaningless. What is at stake in these “symbolic struggles is the imposition of the legitimated vision of the social world and of its divisions, that is to say, symbolic power as *worldmaking power*” (Bourdieu 1987: 13). Simultaneously, class is a physical classification that enacts through a framework of cultural distinctions —we do class with our bodies, behaviours, language, and manners—. In practice, class has been (over)valued or valued differently to other categorizations such as race, sexuality or gender, which not being economic in nature rank far below class in the normative hierarchy of modern narratives. However, in the same way that class is a structured frame that exists inside us, “economy is made up of practitioners (people who act), governed by a number of culturally determined rules and conventions” based on inequality-creating social practices and representations (Holgersson 2017: 121). Further, human beings are not only classed, they are also gendered, raced, sexualized, and so on. Thus, gender cannot readily be distinguished from sexuality or class in the same way class cannot readily be distinguished from race or ethnicity. Class differences can be represented as gender or ethnic differences in everyday social practices and representations: in service interactions, consumption practices or the performance styles: “gender or ethnicity can be the expression in which class is clothed” (Holgersson 2017: 121). Moreover, class analysis is also perfectly identifiable within the trend towards the increasing hybridization of different social analysis since the advance of postcolonialism, feminism and other social movements, married with the cultural turn that put identity high on the scholarly and political agendas; a hybrid though that conceives class and social inequality as an intersectional relationship with other categorizations such as race, gender, or sexuality.

(h2) The work of Pierre Bourdieu has important implications for the comprehension of class and social life today.

We can also see that the emerging tradition that treats class, inequality and globalization as emerging out of social practices and representations as social “processes” owes much to Pierre Bourdieu’s work. As both Sylvia Junko Yanagisako (2002) and Mark Liechty (2003) point, “treating culture (and the economy) as *process*” (Yanagisako 2002: 6) or practice that is carried out in everyday life rather than static or stable structure provides an avenue for understanding class identities and practices as emerging out of both economic resources and cultural orientations (Yanagisako 2002: 6; Liechty 2003: 21-27, in Hanser 2008: 5). Indeed, in contemporary societies, due to the changes emerged in the structure of work as employment, social identity can be considered to relate more to experiences associated with consumption and leisure than to experiences related to productive activity, which is consisted with the fact that the economy and culture are gradually coming to be structured around consumption rather than production (Giddens 1973; Bourdieu 1984; Crompton 1998; Wynne 1998). For Bourdieu, linking the conception of class as a position in the economic order and class as a set of culturally shared meanings and experiences —that is, social practices and representations— lays at the core of his epistemological approach to social life. His idea of capital as a metaphor and the concept of *habitus* in his class theory have been extremely important in the field of cultural studies in recent decades, especially when it comes to discussions of the stratification processes in contemporary social life. Bourdieu devises a set of relational concepts, including capital, habitus, field, social space, and symbolic violence, whose application aimed to understand, explain and disclose the interaction between objective and subjective factors which create and reinforce inequality at different layers in everyday practices. In Bourdieu’s later works, the primacy of class analysis is revoked due to the intersection of combinations of

dominations and inequalities of categorizations such as gender, race, or sexuality. As a result, class distinction not only depends on the accumulation of economic capital but also gradually depends on the reproduction of cultural capital in the so-called post-industrial societies (Lin 2008). Moreover, as Atkinson (2016: 139-140) notes, with circuits of symbolic power recovered from the margins of Bourdieu's theory of class, space has been opened up in our study for analysis of "the differential dispersal and impact, across time and geography" —e.g., by analysing class as a *well-founded historical artefact* or migration as class-based consumption in the PRC—, "of objects, social practices and of thought springing from field struggles, including those originating within the state *qua* bureaucratic field" in terms of discourse construction and sponsorship as the official discourse of the middle class, "thus filling in the gaps on genesis, struggle, appropriation, symbolic violence" as the process of classification struggle implied by the term *suzhi*, and dissemination power acknowledged in investigations of "emerging China's middle class" as we have seen in Chapter II when exploring the intellectual debate about China's middle class but also haunting perspectives as diverse as neighbourhood governance, homeowner activism in gated communities and globalization theory. In other words, the upshot of Bourdieu's approach is that the attempt to integrate the structuralist and the constructivist's perception on class in a multidimensional conception of social space inspires new revisions of class analysis with important implications for the debates about inequality, consumer culture, gender and post-modernity.

After contextualising the most significant theories and debates about class in the general intellectual framework of contemporary Social Sciences, and analysing in detail Bourdieu's epistemological and methodological approach to class by illustrating the core concepts of social space, field, habitus and capital in his class theory and the currents that make up the current categorization of his work, it is evident that we must locate the increasing concern in China studies of those fields of urban lifestyle that go beyond the occupational space and the increasing importance given to leisure in the emergence and development of a middle class's social identity. Thus, in Chapter II, we proposed two hypotheses relating to the intellectual debate about China's middle class both inside and outside the PRC:

(h3) The current academic categorization of the 'Chinese middle class' reflects the diversity of thought in China studies.

We can observe that class as socio-economic structure, class as performance (the rehearsal of identity), and class as ideological formulation are all involved in the intellectual debate that has emerged after reform in the PRC (Goodman 2014: 5). As a result, for over three decades, China's middle class has been the subject of much debate but little agreement. However, in order to shed light on the conceptualization of China's middle class's formative process, we can note that for the most part intellectual debate has centred on two important issues: the first is "definitional," and the second issue involves "a sociological debate" from an ontological approach over class in China today (Li 2010: 135-6). Therefore, we can also see the various criteria for defining middle class from two analytical approaches: the consideration of the middle class more as a state-sponsored discourse rather than a social structure; and the conceptualization of class as a historical phenomenon embodied in the new imaginary that Chinese society is elaborating. On the one hand, due to different objective and subjective criteria, scholars and social researchers estimate the size of the Chinese middle class differently; and on the other, due to the dual perspective used in our study (class as a state-sponsored discourse and class as a historical phenomenon), we can estimate the initial intentions of scholarly in China's social stratification.

(h4) The socio-political context and contestation have added a complex ideological dimension to the description of social groupings and structures in the PRC.

An understanding of these related issues is essential if we are to make sense of the intellectual debate about class in the PRC. The ideological orientations behind the Chinese middle-class definitions and conceptualizations, together with its capacity for social change, are of crucial significance for understanding this social group and its intellectual debate. It is very important to underline, however, that the contemporary hidden agenda concealed in every definition of middle class must reasonably convey how variable the criteria for defining class is, since it is constantly being modified by the purposes, hopes, expectations and interests of the different individuals and organizations involved in the social practices and representations of a social group, and the evolution of the discourses that interact within them. That is, all definitions of Chinese middle class have a political and/or ideological basis. Simultaneously, we have seen that the large disparity in the estimations on the size of the Chinese middle class depending on the definition corresponds to some of the most important scholarly debates about this issue: the first concerns its definition, the second its potential political roles, the third its economic and business expectations, the fourth its ideological values, and the fifth vested interests (Cheng 2010a: 12; Rocca 2017: 4). In addition, the analysis of different ideological taxonomies throws into relief the fact that the “Chinese government’s decision to ‘enlarge the size of the middle-income group,’” and “the Chinese business community’s drive” to disseminate the image of Chinese middle class as “potentially the ‘world’s largest middle-class market’” are two considerations “particularly instrumental in increasing both public awareness of and scholarly interest in China’s middle class” (Cheng 2010a: 8). In short, coinciding with Li Chunling, “multiple orientations coexist among China’s middle class today, and it has a long way to go before it forms a homogeneous middle-class identity and culture” (Li 2010: 155). It is very important to underline that we may be witnessing the emergence not of a new Chinese middle class per se but rather the emergence of new middle-class practices and representations, and the increasing fragmentation of an anachronistic concept of middle class understood solely in terms of economic indicators.

