LUND UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Social Sciences

Graduate School	SIMV07
Master of Science in Global Studies	Spring 2015
Major: Cultural Anthropology	Supervisor: Steven Sampson

The Value of Taste:

Consumption Strategies for Social Upward Mobility among Urban Chinese Youth

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Abstract

This thesis explores a group of young Western-oriented Chinese consumers called xiaozi in Shanghai, comprised mainly by young individuals from an urban lower middle-class background who attempt at adopting a lifestyle and identity marked by a taste for fine arts and foreign culture. The study shows that by means of social distinction through taste and foreign cultural practices the xiaozi youth can attempt at acquiring cultural capital for upward social mobility, to compensate for their lack of economic capital or social connections in Shanghai's society. As such, the xiaozi lifestyle can function as a vehicle for social upward mobility, but most often functions as a coping strategy to assert themselves as high quality individuals despite their lower societal status. By rearranging the quality discourse to adhere to a transnational scale of stratification along an imaginary linear path towards modernization, the xiaozi can consider themselves to be at the forefront of Chinese society and justify their higher social worth. Their questioning of traditional definitions of high quality and parental expectations and their will to create a life that takes departure in their own individual happiness is analyzed as an example of the macro-individualization process of Chinese social relations and new class-struggles in the stratification of China's emerging market-society. The thesis is based on data collected from participatory observation and interviews with 10 young Chinese individuals in Shanghai during the spring 2015.

Keywords: *xiaozi, youth, distinction, social mobility, urban, middle-class, consumer culture, China.*

1. Introduction

While in the high-end area Xintiandi in Shanghai, I was walking together with the 25-year old girl Lan, whom I had met in the Xintiandi Style Galleria. As we walked through the galleria I asked her what she thought of the place. She stopped, listened to the background jazz music, smiled and pointed with her finger to the air [referring to the music] and said; "Ah. It's very xiaozi!" When I asked what xiaozi meant, she answered that "...it means people below the middle-class who seek a more sophisticated lifestyle, but not like the richer Chinese people who only care for money and luxury items." In contrast, she said, xiaozi people use their limited amount of money to go to watch dramas, music festivals, have coffee, visit museums and buy art, to cultivate their "spirit". "Maybe we are trying to make our living style closer to the Western people, especially the middle-class. I think maybe those things are very normal for Western people, but not here you know..!"

The transformation of Chinese society from an isolated socialist society to a globally connected market society is a deep socioeconomic restructuring process which is still in its transition. The increased social mobility, economic wealth and influence from global culture and trade have had impact on all social relations, but youth and women in particular have benefitted from the transition to an emerging globalized market society in terms of heightened social status and power as consumers. Its effect reaches the level of individual identities as well, as profound social change leads people to reconsider their lives and take on identities which they feel best suit the new societal situation. In Shanghai, the most commercial and cosmopolitan city in the Chinese mainland, the young daily find themselves exposed to the individualistic values and practices of global consumer culture and need to position themselves within the new social and cultural field that is being created. In contemporary China the individual must pursue social status or social worth by showing outward cultivation, or high quality, and thus consumption habits are of particular importance for identity formation and social mobility. This

is particularly evident in the youth consumer culture which has emerged since the 1990s, through which individual identity and social position can be expressed through consumer choices. Nevertheless, the youth's individual identity and opportunities for social mobility are still profoundly structured by their local social relations, with high reliance on and expectations from parents for social and economic success, and immense competition among peers which restrains their opportunities for upward social mobility and reach of a middle-class lifestyle. Thus, many of the young Shanghainese who seek upward social mobility are structurally limited by their lesser economic means and few social connections, and in the new cultural field that is being created in Shanghai with influx of global consumer culture they have made it their strategy to adopt an individually fulfilling and transnational consumer lifestyle despite their lower middle-class position in society, to promote and possibly elevate themselves in society through sophisticated consumption. It is this social phenomena which this thesis describes; its cultural practices, meanings, and social implications. These young are called xiaozi, an urban social group which occupy a social space somewhere in between the Western equivalents hipsters and yuppies. The xiaozi promote artistic and aesthetic values to distinguish themselves from the mainstream society, but are not countercultural nor political like hipsters; they embrace commercialism alike yuppies, but xiaozi are not as rich or part of an elite strata alike yuppies. What these subcultures have in common is the same desire for setting themselves apart from mainstream society, which xiaozi youth do by appropriating global consumer culture and prioritizing individual fulfillment before mainstream normative definitions of the ideal middle-class lifestyle. As such xiaozi is an unique urban youth subculture inherent to the contemporary Chinese socioeconomic transition structure and regional globalization.

This study of xiaozi culture is situated in Xintiandi in Shanghai, locally known as one of the most explicitly Western-oriented, sophisticated and hip entertainment areas in downtown Shanghai. Except for Helen Wang's limited comparative analysis of xiaozi subculture and middle-class culture in one of the chapters in her

book *The Chinese Dream* (2010) and three popular articles in *CNReviews* (2010), *Shanghaiist* (2010) and *China Daily* (2012) on xiaozi subculture in Beijing and Shanghai respectively, there has been no coverage of xiaozi's in Western academic journals and media. This thesis aims to begin to fill this lacuna by exploring how this subculture departs from mainstream youth culture and how it relates to the macro-social process of individualization and globalization of Chinese society.

1.1 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to explore xiaozi subculture among young Chinese in Shanghai, to contribute to the anthropological understanding of how the increasingly global Chinese market-society is evolving. This research is relevant because of the lack of knowledge of the changing stratification in urban China in Western academia, and seeks to fill the research gap afore mentioned. Furthermore, case studies of Chinese society's modernization process also provides valuable knowledge for comparative research on the effects of modernization and individualization, which theory currently mainly is based on research in Western societies (see Bauman 2001; Beck 1992; Beck & Gernsheim 2002; Yan 2009).

I will argue that the xiaozi's lifestyle and values are a reaction to the mainstream discourse on ideal personhood and middle-class attainment in China. The xiaozi lifestyle is promoted by young low-middle class people who want to transcend local definitions of social stratification and use what they imagine as a cosmopolitan practice to elevate their status in the emerging globalizing Chinese market-society. In order to demonstrate this argument, I will describe how xiaozi youth try to distinguish themselves from the mainstream by acquiring what they view as modern cultural practices and using this cultural capital to redefine the local Chinese categories of ideal personhood. I analyze the xiaozi as social phenomena as a case of social distinction, inspired by Bourdieu's theory (1984), and as part of the macro-individualization process of Chinese society, which has

begun to be outlined by Yan (2009). The following subset of questions guides my analysis:

- What defines xiaozi subculture to the young Chinese who define themselves as xiaozi?

- Why are some young Chinese attracted to the xiaozi lifestyle? Who attempts to become xiaozi?

- How do the xiaozi use foreign cultural practices to challenge domestic Chinese definitions of social stratification?

- How is the xiaozi subculture a reaction to the mainstream discourse on ideal personhood and middle-class attainment in China?

1.2 Outline of the study

In the next chapter 2 I describe my method for studying xiaozi subculture. In chapter 3 I outline my theoretical framework for analyzing social distinction and cosmopolitanism as cultural capital, and situate these theories in the Chinese context by describing the domestic discourse on ideal personhood and the importance of politics of recognition as the main manifestation of social emancipation in post-reform China. In chapter 3 I describe the social definition of xiaozi subculture, and present my ethnographic findings on the lifestyle and values of xiaozi youth in Shanghai. In chapter 4 I analyze xiaozi youth's struggle for upward social mobility through the lens of the theory on social distinction and cosmopolitanism in China, to answer my research questions and establish my argument that xiaozi youth's lifestyle is a reaction to the mainstream discourse on ideal personhood and middle-class attainment in China, promoted by young people who want to transcend local definitions of social stratification and use what they imagine as a cosmopolitan practice to elevate their status in the emerging globalizing Chinese society. The last section of the study concludes my findings and suggests possibilities for further studies.

2. Method

2.1 Motivation for my choice of ethnographic fieldsite

The majority of social life occurs in the context of "fading away" and the "shading off" of space (Giddens 1984:132), and as such places function as a context, although not a determinant, for social interaction and cannot be fully separated from the socialization process. Places are not an inactive background to active social life, but norms, behavior and social relations are actively reproduced partly by how humans respond to how their surrounding space is constructed (ibid.). When entering the field in Shanghai, I found it necessary to limit my fieldwork in the metropolis to certain places where the xiaozi subculture is expressed and concentrated to specifically. The area Xintiandi was chosen deliberately for my case study of xiaozi culture simply because it was defined by my initial informants as "a very xiaozi place", and as such the place also helped me to understand xiaozi culture and how Xintiandi's global, romanticized and consumerist features functioned as an spatial context for my informants living of a xiaozi lifestyle and attitude. Xintiandi's preservational features of Shanghai's colonial history and its selective historical narrative also made it particularly constructive for exploring the cosmopolitan elements of xiaozi culture. The previous literature which has discussed Xintiandi focus on its role in the ideological quest of making Shanghai a 'global city' (Wu 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2003a; Gabriel 2006; Luo 2011; Cheng 2012; Vaide 2015), as part of Shanghai's abrupt large-scale spatial transformation and social gentrification (Lu 2002; Gamble 2003; Xu 2004; He 2007, 2010, Xuefei 2008; Wang & Steven 2009) and as a case of global commercial place promotion (Wu 2003b; He & Wu 2004; Xuefei 2008; Wai 2006). None has previously undertaken any ethnographic study of Xintiandi. In total I spent 4 months in Shanghai from February until May 2015, continuously engaged in the field and with my informants.

2.2 Ethnographic sample and sample method

I focused my qualitative sample to ten young Chinese individuals between 21 and 29 years old, all presently settled in Shanghai. Seven are female and three are male. The majority, seven of them, were sampled when they were visiting Xintiandi and correspond to the average consumer in Xintiandi; Chinese, young, lower middle-class or middle-class in terms of family annual income, and with a college education, still studying or with a professional occupation (He 2010:356). The other three informants were selected specifically because of their different socioeconomic background; two college students with migration background, and one female elite young professional. The total number of informants was decided as I reached a point of theoretical saturation (Esaiasson et al. 2007:290-4), after which I conducted two more interviews to secure the internal validity of my findings. Aside from the elite young professional (who reported a annual family income of more than 200,000 yuan) all of my informants reported a family income between 20,000 to 100,000 yuan per year, which is considered as lower middle-class to middle-income level in Shanghai by He's statistics from 2010 (He 2010). All the conversations were conducted in English, which did not seem to affect my sample as all the people I approached in Xintiandi were comfortable to converse in English.

2.3 Guided conversations

The purpose of conducting interviews was to acquire qualitative data of "the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman 2006:9). To acquire subjective and detailed data on the meaning(s) of xiaozi identity and culture I conducted guided conversations (Appendix I). I had a set of general questions which I wanted to have answers to and which guided the interview, but also left a lot of room for my informant to steer the conversation in the direction which was most relevant for expressing and grasping her/his experience and thoughts on Xintiandi and xiaozi culture in Shanghai. I intentionally situated us in situations which I understood was considered as being xiaozi, such as sitting in outdoor cafés and drinking coffee, to set us in a more interactive environment that would spark their ability to provide qualitative

information about xiaozi culture and sociality. I also reconnected with all of my informants on Wechat, a Chinese chat forum, which enabled me to come back to them with follow-up questions, specifications and additional questions after the interviews as new data from new interviews and analytical insights emerged.

2.4 Non-participant observation and participant observation

In order to understand the identity politics of xiaozi culture - what it is, who they are, and why Xintiandi in particular is a xiaozi place, I also conducted participant and non-participant observation of groups and individuals matching my sample group. I was invited several times to join in events in Xintiandi with my informants, for example shopping during a creative sidewalk market for local artists, which I visited with two young girls, and to the Shanghai Fashion Week, which I visited with one of my male informants. During these occasions I carefully observed our experience and inquired about my informants views and thoughts. By using the information which I got from my informants on how to interpret xiaozi and determine what is xiaozi and what is not in participatory, I learned about the concept's meaning by taking part of Fashion Week, coffee-drinking and shopping, and asking my informants of what they thought distinguishes xiaozi artifacts, behavior and mentality.

2.5 Methodological considerations regarding my position as researcher

My subjective point of view as a researcher obviously influenced my access to the field, and the information which my informants shared with me. This was a positive thing in the sense that due to my personal characteristics as a young foreigner I could approach young Chinese people with ease, and it was through this entry point that I came in contact with the xiaozi subculture, which other researchers seem to have missed. Simultaneously my own position as a Western European foreigner was precarious, since my xiaozi informants obviously also considered Western culture and Western foreigners as people of high quality and somebody who they wanted to be associated to, which influenced our relationship.

This made it easy for me to meet new informants, and often made them very talkative and informative in my presence - however, I often became the subject of discussion and had to engage in the conversation in a way that inevitably influenced my informants. For example, they often inquired my opinion on different fashions and behavior and wanted me to tell them my opinion in turn for theirs. I chose to respond and engage in mutual discussion since I soon learned that this was the most effective way to come closer to my informants and make them share more qualitative information and personal opinions. In order not to make use of biased data, I have made it clear in my presentation and analysis of how I have engaged in discussions and how my informants used me as their point of reference, in order to make the research process and epistemological production as transparent and reliant as possible.

2.6 Limitations and validity

My geographic limitation of the study to Xintiandi also implies some limitations to the sample of informants who I included in the study. Indeed, Xintiandi is only one arena for socialization of xiaozi culture in Shanghai. Nevertheless as it was my informants who initially highlighted the xiaozi features of Xintiandi to me and pointed me into this direction for understanding xiaozi culture from the perspective of Shanghainese youth, my findings on xiaozi culture in Xintiandi should be considered as having high internal validity despite the study's geographical limitations. But as my findings add to a largely unexplored social phenomena the external validity must be considered to be limited, at least until further studies can contribute with validity from a larger sample size. The very limited coverage of xiaozi culture thus far only has confirmed its existence in Shanghai (Wang 2010; Chow 2010) and in Beijing (Laughlin 2012), although some informants implied that it also exists to varying extent in major Chinese cities such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen. As Shanghai is the most commercial and cosmopolitan city in the Chinese mainland and the main experimental site for producing the new modern Chinese market society (Deng 1994; Gamble 2003;

Wu 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2003; Vaide 2015) it leads the country's market-transition in many socioeconomic aspects, and is often considered to have a prominent role in starting cultural trends in China due to the relatively high financial, human and cultural capital among its population. But because of this specific economic and sociocultural context, such as the city's local cosmopolitan past, the large amount of foreigners living in the city and their impact on contemporary Shanghainese youth culture, and the high economic status which so many more young enjoy in Shanghai compared to other Chinese cities, the findings about xiaozi culture which are described in this thesis could probably only extend to Beijing and Guangzhou.

3. Theoretical framework

My argument that appropriating the xiaozi subculture becomes a vehicle for social distinction within the discourse on ideal personhood (quality) takes its departure in Bourdieu's theory on social distinction as a means of upward social mobility. First I present the theory in general, and then I link it specifically to cosmopolitanism as a type of cultural capital which can be used for social distinction. The latter two sections then situate the theory of social distinction and cosmopolitanism as cultural capital in the contemporary Chinese context by explaining the 'quality' discourse for social stratification in China, and how the appropriation of foreign culture and modernity in the form of embodied cultural capital is situated in this discourse. Then I present Yan's theory on the importance of politics of recognition as the main manifestation of social emancipation in post-reform China, and how cosmopolitanism alike other forms of social distinction in China mainly expresses itself through consumption.