In Chapter III, we proposed two hypotheses as explanations for the construction of the official discourse of the Chinese middle class:

(h5) Class in China is best understood in terms of “the intergenerational transfer of privilege and disadvantage” since the early twentieth century.

We have seen that, over the last century, the Nationalist Party —before 1949— and Communist Party —since the establishment of the PRC in 1949— have both contributed to the protection of the privileged position of the urban population. However, no twentieth-century regimes fostered a fully economically or politically independent middle class in China. What differentiated the life of middle-class groups after 1949 from that of previous regimes was the degree to which the CCP, in particular during the early 1950s, worked to dominate and make every sphere of their life dependent on the Party-state. In post-Maoist China, Maoist middle-class groups have taken advantage of both market competition and socialist redistribution in a hybrid economy, including redistributive resources, institutions, and group membership. The emergence and development of the post-Maoist middle class in the PRC has undoubtedly resulted from both globalization and a complex socio-political process that includes capital transferability-based dynamics, economic and cultural factors, and their interdependence and interaction with each other. Indeed, the emergence of middle-class groups is far more than purely a result of individual attributes such as hard work, talents and skills in a market

economy. Instead, it is intertwined with processes of class reproduction, the redistributive mechanisms of socialist institutions such as *danweis* under the market economy, and policies based on a new social contract established in the 1990s between the Party and the urban population (Tang 2018a; Rocca 2017). As a result, class and social mobility throughout the twentieth century in China are best understood in terms of capitals transferability, the intergenerational transfer of privilege and/or disadvantage, and, after 1949, the promotion of state-sponsored discourses about class developed at different political and economic stages.

(h6) The *Renmin Wang*, as the online version of *Renmin Ribao* —the mouthpiece of Central Committee of the CCP— has become a categorical example of the construction and development of the official discourse of the Chinese middle class in the 21st century.

Of special note is the dominant presence of a pro-market view in the state-sponsored discourse of the middle class in the PRC. In post-industrial societies, Bourdieu notes, the state holds the power to create the very things represented, which make them exist publicly, officially, by turning the state's "vision of the social world, and the principles of division upon which it is based, into the official vision, into *nomos*, the official principal of vision and division" (Bourdieu 1987: 13). Our findings indicate that the power of the Party-state to create the very things represented, which make them exist publicly, can be observed in the state-sponsored discourse of the middle class through the amendments to the PRC Constitution, the discourse of the leaders of the Party-state, and the content of articles published in *RW*. We have identified the re-emergence in recent decades of a series of traditional concepts —*wenming* (civilization, culture), *hexie* (harmony), modernity, patriotism or *suzhi* (quality)— that have acquired different hierarchical connotations to become part of the state-sponsored discourses of the middle class. The presence of a pan-national discourse that appeals to the shared identity of the so-called emerging economies vis-à-vis the more consolidated economies is verified. In addition, nationalist, populist, pro-consumerism, and normative narratives have been shown in all the discursive spaces analysed, along with an strong emphasis on the acknowledge of Party-state's legitimacy over both public and private spheres, and on the firm desire of the regime to deliver its discourse to all political dimensions. Moreover, our findings have discovered the significant increase in the number of articles published in *RW* in 2012, the year in which the initiative of the Chinese Dream was presented, thus establishing a variable between the start of the new ideological program that represents the Chinese Dream and a greater presence in *RW* of a nationalist and anti-American discourse. We argue that the "redistributive mobility narrative" conditions Chinese economic development to the impoverishment of the US middle class and its traditional allies in Asia and Europe. In this way, the concept of the social identity of middle class eliminates its class-based essence and acquires a pan-nationalist and nationalist narratives.

Finally, in Chapter IV we examine data collected in the PRC in order to hypothesize that:

(h7) The conceptualization of the middle class in contemporary China can be considered to relate not only to experiences associated with productive activity, but also, increasingly, to experiences related to social practices and representations.

The analysis of semi-structured interviews collected in the PRC provides a categorical example of the social practices and representations of the phenomenon of the Chinese middle class. Our data collected provides the basic characteristics of the social construction of identity

within Beijing's middle class by exploring the social field in urban China as a multidimensional space of social mobility, new lifestyles, gender divisions and community organizations. While these observations have been derived by employing a conceptual schema associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu, some results obtained question his conceptualization of "real class" and his formulation on homogeneous conditions of class—that is, homogeneous conditions of existence impose homogeneous conditionings and produce homogeneous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices¹³⁵ (Bourdieu 1984: 104). Given our findings pertaining to geographic and social origin, occupation, gender and participation in neighbourhood governance regarding community affairs, we discover a number of defining characteristics that indicate a cultural heterogeneity rather than homogeneity within in the social representations and everyday social practices of middle-class groups in urban China. Additionally, using Bourdieu's theoretical schema we can also see that the formation of the middle-classes groups in the PRC can be primarily understood through a social reproduction phenomenon rather than a class formation process understood through a social mobility accounted for by an increasing "credentialism." Finally, the findings of the case study undertaken in Beijing are also supportive of the thesis of a cleavage society or the so-called class crystallization (Sun 2002) is maintained primarily through consumption—that is, economic capital—, but not through a recognizable "class" identity or "real class". For example, domestic migration in the PRC has proved to be a form of lifestyle consumption, a *suzhi* practice and a way to fashion oneself as a middle-class, civilized and modern subject. Thus, "[t]heir consumption-oriented lifestyles are indicators of their group affiliation, rather than class identity" (Tang 2018a: 144), about which we will continue to discuss in the following section.

Critical synopsis of the social construction of identity within the middle class in urban China

Beyond the general conclusions set out previously, one of the objectives of this thesis was able to work out a synopsis of the social construction of identity within the middle-class groups in the contemporary PRC within a theoretical context associated with Bourdieu's theory of class based on the substantial volume of information that our research project required to be processed.

(h8) By formulating a critical synopsis of the main features on which the social construction of identity within the Chinese middle class is based we can demonstrate together the essential elements of Bourdieu's conceptualization of social class as well as profile its discursive spaces and social dynamics.

We would like to provide, however, evidence of hypothesis (h8) by describing the main features in detail of the case study developed in this thesis with respect to identifying the social construction of the Chinese middle class. Our synopsis further on condenses the results and analyses of this case study developed in this thesis and assesses the degree of consensus as to the main characteristics of the middle class selected as being essential in China studies. In addition, our synopsis suggests possible prospective directions for future research in the light of these findings and in the context of current debate regarding the middle class in the PRC.