3.1 Bourdieu's theory on social distinction

In his theory on consumption and social distinction Bourdieu rejects the traditional notion in Kantian aesthetics that taste, and subsequently consumer choices, are the result of innate, intellectual and individualistic choices of aesthetic appreciation. Instead Bourdieu argues that the objects which consumers choose from reflects a symbolic hierarchy which is socially determined by the social class structure, and maintained by the socially dominant classes to distinguish themselves from the other lower classes in society, e.g. to maintain the cultural hegemony. The assertion of taste through consumption is thus always a symbolic act of social significance, in a politics of recognition of social status which is a power struggle over what is legitimate culture and what is popular culture. Therefore Bourdieu describes "taste" as a "social weapon" to mark off the high from the low, the qualitative from the vulgar, and which the higher classes use for maintaining social distinction by deciding what legitimate culture is and how it should be properly consumed (Bourdieu 1984:59). This concerns all

matters of consumption such as food, drink, art, music, literature, entertainment, cultural activities - Bourdieu argues that even the most mundane and functional items for consumption bear such symbolic significance. But equally it can be used as a social weapon for the lower classes as a means for upward social mobility. Alternative tastes can be promoted to contest the dominant cultural hegemony of what is legitimate culture, but more often taste is used as an individual strategy for upward social mobility in acts of appropriation of the legitimate culture, for example by consumption of objectified legitimate culture (fine arts, wine, opera, etc.) and/or embodying cultural capital by changing one's habitus (for example, by becoming a connoisseur) (ibid.:167).

Bourdieu argues that the cultural hegemony is maintained mainly because of the misrecognition made by the lower classes to think that choices of legitimate culture are a result not of socially structured judgments but of a specific cultural knowledge, more commonly known as "good taste" (ibid.). Due to the mistake of the dominated classes to associate culture with knowledge a middle-brow culture also has grown along with the increased social mobility and purchase power of the working and middle-class in modern societies, and Douglas and Anderson has argued that a whole industry has emerged specifically to cater the demands of individuals on the move upwards in modern society in search of legitimate cultural "knowledge" - books on wine appreciation, classics compilations, etiquette columns in newspapers - which preys on the insecurity which rests in the belief that culture equals taste, and the subsequent belief that such cultural knowledge, or taste, is a vehicle for social mobility. "Indeed, as the endless cinematic retelling of the Pygmalion myth ("My Fair Lady", "Pretty Woman", "Working Girl", "Educating Rita", etc.) seeks to remind us, the only thing that separates the street vendor from the princess is a little cultural capital and a few elocution lessons." (Douglas and Anderson 1994:72).

However, the realization that cultural capital can function as a vehicle for upward social mobility always must be coupled with an understanding of how its accumulation differs depending on the cultural context. In many contemporary

societies in which cultural hybridity and imaginations of globality are permeating cultural meanings, social scientists have pointed to how a specific form of cultural capital called 'cosmopolitanism' is increasingly used for social distinction by sophistication. But cosmopolitanism is an ambiguous concept with various terminological implications in different localities. In the next chapter I begin with presenting the theory of 'cosmopolitanism' as cultural capital and how it ought to be studied ethnographically. Then I describe how earlier scholars have analyzed cosmopolitanism in China, to draw upon for my own analysis of xiaozi youth culture.

3.2 'Cosmopolitanism' as cultural capital and power in the globalizing world

In recent years a more critical stance towards the concept of cosmopolitanism has emerged based in Bourdieu's theory on cultural capital, social distinction and stratification. Weenink (2008) has suggested that cosmopolitanism should not only be considered as the moral value of openness to the foreign, but should also be understood as a form of social and cultural capital. He uses Bourdieu's concept habitus to explain how cosmopolitanism is a set of "bodily and mental predispositions and competencies (savoir faire) which help to engage confidently in such [transnational activities]" (Weenink 2008:1092). Other more critical scholars have pointed to the fact that while cosmopolitanism promote humanistic values, it is in fact also deeply implicated with and dependent on economic inequalities and power relations in the globalizing world (Calhoun 2003, 2008; Harvey 2009). Calhoun has criticized earlier sociologists for presenting cosmopolitanism as "‘simply a free-floating cultural taste, personal attitude, or ethical choice’, decoupled from material conditions in which people’s lives are embedded" (2008:109) and called for a more critical inquiry of cosmopolitanism as cultural capital from a class-perspective on social stratification. Despite that cosmopolitanism is a transnational form of cultural capital, its value as cultural capital for social distinction is embedded in its local domestic context. Robbins argue that "[t]he interest of the term cosmopolitanism is located (...)

(paradoxically) in its local applications, where the unrealizable ideal produces normative pressure against such alternatives as, say, the fashionable hybridization'' (Robbins, 1998:260; original emphasis). Ultimately cosmopolitanism is thus a fantasy of transcending the local, enabled by the imaginary of globality and its subsequent cultural competition, which is used as a cultural capital in local power struggles for social stratification (Skribis et al. 2004:119). Because of the local dimension of transnational cultural capital the associations which the term 'cosmopolitanism' brings might be misleading. Therefore, despite that the term is being used by other scholars, I will use the term foreign cultural practices to better grasp the socializing process through which such transnationalism is culturally produced.

In his critical inquiry of social and cultural stratification by globalization, Jonathan Friedman points out that the flows of culture in a globalized system often are taken for granted in social science and that the local social relations which structure the cultural production are neglected: "... to claim that culture today flows across the world, filtered through states, markets, movements and everyday life (Hannerz 1992), is to assume these structures are the units between which flows occur and are not themselves structured and transformed by global relations." (Friedman 2000:638). Such an assumption ignores how culture inherently is attributed meanings, which must be actively maintained in order to continue to exist. Friedman therefore suggests that social scientists should seek to understand the local socialization processes of cultural production of hybridization and transnationalism, and not just take for granted that the same image which travels around the world is maintained with same meaning in different localities and produce the same social transformation - but that they do create a field in which humans with different cultural backgrounds must position themselves in relation to foreign cultural phenomena. "[S]uch processes do create a field in which shared experiences and shared modes of meaning attribution are effected. Such fields might be said to be fields of resonance in which what Mannheim referred to as conjunctive communication can occur. Such fields are

hierarchical. They are also the fields within which shared cultural forms are created." (ibid.:646).

Friedman argues that one of the effects of hierarchical cultural production along global lines of stratification in the local field is the emergence of global elites and transnationalism as their dominant ideology. Friedman points to that such transnationalism "... polarizes the cosmopolitan with respect to the local and defines the former as the progressive" (Friedman 2000:649), as the higher moral state and civilized mode of being in the global world, as opposed to the backward, reactionary and pre-global local mode of being of the non-cosmopolitan lower subjects. The desire by global elites to transcend their local boundaries and the power with which they try to dominate the discourse on legitimate culture in the cosmological structure of the global system is an important social force which acts in the local fields where cultural production occurs and shapes the formation of social relations, not only those between the global elites and the people they have immediate power over, but also by how the elites' transnational ideology affects normative hierarchies of what is 'high' and 'low' cultural capital in society (ibid.).