¹³⁵ In other words, "constructed classes theoretically assemble agents who, being subject to similar conditions, tend to resemble one another and, as a result, are inclined to assemble practically, to come together as a practical group, and thus to reinforce their points of resemblance" (Bourdieu 1987: 6).

As we have demonstrated in the preceding chapters, the Chinese middle class is mostly a phenomenon of class reproduction. As we have seen in Chapter III, when analysing Chinese middle classes groups as historical artefacts by reconstructing their social trajectories as a class in the twentieth century (Bourdieu 1987, 1991b), urban middle-class groups' perception and beliefs about their class origin and postmaterialist motivations are the outcome of a complex structuring process that involved both class reproduction and awareness of individual interests. That is why middle-class individuals mention their personal trajectories as an example of perseverance, hard work and skills. Significantly, nearly 85 per cent of the informants in this case study come from what we call "Maoist middle-class" backgrounds, thus upward social mobility is a minority phenomenon in urban China. As a result, middle class groups in the PRC cannot be considered part of the "new middle class" as most of the middle-class individuals have experienced the transfer of privileges representing the social reproduction explained in detail in Chapter IV. Indeed, Chinese middle-class groups have benefited from the fundamental new social contract established after the short interlude following the Tian'anmen Square movement in 1989. This event triggered the decision to re-launch economic and institutional transformations at the beginning of the 1990s. During such ambitious process of marketization, some middle-class groups "managed to transform or maintain the benefits of being administrative or managerial elites, while some have become incorporated capitalist entrepreneurs, and some (such as professionals, cultural elites, and technocrats) who historically have normally held an ambiguous class status have gained increased prestige and institutional access" (Tang 2018a: 142). Significantly, what made these middle class's members in a homogeneous group was their constant reconfiguration of their politic capital and/or their class background. But it is here that their homogeneity ends.

Simultaneously, the increase in living standards, globalization, new representations of consumption and the construction of a state-sponsored discourse of the Chinese middle class have turned the country into the largest consuming market in the world. Hence, by paralleling the class analysis developed by Bourdieu, class distinctions in post-industrial societies such as the set of middle and upper-class gated communities in urban China could be represent, "not only depend on the accumulation of economic capital but also gradually depends on the reproduction of cultural capital" (Lin 2008: 7) —that is, on leisure and cultural consumption. Indeed, we have observed the increasing importance of cultural practices and leisure in middle-class groups. As a result, middle-class identities in urban China are increasingly "considered to relate more to experiences associated with leisure and cultural consumption than to experiences related to productive activity" (Wynne 1998). On that basis, we discover that urban middle class, to a lesser or greater extent, consumes culture. As Bourdieu argues, "social distinctions can be observed in a variety of social practices including those traditionally associated with leisure such as holiday-making, sports, reading, music, cinema and other tastes" (1998: 29). Certainly, taste is the clue to understand middle class's consumption patterns within the theoretical context associated with *Distinction* (1984) and the explanation of symbolic power. We have also demonstrated that consumption practices, both online and offline, of Chinese middle-class groups can be centrally organized around the symbolic construction, reinforcement and interaction of class differences.

However, coinciding with Tang (2018a), and Hong and Zhao (2015), the formation of a middle class in urban China "reflects social dynamics of a 'status society' more than a 'class society'" (Tang 2018a: 144). Chapter III and IV together show that the current social construction of a middle-class identity still relies mainly on economic capital, but not on a collective identity through distinctions based on inner dispositions and re-configurations across aesthetic

domains or high level of community involvement. Despite of our study reveals that nearly 80 per cent of middle incomers in this case study think of themselves as belonging to the "middle class" identity, as we discovered in Chapter IV when we examined our informants' social practices and representations, the formation of a middle-class identity in urban China reflects the formation of social dispositions that are internalizing in everyday practices, but they are still somewhat distant from the crystallization of a (middle-)class habitus. In addition, and beside economic criteria that define the group "in-itself," as a statistical category, Bourdieu asserts that the emergence of a (middle)class cannot occur without deep symbolic changes such as the ones which occur in social practices and representations. In other words, the consumption-oriented lifestyles of the Chinese middle class "are indicators of their group affiliation, rather than class identity" (Tang 2018a: 144), they are indicators of a "class on paper" but not of a "real class."

As we have seen in Chapter I, "where class referred to objective situations and need not lead to group awareness and action, status by definition involved interpersonal subjectivity" (Dworkin 2007: 33); "status is governed by what is considered honourable, and concerns ideals that are realized in different lifestyles" (Holgersson 2017: 41) which can "brought privileges with but also responsibilities" (Dworkin 2007: 33-34). Indeed, in comparison to class, Weber's status groups are linked more associatively – than welded together in solidarity –, and "on the basis of culture rather than economics," the discussion then turns on whether class and status become "two types of *real* unities which would come together more or less frequently according to the type of society," or if "it is necessary to see them instead as *nominal* unities ... which are always the result of a choice to accent the economic aspect or the symbolic aspect – aspects which always coexist in the same reality" (Bourdieu 1966: 212-13). In fact, the object of study of *Distinction* (1984 [1979]) is "the relations between social classes and status groups —with the latter understood, following Weber, in the sense of collectivities defined by a uniformity of lifestyle" (Weininger 2005: 84). In the case of the Chinese middle class, status (symbolic aspect) does not go hand in hand with class (economic aspect); they do not form *nominal* unities as Bourdieu suggests. Further, such divergence can be seen to relate to the principal concerns of this study, namely the convergence of productive activity (economic aspect) and lifestyle (symbolic aspect) in Bourdieu's conceptualization of class and social stratification. On that basis, our findings do not allow us to translate, as Bourdieu indicates, the objective social and economic conditions into class identity and bridge the divisions between both class-in-itself and class-for-itself (Marx), and material structures and historic actors (Weber).

We have also observed that the importance of both material and post-material concerns for happiness is similar within the Chinese middle class. According to the post-industrialist thesis, "the importance of post-material concerns for happiness, relative to that of materialist concerns, is indeed higher in rich post-industrial societies" —"[p]ersonal autonomy and job creativity serve as indicators for post-materialist concerns," while the income domain and concerns for basic needs serve as indicators for materialist concerns (Delhey 2010: 65). The mutual reconfiguration of post-industrial concerns such as personal fulfilment on the one hand, and material concerns on the other in urban China, have to be contextualised in relation to a fast-paced commodification of a growing number of areas in both public and private spheres —rapid industrialization, competitiveness of the labour force, globalization, economically calculative individualization, and urbanization. Moreover, social scientists generally agree that the relationship between material conditions and SWB "is curvilinear: at low living standards rising income yields great gains in happiness but these gains level off as incomes continue to

rise" (Brockmann *et al.* 2009: 389). That would explain some pseudo-happiness narratives of the middle class found in Beijing.