Several other scholars have argued in line with Friedman that cosmopolitanism - which I argue is better described as transnationalist ideology and foreign cultural practices - is increasingly becoming a locus of social stratification on global scale, thus an increasingly important form of cultural capital in the struggles for dominant positions in societies in a globalized world (Igarashi and Saito 2014; Kim 2011; Weenink 2007, 2008; Weiss 2005). By using Bourdieu's theory on social distinction and misrecognition, they have all made ethnographic inquiries of how foreign cultural capital is used as a means for social distinction vis-a-vis others, as it is expressed as a specific "knowledge" which they use to distinguish themselves as more cultivated and self-developed, and misrecognized by their less fellow citizens as a result of their situatedness in a broader social structure (such as the neoliberal world economic system). Foreign cultural practices (and the economic means which is needed to pursue such a lifestyle) thus become a means for social distinction, a type of cultural literacy and taste which is assumed to be

acquired by consuming the foreign and being able to engage confidently in its cultural practices - just like in other elite culture, such as opera or fine dining. Friedman's critical model for studying the transnational extension of class-structures as a process of cultural production and socialization in a global world system, indeed sets one better capture the implications on local level of globalization, and to analyze how the hierarchical polarization of the 'transnational' higher echelons of societies versus the 'local' lower classes is embedded in economic realities and power relations.

China is no exception to this trend, but as implied earlier, the cultural value that foreign culture has in China and how it is expressed and used for social distinction is embedded in the (many) local Chinese context(s). Lisa Rofel has described this as a "cosmopolitanism with Chinese characteristics", "a self-conscious transcendence of locality, posited as a universal transcendence, accomplished through the formation of a consumer identity; and a domestication of cosmopolitanism by way of renegotiating China's place in the world" (Rofel 2007:111). Rofel's use of the word cosmopolitanism and 'universal transcendence', despite the more important domestic aspect of consumption of foreign objectified cultural capital as a means for social distinction, is conceptually misleading because the statement that such cultural capital is used "by way of renegotiating China's place in the world" also makes it seem like this is a negotiation process between Chinese and people of other nationalities, while it is in fact a domestic class struggle in which acquisition of foreign cultural capital is used as a means for status. It also misses to clarify the important point which Yan has made, that the foreign, and especially the Western, to many Chinese also means 'modern', so that in the Chinese context the perception of 'cosmopolitanism' must be understood as implicated with the understanding and definition of modernity (Yan 2009:254). Song and Lee argues that the ability to engage in foreign cultural practices in China is an elitist form of cultural capital, closely connected to the unequal modernization process and the inflows of global capital in China, and accessed by those who can afford it and who desire it as a means to transcend and

overcome an imaginary "peripheral position" in the global world (Song and Lee 2012:346). Cosmopolitanism in China is thus less defined as a mental predisposition of being able to feel home anywhere, but rather as the imagined cultural knowledge to be able to behave in accordance with foreign norms and expectations in transnational, 'modern' environments in terms of tastes and cultural practices. Song and Lee argue that such cosmopolitan imagination as local cultural capital in China mainly centers around the ideology of consumption (e.g. a certain "taste" for foreign things) and "aspirationalism" which they explain as upward social mobility by consumption (ibid.:364).). This observation explains the status which foreign culture has in China and why xiaozi youth may adopt foreign cultural practices as a strategy for social mobility, but it also challenges Song and Lee's assumption that only rich Chinese individuals attempt at establishing a 'cosmopolitan' identity. Again, because of this aspirational approach to and conceptualization of transnationalism, Rofel's and Song and Lee's use of the term 'cosmopolitanism' might be misleading to apply to the Chinese context, which is why I instead use the term 'foreign cultural practice' to grasp the multiple implications with the ideas of modernity that the foreign has in my Chinese informants minds. I use the term *foreign* cultural practices because it transcends American and European culture, also including Taiwainese, Japanese and South Korean practices.

The importance of foreign and modern cultural capital for social stratification in China is also evident by its place in the discourse on what constitutes ideal personhood, or a high quality person. In the intense competition for social mobility, especially among the young, appropriation of foreign cultural knowledge and manners has become an important means for compensating for their lack of other forms of cultural, social or economic capital, such as high family income or academic success, in the formation of an identity of ideal personhood. In the next section I will try to describe how the aspirations toward foreign tastes and manners mix with the local Chinese concept of status definition, or 'the person of quality'.

3.3 The ideal Chinese youth: educated, modern, 'cosmopolitan', and civilized

In relation to the envisioned market-transition and macro-change of Chinese society, the term *gao suzhi,* which translates into 'high quality' (as opposed to *suzhi di,* 'low quality'), began to be used in the Communist Party of China's (CPC) official rhetoric in the 1980s to explain and legitimize the one-child policy as a necessity for the development of a next generation of Chinese children of high quality, for the purpose of raising the average standard of the Chinese population and culture (e.g. the emergence of a Chinese middle-class) which previous 'low standard' in a 1988 report by the State Council was argued to be the main impediment on China's economic development (Greenhalgh 2003, 2005a, 2005b; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005; Murphy 2004). Anagnost has suggested that the official discourse initially was inspired by the Taiwanese author Bo Yang's influential essay "The Ugly Chinese" (*Choulou de Zhongguoren)* from 1985 which criticized Chinese culture for impeding its civilizational development, and that it spread to become a popular discourse among the Chinese populace through the 1988 PRC television series "River Elegy" (*Heshang*) which was based on the State Council report and blamed China's economic shortcomings on Chinese culture (Anagnost 1995:25). A few years later in 1993 the educational campaign "Education for Quality" (*Suzhi Jiaoyu*) was launched nation-wide, which called upon teachers to change the focus of schooling from tedious exam-taking only to produce more "all-rounded" citizens of high quality, by emphasizing the importance of physical, political, social, artistic, technical and practical skills for high quality attainment as well as academic success. Officials, and parents with them, were worried about how the educational system seemed to produce unhealthy and asocial young citizens, and exhorted teachers to emphasize other activities such as sports and arts, to relax and cultivate the Chinese young (Fong 2007:99). From being used as an official term quality has evolved into a popular discourse among the Chinese populace through state propaganda, media, the education system and popular culture, and has become one of the most all-

encompassing and frequently contested discourses on social distinction (and subsequently, social worth) in post-Maoist China. The discourse has predominantly been projected on the younger generation Chinese born in the late 1980s and onwards, and in particular on the young urban 'singletons', as the one-child policy was implemented with foremost emphasis in the bigger cities (Fong 2007:88). Although the discourse on quality stems from the CPC's defined rhetoric, the popular discourse which has evolved is much more diverse due to its daily interpretations and contestations in Chinese society.

Quality is an intersectional concept of identity, predominantly defined by formal education level and urban lifestyle (as opposed to countryside agricultural lifestyle) but in intersectional combination with other characteristics of embodied cultural capital such as civility (*wenming*), cosmopolitanism, and overall sense of modernity (Anagnost 2004; Fong 2007; Jacka 2009; Murphy 2009). The discourse, which is closely related to the emergence of a 'Chinese Dream' (described as the belief that one can change one's fate through intelligence and hard work) with the increased social mobility which has come along with the market transition (Yan 2009:xvii), has created great expectations and pressure from society, parents, peers and the individual itself on the first generation Chinese born into market society to become economically and socially successful, and for a young urban Chinese person it is deeply insulting to be accused to be of low quality, which is implying that one does not live up to the expected standard of embodiment of ideal personhood (Fong 2007:86). Simultaneously the reality which Chinese young face today is that only a few of the many urban ambitious young can reach the social and economic success which they have been raised to expect and dream of. The construction of the Chinese educational system, which demands long hours of studies and extremely high academic attainment in all subjects to enter university, still offers very few opportunities, which has resulted in fierce competition for social upward mobility among a generation of urban singletons (ibid.:101). Most often the young try to cope with this problem by seeking further education opportunities, but as Fong's ethnographic findings show, they also

attempt to shift the discourse on quality towards their own favor. Young Chinese individuals thus tend to promote different characteristics of what foremost defines high quality that favors their own personal strengths: highly educated individuals highlight the importance of academic attainment, while the academically unsuccessful emphasized cosmopolitan experiences and 'modern' appearance and attitude; wealthier youth highlighted possession of expensive and cosmopolitan hobbies and talents; and poorer argued that patriotism and good citizenship was the foremost indicator of high quality (ibid.:94). Due to the limited opportunities of institutionalized cultural capital in the form of elite education and profession, other forms of cultural capital seem to have emerged as strategies for acquiring high quality status. Anagnost argues that:

"*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)

Such minute distinctions of defining what is high quality behavior and what is not are contested daily by people in social interaction through condemnation and appropriation. In a discussion among three of Fong's informants, one boy, who was a high-performing student, said: "Quality is being good at your job, having an education, and causing people to respect you. High quality people don't use dirty words or spit on the ground, not even when other people are not around". But his more socially minded friend contested him by saying that a high-quality person rather is "Someone like Bill Gates. He didn't finish college, but he had creativity and the ability to get things done. You don't have to have a college education to have high quality. You can see high quality in someone's expression, language, and speaking ability. Quality is an overall evaluation." And yet the third friend, who had more of a bookish skill for language and programming, added: "I heard that in the 21st century, everyone will have to know English and computers to have high quality." (Fong 2007:94-5).

Certain elements of xiaozi subculture can be discerned here in the discourse on quality, namely the emphasis on appropriation of foreign culture and its perceived modernity as a form of cultural capital which is considered to signal high quality among Chinese youth. This symbolic hierarchy and its reinforcement of social structures in China has been captured by Yan (2009:114) in his description of how rural migrant youth who return to their home villages after working in the city continue to wear their expensive and trendy leather shoes even when working in the fields, despite the judgmental and doubtful looks from the older generations (a behavior perhaps similar to the Congolese 'La Sape' dandy migrants in Paris; see Tamagni 2009). The hierarchical symbolism of the urban-modern-foreign evidently holds legitimate value among Chinese youth, however, as displayed in the conversation above the value of its various aspects can be and is being contested and downplayed by young Chinese in order for the quality concepts' symbolic hierarchy to affirm their own strengths as the most valuable. The scope and intensity of the quality discourse in Chinese society is a confirming example of the importance of personal identity for social status and social mobility in contemporary China, which Yan argues depends on the structural features of the society's current individualization process.

3.4 Structural possibilities for social distinction and social mobility in China

Yan has argued that the modernization of Chinese economy [the regional emergence of market economies, economic development and opening up to global trade and consumerist culture] indeed also has led to increased social mobility with the emancipation of the individual from traditional social institutions, similar to how modernization has led to individualization in Western societies (Giddens 1991; Bauman 2001; Beck 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001). But the individualization process in China differs from that in the West because of its authoritarian implementation from top-down, in contrast to Western countries where the established state-individual relationship has taken its departure in individual rights movements from bottom-up. Due to this structurally different

mode of state-directed individualization in China and its contextual differences such as its departure in socialist society and lack of cultural democracy, Yan argues that a different individuality in social relations, means for social mobility and conceptualization of individualism from that in the West has emerged in post-reformist China. This is also the case in the nuclearization of Chinese family relations and the subsequent empowerment of youth (and children and women) as post-socialist consumers, which has been one of the most profound individualizing social structural changes during the 1990s and the 2000s (Yan 2009:xxiii).

The one-child policy from the 1980s and the increased wealth has resulted in a nuclearization of urban Chinese family relations, something which follows a global trend despite being implemented by CPC legislation in Chinese cities (ibid.:xxii). But as Yan points out, it is not the size of the nuclear family that is the causally relevant factor but "the modernity of the contemporary family lies in the rising importance of individual desires, emotions and agencies in family life, on the one hand, and the centrality of the individual in family relations, on the other hand" (ibid.:xxiv). While the one-child policy enforced a centering around one child in Chinese family relations, simultaneously the Chinese state rolled back its social security net and let market mechanisms take over many social security functions to manage the budgetary deficit which was accumulated under state socialism. Yan argues that because of the long history of collective social organization in China, the work unit social organization which was formed during state socialism, and the fact that the contemporary Chinese state provides the Chinese individual with less institutional social welfare security than their European peers, Chinese individuals are still largely dependent on and embedded in collective family social relations, social *guanxi* networks (a native Chinese term for social relations based upon mutual dependence and trust) and migrant ties, both overseas and in the mainland. The Chinese societal structure thus makes the emancipation, or re-embededdness, of the Chinese individual from its socioeconomic origin dependent on its social network, which is the same point

where such individualistic disembeddness begins (ibid.:289). Therefore the politics of emancipation in China mainly manifests itself in personal politics of identity, as social mobility is so dependent on personal network and social status in the emerging Chinese market society. Yan contrasts this to the institutional mechanisms for social mobility which are available for citizens in European welfare states to varying extent. He suggests that the best comparable example probably is the US, where social mobility also to a larger extent is determined by family networks and social status (ibid.:291).

These socioeconomic factors have resulted in a change in the Chinese nuclear family's household expenditure in favor of investment in the singleton children's education and personal development - for example, even the average working class family in Shanghai spends (or, invests) around a third of their monthly income on their one child, in the quest of creating an individual with the highest possible human and cultural capital and access to a higher social status. The fierce competition for social mobility thus takes place in the corporeal politics of producing one child of the highest possible quality, as economic capital is invested in piano lessons, English lessons on the weekend, private tutors, fashionable clothes and restaurant visits, aimed at raising and creating a personhood and lifestyle which is distinctly upper middle-class in its cultural orientation (ibid.:266; Davis 2000). While this is happening in other parts of the world as well, in particular in East Asia, the rapid forced nuclearization of urban Chinese families, also among lower middle-class and working class families in the metropolitan cities, has created a different individualization of family relations without individualism, (Yan 2009:xxxii) where the individual child is the focus of family relations, but the determination of the individual identity of the child is still deeply embedded in the families social identity, norms and tradition. Thus while the nuclearization of urban family relations has empowered the young generation through increased opportunities for upward social mobility and support for and focus on their individual success, their ability to benefit from such opportunities in a Chinese market society is still very much dependent on parental (and

grandparental) socioeconomic support, or their guanxi network, and their ability to accumulate such an ideal personhood. Therefore Yan argues that the politics of identity and recognition in Chinese society relate even more to the redefinition of social status for social mobility, than to the search of the ultimate individual self as the family still remains the main point of reference for self-identity (Yan 2009:288). Therefore, the identity politics of consumerism is at the core of identity formation, social emancipation and social stratification for the individual Chinese.

Because of the context-specific constraints for individuality and social emancipation in China when compared to European welfare states, Yan also argues that a different concept of individualism has emerged in China and especially among the younger urban generation who has been brought up in the cities in the post-reformist era. Yan argues that the managing role of individualization by the party-state and the subsequent absence of individualism in the process of individualization has created a concept of individualism that is rather that of a *post-socialist consumer*; an utilitarian understanding of individualism (e.g. egotism) as a means for personal fulfillment and social mobility (as compared to the Western concept of individualism as the freedom to choose one's owns life), which contemporary Chinese youth has obtained through politically legitimizing propaganda of and by global consumption culture, the centrality of the one child in urban family relations, and the dependence on social status for social mobility in the emerging Chinese market society (ibid.:xxix; Davis 2000). This argument is also in line with Rofel's and Song and Lee's argument of how cosmopolitanism in China as a means for social distinction mainly is expressed through consumption (Rofel 2007:118; Song and Lee 2012:364). However, the 'authenticity', or capacity of intellectual appreciation, of such form of objectified 'cosmopolitanism' can be contested in the struggles for dominant positions and social stratification by other social groups, and this is the soft spot which xiaozi youth prey on - the aspiring cosmopolites of China.