Therefore, once middle incomers "have satisfied their material needs or at least the most basic ones," they "discover that life is not restricted to its material aspect" and "would allegedly feel a void that could only be filled by some sort of spiritual quest" (Rocca 2017: 135) or some other sort of self-fulfilment narratives that characterize post-industrial societies. Interestingly, we discovered social representations of a "class society" in a "status society." We can see how a significant part of middle-class groups relate happiness with the achievement of individual objectives based on personal fulfilment and not on material concerns such as an apartment, a car and so on. Thus, according to the middle-class narrative of the *jingshen* lifestyle that we have identified, the only way to fill this void would be through spiritual development and personal fulfilment. Such narratives imply a series of distinctive practices which indicate that those who practice them have disposable time and income to develop them, sensibility to enjoy them and an emerging *habitus* to represent them.

Moreover, in urban settings, a higher level of contextual inequality, which affects status perceptions and life satisfaction, not only increases status differentiation, but also heightens status competition and status insecurities among social members—that might cause low subjective well-being rates (Wilkinson and Pickett 2008). Therefore, in situations like the one created in Beijing after the surge in housing prices due to heated competition in the market— itself a consequence of contextual inequality—the indicators of social distinction are transferred to other areas as we have seen when analysing the non-material concerns of urban middle-class individuals such as the *jingshen* lifestyle we discovered. Additionally, we see that the high variance of the material and post-industrialist concerns, on the one hand, and the variety of the material and spiritual aspects of civilization in China's middle class illustrates again that this social grouping is not homogeneous. Bourdieu states that the existence of classes is based on "[t]he homogenizing effect of homogeneous conditionings is at the basis of those dispositions which favor the development of relationships, formal or informal (like homogamy), which tend to increase this very homogeneity" (1987: 6).

On that basis, the Chinese middle class cannot be considered a homogeneous social group and, according to Bourdieu's conceptualization of class, cannot be considered a social class as we have discovered earlier. These findings offer support to those positions that have sought to understand such heterogeneity—or conglomerate of many different middle-class groups that lack of a shared identity— leads to the suggestion that class in global and transnational societies is a constantly re-configurational phenomenon difficult to "capture by the move," with practitioners and representatives but without a neutral and "static" definition as a social phenomenon. To ignore this, Beverly Skeggs points, "is to work uncritically" with the categories produced through conflict and fought out at the level of the symbolic, "which always (because it is struggle) exist in the interests of power" (2004b: 5). It is here that we would find the question on the ontological status of class. As a classificatory concept, class "must always be the site of continual struggle and re-configuring precisely because it represents the interests of particular groups" (Skeggs 2004b: 5).

This study has shown the validity and the reactionary configuration of the concept of class— together with race, gender and sexuality— to produce an accurate representation of the institutionalization, legitimation and reproduction of both inequality and privilege in contemporary societies. At the same time, we have seen the existence of a hidden agenda concealed in every definition of the middle class—"the political hopes, economic purposes,

business expectations, ideological convictions, [and] vested interests” (Rocca 2017: 4). However, the fact that class is a subjective or partial categorization does not make it meaningless (Holgersson 2019). Classes, as Bourdieu notes, “are only analytical constructs, but constructs well-founded in reality (*cum fundamento in re*)” (1987: 5). That is why, we must take a step back from classificatory systems, “a move that asks how and why classifications have been established, and why it is that classification is the mechanism by which we know the contemporary” (Skeggs 2004b: 4-5). Further, Skeggs (2000 [1997]) adds, “to ignore or make class invisible is to abdicate responsibility (through privilege) from the effects it produces” (2002 [1997]: 7). Thus, to ignore or make class invisible is to ignore or make inequality invisible.

In a similar vein, we have discovered that middle-class groups position themselves within a concept of love and marriage associated to aspects of Chinese marital culture which emphasis commitment and heteronormativity. Similarly, narratives about marriage, romantic love and its most recognizable romantic manifestations are not their main concerns in terms of loving relationships. Indeed, despite the relatively privileged position of middle-class couples on the social ladder, they face material issues in raising “the happy complete heterosexual family” in urban China. In addition, we have been able to document significant differences in the conception of romantic love and in the public and private spheres of men and women. Moreover, while the majority of middle-class women in Beijing can be observed to operate under similar constraints with regard to the public and private spheres, and while differences in constraints and opportunities can also be explained in terms of occupation, geographic origin, child care, extended family and the developmental stages during lifetime, nevertheless significant “differences *between* women” can also be seen (Wynne 1998: 120). However, as Xie (2020) also observes, women face struggles to reconcile the multiple and often oppositional ideologies arising from the intermingling of traditional and modern discourses of romantic love and marital happiness.

We use the concept of *haoyong* woman or “useful woman” in order to highlight narratives of gendered division of labour in a patriarchal society such as post-reform China. We have observed that the *haoyong* narratives of gendered division of labour imposes a binary or exclusionary distinction on working middle-class women in the public sphere. On the one hand, jobs with a high degree of female discrimination and sexualization, which are mostly offered by private companies to *haoyong* women, and jobs with a lower degree of gender division, which are designated for *bu haoyong* women or “non-useful women.” This division in the professional world seeks to naturalize the imposition of a choice between two abusive options, of which only women in the PRC must face, resulting in the normalization of inequality. It is through the normalization of this binary classification —married vs. single women, and discriminatory workplaces vs. less discriminatory workplaces— that the normative masculinity legitimizes its dominant symbolic position in the public sphere. In the private sphere, and following market logic, we have also seen that some middle-class women may feel more *haoyong* than other because they prioritize personal fulfilment or, vice-versa, other women following the logic of discriminatory workplaces will feel more agile or possessing more class *habitus*, since they had not chosen the private sector characterized by jobs divided by gender and in which one must accept a situation of abuse. In this context our argument is not that the reforms of the 1990s have simply assigned a set of new social practices and representations to the Chinese middle class but it has destroyed many of the common elements previously possessed by the Maoist middle class.

The structural and cultural heterogeneity of urban middle-class groups is best understood not solely as productive of an emerging "middle class" but rather as a process that has implications for the multidimensionality of unprivileged actors, such as the *haoyong* women and reproductive workers, lived experiences in the public and private spheres in the PRC. The historically relational positioning to others of a Chinese woman's self reflects a deeply rooted hierarchical order formed under a long Confucian patriarchal and patrilineal family tradition, which the Party-state has long assumed in its policymaking to reinforce its legitimacy in the PRC (Xie 2020). As a result, such deeply rooted patriarchal, normative and disciplinary structure is underpinning gender inequalities in both the public and private spheres in contemporary China. Further, it is such gender inequality that leads, again, to the suggestion that the primacy of class as a symbolic factor of classification is over, class emerges in the PRC as a principle of division 'on the same level' as gender, race, age, geographic origin or sexuality.

Our research has been able to determine that 80 per cent of middle-class informants of this case study in Beijing thought of themselves as belonging to the "middle class" identity; it seems that most of the members of middle-class groups in urban China coincide with their objective social position. In addition, we have demonstrated the emergence of celebrity culture, which "shapes our thought and conduct, style, and manner" (Cashmore 2006: 6), and volunteer practices for the common good —of the neighbourhood and/or gated community— in the PRC. These findings, together with the re-focus on familial practices —which, "unintentionally, resonate with the state agenda that seeks to reassert traditional values as a way to deal with an aging population" (Zhang 2016: 1) — are not to claim the emergence of a civil society in the PRC, but rather to stress that these social practices and representations are part of the complex processes of social construction of identity seamlessly integrated into PRC's own trajectory toward modernity.