3.5 Summary

In the contemporary globalizing world the ability to appropriate and express foreign cultural practices, especially Western consumption habits, is increasingly becoming a locus of social stratification on global scale, and thus an increasingly important form of cultural capital for social distinction in the struggles for dominant positions in local societies. In China such appropriation of the foreign is part of the discourse on ideal personhood and as such a valuable form of cultural capital. Due to the specific constraints for individuality and the importance of identity politics of consumerism for social emancipation in Chinese society, cosmopolitanism is mainly expressed in acts of objectified cosmopolitan consumption for social stratification, such as expensive cosmopolitan hobbies or acquisition of foreign cultural objects. In the next chapter, I will describe how xiaozi youth in Shanghai use cosmopolitanism as a means for social distinction and attainment of high quality status. In order to demonstrate this argument, I will describe the specific pro-Western and modern values which xiaozi youth promote, how xiaozi youth distinguish themselves from the mainstream, and how their claims for social distinction are condemned by other non-xiaozi youth.

4. Xiaozi politics of identity: distinction and recognition

The empirical chapter begins with an introduction to xiaozi lifestyle; what has been written about it thus far and what the popular definition of the term is. In the subsequent chapters I dwell deeper into how my informants define what distinguishes xiaozi youth - their values, habits and views on the mainstream society from which they are trying to distance themselves. I begin with describing how my informants orient themselves towards a global scale of stratification to set themselves apart from and to reposition themselves within Chinese society. Then I describe the xiaozi's expressions of identity through consumption and habits and probe deeper into the socialization process of how they acquire cosmopolitan cultural capital to distinguish themselves from other social groups. Lastly I explore the deeper psychological predispositions which seems to compel xiaozi youth to part from the mainstream norms of middle-class society and renegotiate their position as high quality people despite their alternative lifestyle.

4.1 What is xiaozi?

The term xiaozi translates into 'petit bourgeois', but my informants used the translation 'small capitalist' to explain it in English. They always used the Chinese term xiaozi in conversations to express and emphasize its specific cultural meaning embedded in the Chinese cultural setting. The contemporary literature on xiaozi culture is currently rather limited, probably due to the fact that the xiaozi is a relatively new urban social group since a few years back which has emerged as the Chinese market transition has matured and social mobility has begun to diversify Chinese society, especially in the urban areas. The xiaozi was first depicted in the online magazine CNReviews in 2010 by the Chinese journalist Elliot Ng, who had picked up the slang word over dinner with friends. When asking his friend what it means, she said: "I don't know how to translate it. People who are xiaozi like Western things, like to drink coffee at cafes… Shanghai is very xiaozi." Ng set out to consult his friends and Twitter

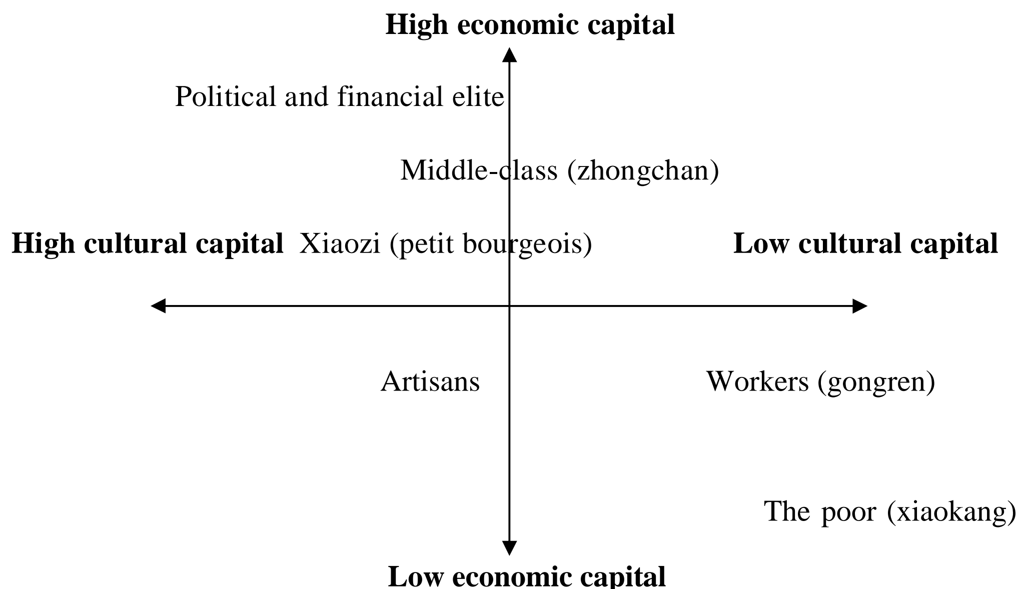
for what it means and how the term is being used, and a wrote an "attempt at a definition" of xiaozi as:

> "... people who enjoy fashion, brands, hobbies, and free thinking that is inspired by Western commercial and artistic culture. Similar to “yuppies” in the sense of youthful materialism, the term also carries overtones of the creative, free-thinking state of being “hipsters.” However, this creativity and free-thinking is only within the bounds of what is socially acceptable within the xiaozi norm. There are many positive attributes of xiaozi. To some it is a put-down. But to others, it is a compliment. Still others might use the term in a self-deprecating way to describe themselves." (Ng 2010).

The article was reposted at the local Shanghainese expatriate-oriented magazine *Shanghaiist* by Elaine Chow, with the statement that xiaozi is 'a new breed in China', a statement which was contested by a Chinese individual in the comment thread who argued that the term had been used in Chinese social life since the beginning of the 2000s (Chow 2010). In her depiction of the Chinese middle-class Wang (2010) explains that xiaozi historically referred to a specific social group in Maoist socialist class-society, namely the city dwellers who may have worked as government functionaries, owners of small businesses, or intellectuals. They were considered the 'petit bourgeois' according to the Marxist class-definition because they made a commercialist living, but in contrast to the oppressive feudal class, who were considered the real bourgeois, they differed in income-level, political power and occupation. But according to both my own informants, and a girl interviewed on the topic in Beijing in 2012, "I think you should leave what Mao said behind. I think what you want to know about xiaozi is very different from what he meant." (Laughlin 2012).

While xiaozi's original meaning 'petty bourgeois' refers to a specific place in the Chinese class-structure, my informants explained to me that in contemporary Chinese social life xiaozi rather means a certain lifestyle and "carpe diem" attitude towards life: "a type of spirit" and "a way of living", thus a social code which is expressed through a certain culture of consumption, and no longer a socioeconomic class defined by its productive occupation as it was in Maoist China. Ng writes: "The original “petty bourgeoisie” were the merchant,

shopkeeper, small business owners. But today's xiaozi are not defined by how they make money, but how they spend it. The term, once used to mark those on the wrong side of the revolution, has now been co-opted by popular culture to mean something entirely different and not entirely negative." Xiaozi thus refers to a lifestyle (as opposed to class in sociological terms) of a group of young people who are slightly below or lower middle-class by Chinese economic definitions - defined by Wang as having about a third of their income available for discretionary consumption (Wang 2010:xv) - and not part of the artistic urban population, which is what my Chinese informants defined as Chinese hipsters, but occupy a social space somewhere in between. Laughlin writes that according to her interviewees "the typical xiaozi net income is anywhere from 5,000 yuan ($794, or 612 euros) to 20,000 yuan a month, but that living the xiaozi life is more about attitude than earning power." (Laughlin 2012). Thus xiaozi should not be interpreted as a social class in itself, but as a lifestyle adopted by people from the lower middle-class. Below, I present a suggestive graph of contemporary urban Chinese society inspired by Bourdieu's (1984) diagram for depicting social classes and their distinctive consumption habits.