However, a middle-class identity is progressively constructed in urban China not only through consumption practices but also through the experience of participating in new activities in their neighbourhood life based on principles of openness, publicity and solidarity, and also in collective action against violation of their private-property rights as homeowners. Of special note is the fact, however, that the participation of the informants in the space for collective action is basically reduced to activities placed in their private sphere —intergenerational exchange in families— and within their neighbourhood or gated communities. Also, analyses reported in Chapter IV suggest that urban middle-class groups are on average more accepting of and less angry about current patterns of inequality in the PRC. In addition, despite the low participation in volunteer programmes and in the activities organised by the Residents' Committees, which may indicate "a rising autonomy of the private sphere" (Tang 2018a: 136), we have discovered the importance of the phenomenon of "celebrity philanthropy" and the refocus on the family in general, and the filial piety in particular among urban middle-class dwellers. In addition, a weak progress of social practices and representations in the social space of community beyond the *shequ* has been identified.

This might be consistent with the fact that a significant part of middle-class groups —mostly women— would prefer that the government take more active measures to help the migrant workers and other unprivileged groups, and thereby reduce income gaps. While, we see that middle class perceptions on inequality and distributive justice with regard to the dominant class also indicates a neutral held view. Hence, our observational notes and case study material collected on urban middle-class perceptions on distributive justice indicate that the *hulianwang xingui*, or successful business(men), enjoy a high level of respect, influence, and

even esteem and admiration in urban dwellers. Such feelings are based on values such as hard work, sacrifice, risk, or just the fact that the emergence of rich people is the unavoidable cost to become a rich country. Also, the Chinese Dream promoted by President Xi aims to foster the belief that one can change her or his own destiny through these values —mostly, intelligence and hard work.

Some of such values, however, are also pointed out by many of the informants when talking about migrant workers —hard work, sacrifice, risk—, but the feelings for the disadvantaged groups such as unemployed, peasants, transgender individuals or poor single-parent families are not quite the same. In short, despite a middle-class identity is progressively constructed in urban China not only through consumption practices but also through the experience of participating in new activities in their neighbourhood, the great majority of such practices are emerging within the discursive space of the Party-state. By contrast, the minority of the practices based on principles of openness, publicity and solidarity that are not bound by any kind of state-sponsored discourse or Party-state initiative are only carried out by middle-class women, and it seems a natural and timid evolution of the *middleization* of society. Beyond the homeowners' movements —that is, consumers' movements— and the faint solidarity initiatives amongst middle-class women, we did not identify any other form of unofficial associationism in urban China. In this connection, perhaps one of the most relevant conclusions is that, as we have noted, according to Bourdieu's understanding of social class, the Chinese middle class can be considered a *probable* class, but not a real class. A class exists “when there are agents capable of imposing themselves, as authorized to speak and to act officially in its place and in its name, upon those who, by recognizing themselves in these plenipotentiaries, by recognizing them as endowed with full power to speak and act in their name, recognize themselves as members of the class, and in doing so, confer upon it the only form of existence a group can possess” (Bourdieu 1987: 15). That is, for Bourdieu, without civil society there is no middle class.

In this scenario, class in the PRC can be understood not only as a social relation constituted dialogically and relationally —middle incomers compare what has been happening to themselves and people they know with the daily images of the lavish and privileged existence of the newly rich and the vague, if not missing, images of “the poor”— through structural narratives and processes which create and reinforce distributive injustices and inequalities. Hence, power and relations of symbolic domination and subordination such as the narratives of *suzhi* or the binary logic of “the winners and the losers in the reform” are embodied (migrant workers, peasants, etc.) and reincorporated into behaviours, dispositions, aspirations, decisions and actions. Indeed, as this thesis suggests, “[t]here is an economy of cultural goods” (Bourdieu 1984: 1) or, in other words, there is an economy of cultural practices and representations, associated with occupational positions and class location. For example, based on what have been termed the social spaces of community, gender, mobility and lifestyles, our findings indicate that a class habitus is being “constructed” through categorizations such as gender, cultural capital or geographic origin. Further, it is such heterogeneity, or multidimensional conceptualization, that leads to the suggestions that future studies may employ intersectional designs to evaluate how inequalities of different kinds reinforce each other in the PRC.

In this respect, the present study of the Chinese middle class is far from conclusive; instead it raises more questions about the criterion, the methods, the theory and the re-configurational reality. The analysis of the process of class construction and reproduction has also illustrated

the current trend to qualify not just social inequality, but also to a large extent acutely polarizations in the PRC. From an empirical aspect, identifying the economic and symbolic power structures operate together in class formation in urban China is a sober methodological issue that should be overcome especially in the geographical context. Hence, the sample of the present study is only representative of the urban middle class, but the emerging middle class in less developed inland areas must be addressed in future research, together with Bourdieusian analysis of cultural and economic capital, in order to understand if geographical differences serve to fragment rather than solidify the Chinese middle class as a global phenomenon. From the theoretical aspect, “since class is a social construction decided by people’s viewpoints” (Holgersson 2017: 119), and “class formation is not only constrained by the class structure, but also shaped by the cultural and political institutions as well as the interactions between the elites and the organized labor in political transition” (Lin 2008: 124), the question arises: how do the dominant class and the subordinate classes shape and/or identify the Chinese middle class? This issue, indeed, requires further exploration and data collection in future. Finally, from the political concern, the question of political representation not only partly explains the intellectual debate about the Chinese middle but also represents “the last frontier” (Rocca 2017: 245) of this social phenomenon: how the transformation of class structure and the Chinese middle class’s formation could determine the political horizon in the PRC? Class, therefore, still deserves our concern in the future.

Further, as we have seen in Chapter III, the analysis of the social construction of middle-class lifestyles also reveals a state-sponsored discourse of the Chinese middle class developed over the last twenty years. As the new century begins, the earliest official representations of the Chinese middle class in the PRC emerged in line with the announcement made by Jiang Zemin, then President of the PRC (1993-2003) and General-Secretary for the CCP (1989-2002), “that business people were welcome to apply for CCP membership, though it would still be necessary for the CCP to ensure they were ‘educated and guided’” (Jiang 2001: 169, in Goodman 2014: 26). Since then, the official discourse of the Chinese middle class has been and remains a key tool of co-optation of the middle-class groups, political legitimation, social control, and moral and ideological foundation. Similarly, since 2012, when Xi Jinping was confirmed as the new president of the PRC, the achievement of the Chinese Dream became the new official discourse of the Chinese middle class. In terms of lifestyles, the Chinese Dream is to achieve “Western living standards without being shaped by Western political standards” (Li 2015: 27). The concept of the Chinese Dream alludes to the great dream of the Chinese nation —and of each individual— in modern history and to the concept of China’s “great rejuvenation” after the “century of national humiliation” that the country suffered from the First Opium War (1839-1842) until the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1945.

This rejuvenation aims to restore optimism and enthusiasm about the future, especially among the younger ones (Ferdinand 2016) through a national rejuvenation to promote urbanization, upward social mobility and ideological values. These concepts effectively suggest that Xi and the CCP are concerned about the average citizen’s aspirations —and, in particular, “recognizes that the China Dream is likely to be fulfilled through new-type of middle-class life” (Taylor 2015: 110-111). The Chinese Dream slogan channels the dreams and aspirations of the average citizen, who yearns for a new type of urban middle-class life. Also, through the initiative of the Chinese Dream, Xi Jinping calls for attention to the power of China at the national and individual level.

According to President Xi, the people of the PRC must have better standards of living, standards of the middle class. Xi's initiative adds to the tradition of the CCP a collective ideal of future and attempts to convince the Chinese population "that the realization of the Chinese Dream leads to improved housing, education, public health, and social welfare" (Zheng Wang 2014: 7). However, it must be borne in mind that the very concept of the Chinese Dream must be understood within the global framework of the twentieth century in three, interconnected ways: as a concept of the Chinese tradition that resurfaces with new connotations in "Xi Jinping Thought"; as an instrument to increase the legitimacy of the CCP; and as a method of international dissemination of certain ideals (Zheng Shiping 2014, in Taylor 2015: 109). In this way, the ruling elite, aware of the need to strengthen its legitimacy and of the fact that ending the disparity between the incomes of rural and urban residents will largely determine the success of the Chinese Dream, continues the reform of the economic model launched during the previous period under Hu Jinta "by gradually expanding the urban Chinese middle class through stable domestic economic growth and consumption" (Taylor 2015: 116). As a result, the middleization and harmony of Chinese society is inextricably linked to the economic growth—domestic consumption—and an international presence strategy—as an alternative to the American Dream—for the Chinese public. Indeed, the Chinese Dream, the economic growth, the state-sponsored discourse of the Chinese middle class and the pan-national discursive strategy providing narratives about a PRC's stronger international presence, both economically and politically, must be understood as a discursive legitimation of Party-state for the Chinese public.

To this end, as discussed in Chapters II and Chapter IV, poverty eradication is a key aspect of government with the aim of stimulating domestic demand, accelerating the transformation of the economic growth model, and promoting sustained long-term development (Beltrán 2018: 140). Thus, the Chinese Dream is sustained on a national scale in the official discourse of the middle class, not so much as the political ideal of a harmonious society but as an individual dream, which aspires to achieve a comfortable urban lifestyle typical of the middle class. In this way, the Chinese Dream serves as a roadmap for China's middle-class groups. As Cheng Li states, the Chinese Dream will create new economic opportunities and new sources of wealth, and it will be an opportunity for upward social mobility and achieving a middle-class lifestyle (Gao 2013). However, according to our analysis of digital media in the PRC, the problems facing the Chinese middle class reveal a simultaneous social transformation in the PRC. On the one hand, it demonstrates that in the PRC's urban society the ideal of a citizen is based on the concept of the entrepreneurial subject. On the other hand, this anxious new middle-class citizen, who emerged as a result of globalization and the process of social engineering developed during the 1990s in the PRC, observes with concern as the transfer from the public to the private no longer benefits him or her. Although the PRC remains explicitly class-based political system informed by the CCP's Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Party's role as the vanguard of both the Chinese proletariat and the Chinese peasants has ceased to become an inter-class entity that represent the Chinese people and the Chinese nation without accentuating class differences. There could be continuous support for Party-state legitimation of the Chinese middle class, if it could assure the protection of the structure of entitlement and social peace while maintaining a stable economic growth. Only in this way can the Party-state avoid the costs of the continual struggle and re-configuring processes that class represents, as "a flame whose edges are in constant movement, oscillating around a line or surface," getting out of hand.

Appendix I. List of informants

List of semi-structured interviews conducted in Beijing in 2017 and 2018. The serial number and names, as well as the age, status, residence, level of education, occupation and home province of each informant, are listed in the following table.

No.	Name	Age	Status	Place of Residence	Level of Education	Occupation	Home Province
1	Mr. Yi	29	Married	Chaoyang District	Postgraduate	Businessperson / Unemployed	Beijing
2	Mrs. Li	39	Married	Haidian District	Postgraduate	Professor	Guizhou
3	Mr. Yang	32	Single	Gulou, area in Dongcheng District	Graduate	Engineer in State-Owned Enterprise	Beijing
4	Mr. Duan	29	Single	Haidian District	Graduate	Technologist in State-Owned Enterprise	Heilongjiang
5	Mr. Wen	29	Single	3rd Ring Road close to Guomao, area in Chaoyang District	Postgraduate	Staff in State-Owned Enterprise	Fujian
6	Mrs. Gong	42	Married	Chaoyang District	Postgraduate	Lawyer	Sichuan
7	Mr. Lai	37	Married	Chaoyang District	Postgraduate	Staff in Private Enterprise	Nei Menggu Zizhiqu
8	Mrs. He	39	Married	Haidian	Postgraduate	Lawyer in Public Organization	Shandong
9	Mr. Qiao	35	Single	Chaoyang District	Graduate	Doctor in Foreign Company	Beijing
10	Mrs. Wu	38	Married	Haidian District	Postgraduate	University Staff	Anhui

11	Mrs. Yin	42	Married	Shijingshan District	Postgraduate	Professor	Shanxi
12	Mrs. Tang	29	Single	[Refused]	Graduate	University Staff	Liaoning
13	Mr. Cui	52	Married	Chaoyang District	Postgraduate	Professor	Anhui
14	Mrs. Kang	42	Married	West 4th Ring Road, area in Haidian District	Postgraduate	Professor	Refused / No answer
15	Mr. Bai	64	Married	Haidian District	Postgraduate	Professor	Nei Menggu Zizhiqu
16	Mrs. Ai	33	Married	Liangmaqiao, area in Chaoyang District	Postgraduate	Professor	Xi'an
17	Mr. Lu	37	Married	Chaoyang District	Postgraduate	Professor	Hubei
18	Mrs. Yao	51	Married	Haidian District	Postgraduate	Professor	Hebei
19	Mrs. Ren	46	Married	Haidian District	Postgraduate	Professor	Shanxi
20	Mr. San	25	Qingtian	Haidian District	Graduate	Staff in Private Enterprise	Hubei

Appendix II. *Renmin wang* articles on middle class, 2000-2015.

List of 427 newspaper articles about the middle class published in *Renmin Wang* on middle class from January 1, 2000 to the end of December 2015, and ordered by date of publication. As is indicated below, some articles were published several times on different days. In addition, the content of the articles listed here can also be published under different headlines. In such cases, the different headlines are placed side by side in the following list.

美国房子越来越贵 中产阶级也买不起 (*Meiguo fangzi ye lai ye gui zhongchan jieji ye mai bu qi*, American Houses are Getting More Expensive and The Middle Class Cannot Afford It). *Renmin Wang*, 22 May 2002.

“中产阶级”将成为社会主流? (“*Zhongchan jieji*” *jiang chengwei shehui zhuliu?* Will the “Middle Class” Become the Mainstream of Society?). *Renmin Wang*, 17 February 2003.