In her *Shanghaiist* article Elaine Chow describes xiaozi as "the Chinese yuppie",

but in the comment thread such a definition is contested as being an Americanized interpretation. Another reader suggests that xiaozi reminds more of the American Bobos - the bohemian bourgeois, who have creative and well-paid jobs but promote a bohemian lifestyle, and denounce white-collar mainstream cultures commercialist values despite embracing capitalist economy (Brooks 2000).

As it turns out, neither comparison seems to fit perfectly to the xiaozi, apart from the equally accurate observation of the xiaozi as less as a coherent social class but as an aspirational lifestyle (and not countercultural) which attempts to distinguish itself from the growing Chinese middle-class and white-collar sector. My informants generally defined xiaozi people as young people who 1) have enough money to spend on discretionary consumption but are not really rich; 2) have a outspoken preference for Western culture to Chinese; and 3) have an allowing attitude towards spending money on art, fine dining, shopping and travel for pure personal gratification. According to Wang Chinese "associate the middle-class with cars and houses, and xiaozi with candlelight dinners and a glass of wine" (Wang 2010 in Laughlin 2012), which implies that even though they do not have the money to buy a bottle, they do have the foreign taste to buy a glass of wine. Mostly xiaozi were also referred to as female, and it was mostly my female informants who defined themselves as xiaozi. All pictures online which are supposed to represent xiaozi depicts young, Western-fashioned women (Ng 2010; Chow 2010; Laughlin 2012; ForeignCN 2015). On the website *ForeignerCN,* where xiaozi is presented as a popular Chinese word in their training section for practical Chinese language skills, it is suggested that it is mainly urban single women below 30 who are being called xiaozi (ForeignerCN 2015).

4.2 Distinction from and stratification in relation to other social groups

For me as an outsider it was initially very hard to distinguish when somebody was xiaozi, when somebody was not, and when xiaozi was perceived as a

positive or negative label. To understand it better, I began exploring more in detail what it is that distinguishes people who live the xiaozi lifestyle from others, what their social code is - who the xiaozi are and how they attempt to communicate their social distinction to each other and others. One of the most important findings was how xiaozi youth struggles to set themselves apart from the elite and the middle-class by referring to their superior taste and manner of consuming, and by doing so defying the norm that one must live a middle-class life to have a high quality life, and be a high quality person. Eventually I understood that even though xiaozi identity is expressed by certain practices and fashions, such as coffee, fine arts and Western fashions, the most important notion of xiaozi was their imagined superior inner state which was reflected in their 'better manners' and higher level of being and consuming. Their deep concern for and strong belief in their superior style and taste was intriguing because, as Bourdieu (1984) reminds us, struggles over taste are never only about taste, but a struggle for distinction and social status. As pointed out by Fong (2007), the importance of recognition as a qualitative individual is extremely important in Chinese society because status also determines the individual's social worth. This statement is also supported by Yan who has argued that politics of identity is the main area for individual emancipation in contemporary China. Below I exemplify this by describing how two of my informants distinguished xiaozi people from other classes in society and tried to assert xiaozi as the most qualitative.

One of my informants was the 24-year old Alicia, who is an aspiring xiaozi girl, although she admitted to this only after being coaxed by me. Alicia has grown up as a single child in downtown Shanghai with her parents, who both are teachers. She has a Master's degree in German, and is currently doing an internship at a German automotive joint venture firm in the city. Alicia visited Xintiandi at least two times a month, which she thought was "one of the coolest places here [in Shanghai]", but said that she actually preferred other more private places, like jazz bars and art cafés. When I asked if she considered

herself to be xiaozi she giggled and said "Well... sometimes!" Alicia said that xiaozi to her is:

"... to have a good life quality, but people needn't spend too much money on it - to get in contact with more art and beautiful stuff. It needn't be very expensive but rather must have a feeling of art. Xiaozi people like to enjoy jazz music, classic music, symphonies..."

Alicia made a very clear distinction between the splurging and tasteless consumption habits of richer people, which she called tuhao (e.g. the Chinese nouveau riche), and the tasteful and more balanced consumption habits which distinguishes a xiaozi person. "They [tuhao] spend a lot of money but have no taste of art." Her descriptions of tuhao people often referred to their lack of corporeal intonation (habitus) to what is considered as xiaozi and "wenming" (civilized) despite their high socioeconomic status: "They might talk very loudly in public" or "They might use red shoes with green pants, just to show some brand, you know, that costs millions..." Alicia's perception of the term xiaozi thus was a positive one; it marks of those who have the good taste not to spend money on brands just because they are expensive, but on such things which truly "have a feeling of art". When I asked Alicia what she thought of xiaozi people's quality, she claimed that "most of xiaozi people are of high quality. And some tuhao isn't low quality." What she meant was that socioeconomic status and high quality as defined by society's norms does not necessarily correspond to a cultivated or sophisticated personhood, which is what defines being xiaozi. Still she withheld that xiaozi people often have high quality also in the normative sense. "They [xiaozi people] are often higher educated. They like to learn things, are maybe interested in skills which cannot earn money like history, linguistics, or have a band." Xiaozi people's quality, according to Alicia, thus lies in their more genuine appreciation of art and knowledge, in contrast to the richer classes' aspirational consumption of such things to assert their own social superiority.

Another aspirational xiaozi girl was Lan, the 25-year old girl who first introduced me to the concept xiaozi. Lan has grown up as an singleton in the suburbs of Shanghai with her parents, who are shopkeepers. She attained high

scores at the Chinese university entrance exams (*gaokao*) and managed to enter the prestigious Fudan University, where she is currently doing a research internship. Lan often visited Xintiandi - we met there three times during March - despite that it is located 30 minutes away with the metro from her home. She often came to Xintiandi to hang out with her female friends, drink coffee and look at the fashion, and said that sometimes she came there "just to feel the feeling" of the place, which she thought was "just right". Lan explained that her idea of being xiaozi was to live a lifestyle which consumption also entails intellectual cultivation, or "spiritual", as she described it, compared to rich people who do not share the xiaozi's good taste in consumption. "Capitalists, they only care for money, and they spend a very luxurious life - so small capitalism [xiaozi] is like not very luxurious but people will still enjoy their living... you must be very careful not to spend too much money. (...) [Xiaozi is] not only enjoying money but also a kind of spiritual life - to also care about the spiritual life - a cultural life. Can you feel what I say? We do not only care about the living, but also about the spirit life."

As pointed out by Davis, class culture is as much defined by cultures of consumption as cultures of production (Davis 2000), and consumption functions as a means to draw boundaries between one's own identity vis-a-vis other social groups and reinforce social labels. This was evident by my informants' severe efforts to separate their own tasteful and innate consumption of art, film, books and travel from the richer classes' distasteful and pretentious consumption of luxury items and tourism, a hierarchy which they meant reflected their own superior inner mental state. My informants openly and readily argued that they were superior to other people, and seemed to be very acceptable of and even promotional of stratifying people and determining their social worth according to their 'quality'. They often spoke derogatory of the vulgarity of the rich and the disgust they felt for the poor. Simultaneously their acceptance of distinction and stratification according to individual quality was coupled with their belief that they were of intrinsic possession of high quality due to their better taste and

knowledge of foreign culture. One of my informants, the 26-year old graphic designer Christopher, argued that

- "They [xiaozi] have higher suzhi (quality). I think you're born with taste. Like some people are just born without taste and even though they become middle-class or rich they never get taste."

- "Are they tuhao [nouveau riche]?"

- "Yeah. Even though they have the money I wouldn't say they are the same level as xiaozi."