“变坏”的催化剂? 中产阶级男人闲适自信的爱情 (“*Bian huai*” *de cuihuaji?* *Zhongchan jieji nanren xianshi zixin de aiqing*, The Catalyst for “Deterioration”? The Casual and Confident Love of Middle-class Men). *Renmin Wang*, 13 March 2003.

不只是金钱, 关注中产阶级的十大人生问题 (*Bu zhishi jinqian, guanzhu zhongchan jieji de shi da rensheng wenti*, Not Just Money, Pay Attention to The Top Ten Life Issues of The Middle Class). *Renmin Wang*, 27 March 2003.

美国中产阶级: 两份收入 难维生计 (*Meiguo zhongchan jieji: Liang fen shouru nan wei shengji*, The American Middle Class: Two Incomes, but Difficult To Make A Living). *Renmin Wang*, 18 September 2003.

中产阶级才是中国财富的中坚力量 (*Zhongchan jieji cai shi Zhongguo caifu de zhongjian lilian*, The Middle Class Will Become The Essence of China’s Wealth). *Renmin Wang*, 3 and 5 November 2003.

朴树的中产阶级甜美生活 (*Pushu de zhongchan jieji tianmei shenghuo*, The Sweet Life of Pushu’s Middle Class). *Renmin Wang*, 30 November 2003.

台湾人被迫远走他乡 中产阶级是受害主体 (*Taiwanren bei po yuan zou taxiang zhongchan jieji shi shouhai zhuti*, Taiwanese Are Forced To Leave the Country, The Middle Class Is The Victim). *Renmin Wang*, 11 April 2004.

“中产阶级”徒有虚名 西甲积分榜两大板块现巨大鸿沟 (“*Zhongchan jieji*” *tuyouxuming xijia jifen bang liang da bankuai xian juda honggou*, The “Middle Class” under A False Name, The Two Main Courses of La Liga Have a Huge Gap). *Renmin Wang*, 14 May 2004.

中产阶级十种休闲方式 (*Zhongchan jieji shi zhong xiuxian fangshi*, Ten Ways to Enjoy Leisure Time for The Middle Class). *Renmin Wang*, 17 May 2004.

抽样调查：海南中产阶级有多少？收入多少？(Chouyang diaocha: Hainan zhongchan jieji you doushao? Shouru duoshao? Sample Survey: How Much Is The Middle Class in Hainan? What Is Their Income?). *Renmin Wang*, 26 May 2004.

上海传媒人薪水调查 未来将成为“中产阶级”？(Shanghai chuanmeiren xinshui diaocha weilai jiang chengwei “zhongchan jieji”? Shanghai Media on Salary Survey: Will Shanghai Become A “Middle Class” Society in The Future?); 沪传媒人薪水调查 未来将成为“中产阶级”？(Hu chuanmeiren xinshui diaocha weilai jiang chengwei “zhongchan jieji”? Shanghai Media on Salary Survey: Will Shanghai Become “Middle Class” in the Future?); 传媒人未来将成为“中产阶级”？(Chuanmeiren weilai jiang chengwei “zhongchan jieji”? Will Media People Become “Middle Class” in the Future?) *Renmin Wang*, 3 and 4 June 2004.

南方体育：EURO2004 十批判决书之中产阶级批判 (Nanfang tiyu: EURO 2004 shi pipan shu zhi zhongchan jieji pipan, Nanfang Sports: EURO 2004, Critical Document on The “Middle Class” Teams). *Renmin Wang*, 5 July 2004.

叫板豪门并非黄粱一梦 英超中产阶级谁能杀出黎明？(Jiaoban haomen bingfei huang liang yi meng yingchao zhongchan jieji shei neng sha chu liming? Who Can Make The Dawn of The Premier League’s Middle Class?). *Renming Wang*, 12 July 2004.

克里转守为攻 再打经济就业牌 讨好中产阶级 (Keli zhuan shou wei gong zai da jingji jiuye pai taohao zhongchan jieji, Kerry Turns from Defence to Offense by Using The Employment Card to Please The Middle Class). *Renmin Wang*, 25 August 2004.

绑架活动增加令巴西中产阶级胆寒 (Bangjia huodong zengjia ling baxi zhongchan jieji danhan, Increasing Kidnapping Activities Chills The Brazilian Middle Class). *Renmin Wang*, 7 September 2004.

争鸣：中国何时才会有“中产阶级”？(Zhenming: Zhongguo he shi cai hui you “zhongchan jieji”? Discussion: When Will China Have A “Middle Class?) *Renmin Wang*, 21 and 24 September 2004.

和讯转型：服务中产阶级 (Hexun zhuanxing: Fuwu zhongchan jieji, Hexun’s Transformation: Serving The Middle Class). *Renmin Wang*, 14 October 2004.

直面南京“中产阶级” (Zhimian Nanjing “zhongchan jieji,” Facing Nanjing “Middle Class”). *Renmin Wang*, 24 October 2004.

阿根廷 930 多万新穷人来自中产阶级家庭 (Agenting 930 duo wan xin qiongren laizi, More than 9.3 Million New Poor People in Argentina Come from Middle-class Families). *Renmin Wang*, 31 October 2004.

俄罗斯中产阶级惊恐度日 (Eulosi zhongchan jieji jingkong du ri, The Russian Midle Class Lives in Terror). *Renmin Wang*, 7 November 2004.

帖文：能够指望中产阶级救中国？(Nenggou zhiwang zhongchan jieji jiu zhongguo? Can We Count on The Middle Class to Save China?); 中国不能指望发展壮大“中产阶级”消除矛盾 (Zhongguo buneng zhiwang fazhan zhuangda “zhongchan jieji” xiaocchu maodun, China Cannot Expect to Develop and Strengthen the “Middle Class” and Eliminate Contradictions). *Renmin Wang*, 22 November and 3 December 2004.

中国经济时报：美国中产阶级为什么不投票 (*Zhongguo jingji shibao: Meiguo zhongchan jieji weisheme bu toupiao*, China Economic Times: Why Does The American Middle Class Not Vote?). *Renmin Wang*, 29 November 2004.

中产阶级也另类 “小资”是怎样的一群人? (*Zhongchan jieji ye linglei "xiaozhi" shi zenyang de yiqun ren?* The Middle Class Is also An Alternative. What Kind of People Are “Petty Bourgeoisie”?). *Renmin Wang*, 18 January 2005.

国家统计局解释：中产阶级的门槛怎么来? (*Guojia tongji ju jieshi: Zhongchan jieji de menkan zenme lai?* The National Bureau of Statistics: How Did The Threshold of The Middle Class Come from?). 华夏时报：家庭年收入 6-50 万是我国中产阶级标准 (*Huaxia shibao: Jiating nian shouru 6-50 wan shi woguo zhongchan jieji biao zhun*, China Times: Annual Family Income of 60,000 to 500,000 Is The Standard for The Middle Class in My Country); 年收入 6 万以上就中产阶级? (*Nian shouru 6 wan yishang jiu zhongchan jieji?* Being a member of the middle class with an annual income of over 60,000?). *Renmin Wang*, 19 January 2005.

评论靶子：“中产阶级”究竟该长啥样? (*Pinglun bazi: "Zhongchan jieji" jiu jing gai zhang sha yang?* Comment Target: What Should The “Middle Class Look Like?”). *Renmin Wang*, 21 January 2005.

30 万答卷揭开“中产阶级”神秘面纱 (*30 Wan dajuan jie kai "zhongchan jieji" shenmi mansha*, 300,000 Answer Sheets Unveil The Mystery of The “Middle Class”); 现实与梦想 30 万答卷揭开“中产阶级”面纱 (*Xianshi yu mengxiang 30 wan dajuan jie kai "zhongchan jieji" miansha*, Reality and Dreams 300,000 Answer Sheets Revealed the “Middle Class” Veil). *Renmin Wang*, 21 and 27 January 2005.

强国论坛：要高度重视中产阶级子女教育问题 (*Qiangguo luntan: Yao gaodu zhongshi zhongchan jieji zinu jiaoyu wenti*, Qiangguo luntan: We Must Attach Great Importance to The Education of Middle-class Children); 要高度重视中产阶级子女教育问题 (*Yao gaodu zhongshi zhongchan jieji zinu jiaoyu wenti*, Qiangguo luntan: We Must Attach Great Importance to The Education of Middle-class Children). *Renmin Wang*, 25 January 2005, 2 and 4 February 2005.

玩的是自得其乐（中产阶级）(*Wan de shi zide qi le (zhongchan jieji)*, It's Fun to Play (Middle Class)). *Renmin Wang*, 1 April 2005.

报告披露基地招募策略 成员多为受教育的中产阶级 (*Baogao pilu jidi zhaomu celue chengyuan duo wei shou jiaoyu de zhongchan jieji*, The Report Discloses the Recruitment Strategy of Bin Landen, and The Members Are Mostly Educated Middle-class Individuals). *Renmin Wang*, 3 April 2005.

英报称基地成员多为中产阶级 (*Ying bao cheng jidi chengyuan duo wei zhongchan jieji*, The British Newspaper Said that The Members of The Base Are Mostly Middle Class). *Renmin Wang*, 4 April 2005.

解析贫穷中产阶级 为什么会有高收入难言的痛 (*Jiexi pinqiong zhongchan jieji weisheme hui you gao shouru nan yan de tong*, Analyzing The Impoverishment of The Middle Class: Why Do They Have High Incomes and Indescribable Pain?). *Renmin Wang*, 20 April 2005.

篮网三巨头欢迎拉希姆 中产阶级条款成为最大障碍 (*Lan wang san jutou huaying la xi mu zhongchan jieji tiaokuan chengwei zuida zhang'ai*, The Nets Big Three Welcome Raheem's Middle Class as The Biggest Obstacle). *Renmin Wang*, 8 July 2005.

加州房价飞涨殃及中产阶级 (*Jiazhou fangjia feizhang yang ji zhongchan jieji*, California Housing Prices Soaring Hit The Middle Class). *Renmin Wang*, 9 September 2005.

市场报：醒来吧 中产阶级的“奢侈体验” (*Shichang bao: Xing lai ba zhongchan jieji de "shechi tiyan,"* Market Report: Wake up The “Luxury Experience” of The Middle Class). *Renmin Wang*, 21 September 2005.

不要让“中产阶级”误导我们前进的方向 (*Buyao rang "zhongchan jieji" wudao women qianjin de fangxiang*, Don't Let The “Middle Class” Mislead Us Where We Are Going). *Renmin Wang*, 28 October 2005.

车子 房子 保险成为中国“中产阶级”新标志? (*Che zi fangzi baoxian chengwei zhongguo "zhongchan jieji" xin biaozi?* Have Cars, Houses, and Insurance Become A New Symbol of China's “Middle Class”?). *Renmin Wang*, 19 December 2005.

调查：广州市民认为年薪 10 万才算中产阶级 (*Diaocha: Guangzhou shimin renwei nianxin 10 wan cai suan zhongchan jieji*, Survey: Guangzhou Citizens Think that The Annual Salary of 100,000 Is Considered The Middle Class). *Renmin Wang*, 19 December 2005.

埃弗顿成为中产阶级球队 (*Aifudun chengwei zhongchan jieji*, Everton Soccer Team Becomes A Middle-class Team). *Renmin Wang*, 22 March 2006.

白领还是民工？中产阶级薪水高却感觉像在底层 (*Bailing haishi mingong? Zhongchan jieji xinshui gao que ganjue xiang zai diceng*, White Collar Workers or Migrant Workers? The Middle Class Has A High Salary but Feels Like the Ones below). *Renmin Wang*, 31 March 2006.

赋税沉重失业率高 美国中产阶级日子不好过 (*Fushui chenzhong shiye lu gao Meiguo zhongchan jieji rizi bu haoguo*, Heavy Taxes and High Unemployment Rate: The American Middle Class Has A Hard Time). *Renmin Wang*, 18 April 2006.

中央关于对中间派和中产阶级右翼分子政策的指示 (*Zhongyang guanyu dui zhongjianpai he zhongchan jieji youyi fen zi zhengce de zhishi*, The Central Committee's Directive on The Policy towards Middle-class Centrists and Rightists). *Renmin Wang*, 17 June 2006.

美国收入差距拉大 中产阶级社区萎缩 (*Meiguo shouru chaju la da zhongchan jieji shequ weisuo*, U.S. Income Gap Widens, Middle-class Communities Shrink). *Renmin Wang*, 17 June 2006.

NBA 联盟新工资帽出炉 中产阶级条款和税金确定 (*NBA lianmeng xin gongzi mao chulu zhongchan jieji tiaokuan he shuijin queding*, New NBA Salary Cap Released, Middle Class Clauses and Taxes Determined). *Renmin Wang*, 13 July 2006.

为什么我们都不敢称自己为中产阶级? (*Weisheme women dou bu gan cheng ziji wei zhongchan jieji?* Why Do We Dare Not Call Ourselves Middle Class?). *Renmin Wang*, 17 July 2006.

早期中产阶级的价值理念 (*Zaoqi zhongchan jieji de jiazhi linian*, The Values of The Early Middle Class). *Renmin Wang*, 27 July 2006.

英国图谋炸机嫌犯：出生中产阶级受过良好教育 (*Yingguo tumou zha ji xianfa: Chusheng zhongchan jieji shouguo linghao jiaoyu*, British Conspiracy to Bomber Suspect: Born Middle Class Well Educated). *Renmin Wang*, 11 August 2006.

台湾中产阶级日子越过越穷 (*Taiwan zhongchan jieji rizi yueguo ye qiong*, Taiwan's Middle Class Is Getting Poorer and Poorer). *Renmin Wang*, 2 September 2006.

国际金融报：削尖脑袋，争当“中产阶级” (*Guoji jinrong bao: Xue jian naodai, zheng dang "zhongchan jieji,"* International Finance News: Sharpen Your Head and Strive to Become a "Middle Class"); 削尖脑袋，争当“中产阶级” (*Xue jian naodai, zheng dang "zhongchan jieji,"* International Finance News: Sharpen Your Head and Strive to Become a "Middle Class"). *Renmin Wang*, 5 September 2006.

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