Expressions of being 'on another level' and living a more 'spiritual life' constantly came through in my informants attempts of defining what sets xiaozi apart from the rest of Chinese society. Such spirituality they meant could be perceived in their genuine appreciation of art, but was mostly expressed through a knowledge of how to appropriate foreign cultural practices in a tasteful way; to be able to discuss Alexander McQueen's fashion, know French wine, and knowing how to be drinking café Americano. The core of the xiaozi's mentality seemed to be a strong belief that they are more sophisticated and thus have a higher social value than other Chinese citizens, coupled with a desire to distance themselves from those others - both poor and rich - to assert their superiority. Simultaneously the imagined 'level' which has to be attained in order to be xiaozi was constantly defined in comparison with other cultures - most notably the Taiwainese, Japanese and South Koreans, but also Americans and Europeans. The notion that Chinese people are 'on their way' and 'catching up' on other cultures and societies permeated the discourse on social stratification and how my xiaozi informants related their own distinctiveness from the rest of Chinese society to their more equal level of other populations. In an attempt to give a historical explanation to China's cultural shortcomings and xiaozi people's place in that context Christopher argued:

"We're more like the new generation... I think maybe in 10-20 years many people will be like that... have manners, be more civilized. That is what I feel now, that still China is not that civilized, have that much civilized people. (...) Because the reason for that is that in the 1980s - no, I think in the 1970s or 1960s - they killed all those people who had that knowledge, in the Cultural Revolution. So those people were the ones who had all the knowledge, the higher education, but

those were the one's who got caught. By those who had no knowledge, no education at all. So this period will be the generation that were my grandparents, who got killed. So that's why my parents generation would not get any good education. And now my generation is slowly catching up. Actually that's why Taiwan kept better manners and better things from original China, because they didn't go through that. You can feel the Taiwainese are different than from Chinese - also because they are closer to Japan. I like Japanese culture. I think they are a little over-mannered, a little over-polite. (...) But they are supposed to be the Asian culture thing. So China is still in the period of still looking for something different on their own."

4.3 Café culture

To go to a café in Xintiandi with friends might seem like the most normal thing to do in an afternoon for a Westerner. But for Chinese youth, it is a relatively new way of socializing, and not something which everybody takes for granted or engage in doing but is considered as a very xiaozi thing to do both due to its economic cost and its cultural symbolic. As Lu points out, in Arabian countries and in Europe, and in particular in bigger cities such as London, coffee houses have for long been the most common place for socializing, even to the extent that it has been identified as the main locus of emergence of bourgeois public space and bourgeois culture (Lu 2002:176; Pincus 1995). But in China coffee houses have never been part of the native culture - the establishment of coffeehouses in Shanghai by foreigners in their concessions the 1920s and 30s were something which deviated from the local practice of tea drinking, which when served in public was a much more ritualized social gathering and did not enable the kind of casual sociality which the coffee houses offered. Subsequently, the coffee houses disappeared with the foreigners in Shanghai during the Maoist era (between 1949 and 1970 the number of foreigners living in Shanghai decreased from several thousands to only 70 registered individuals in total (Farrer 2010:1215). Lu argues that coffee houses were never a popular resort for the Chinese, except a minority of 'foreign Mandarins' who were particularly pro-Western. Therefore the resurgence of coffee culture in post-reformist Shanghai is a sign of cultural significance, and places such as Xintiandi are examples of cultural change in public life and consumption preferences (Lu 2002:175). As a matter of fact,

Xintiandi offers a type of social activity which is not common in Chinese cities, and still is new (in an old way) in Shanghai; sidewalk cafés with outdoors seating, which faces each other on each sides of a square like an Italian piazza, where people can sit and gaze at each other while enjoying a drink in the sunshine. Prior to Xintiandi's construction some critical investors argued that it was a bad idea to build sidewalk cafés in Xintiandi since "no Chinese person will sit outside" (Liu-Lin 2004:97). My 29-years old informant Ann, who works as an English teacher and has lived her whole life in Shanghai, said that going to cafés was something that had not been common during her youth, but had become more popular with the 1990s generation. "It's popular nowadays, especially among the young girls, to go to some café, have some high tea and take some selfies, you know? 'See, I'm having an afternoon tea with my friend! I take a picture!' They think that is to relax, how to enjoy their life."

Notably, one of the most frequently referred features of xiaozi culture by my xiaozi informants was coffee drinking. They were all intrigued by my opinion on coffee drinking and often wanted to turn the conversation around, to make me and my coffee drinking habits the object of investigation. They asked me questions such as if I consider Starbucks a "high quality place"; why I drink espresso despite its being so little coffee for so much money; if I think it considered childish to put milk in coffee; and if I genuinely actually enjoy to drink black coffee. All of the questions were aimed at understanding the social practices and norms surrounding coffee drinking from what they considered to be my 'insider' perspective on the matter; as put by my informant Andy: "I think if we want real coffee we should drink it the real [Western] way." However, none of my informants were very keen on coffee which they often thought tasted bitter, but they all wanted to enjoy it, as it was one of the most xiaozi things that one could do. Not only, perhaps not at all, the drinking of coffee but the cosmopolitan knowledge of café culture was that which a well-mannered and enlightened xiaozi person should master. But my informant Ann well described the anxiety which comes with cultivating the tastes of a xiaozi habitus and how coffee-drinking is an example of this process:

"If we are doing that [pointing to her café latte] that is xiaozi. Xiaozi is like zibenjia [capitalist]. That is the capitalist. Because in China, there has been no capitalist. But people from the West, they are capitalist, right? So people in China imitate them. They think that they are high level, we need to learn from them. So they drink coffee, they do things like that, you know, so we do that the same, then we call that xiaozi. If you are living a xiaozi life, it means that's the high quality. But for me, I have a different idea of that. Because some people, they just pretend, you know? We call them zhuangbi [vulgar]. Just like: 'You are not that level. You are not that much about art, or that much about culture. You sit there and drink coffee like that, seems like you enjoy that: 'Oh, that coffee tastes good, smells good!' But actually you know nothing about coffee; what kind of coffee bean it is, the procedure of making this coffee, you don't know the differences between this coffee and that coffee - you know nothing. So he or she will just pretend: 'This is the best coffee I have ever had..!' - you sit here in Xintiandi and maybe, people provide the same coffee at another place but then you will say ' I don't like that coffee, I drink the better coffee in Xintiandi.' (...) Good or bad, that shows that Chinese people are developing. We are just on the way to developing. So that kind of things will come out, you know. But for Chinese people it is a lot about face or pretend. Because Chinese people like 'face'! We are just on the way. So Chinese imitate the Korean, the Japanese, imitate American, or people from Europe. It's a good thing, because we are on the way of developing. But also because actually people are not on that level, they just pretend."

The quote above reveals the imperatives towards appropriating a proper model of sophisticated culture and turning it into an index of xiaozi culture - to be able to assert oneself as more cosmopolitan and cultivated, but also running the risk of being condemned as pretentious and imitating. The term zhuangbi, which translates into 'vulgar' and 'pretentious', entails the ambiguity and scrutiny with which xiaozi is identified and acknowledged among young Chinese people. Contestations of whether xiaozi culture truly expresses cosmopolitanism and taste and a 'higher level' of being, or if it is imitation, pretention and fake was frequently discussed among my informants, and revealed the ambiguous feelings which they all had towards foreign culture and consumption and the risk of coming across as wrong, e.g. outside the boundaries of what is 'right' both in transnational settings and in the domestic Chinese. For example, Alicia told me while giggling how one Chinese girl she knew had chosen Lady Gaga as her English name, something which she thought was a sign of lack of cultural fine-tuning in her attempt to establish an English identity, and "not very xiaozi".

4.4 Cultivating a xiaozi lifestyle

Because of their desire to distinguish themselves from the rest of society, the relationship to other social groups, in particular the richer middle-class, was crucial to my informants. Christopher expressed that he often felt frustration of being associated with nouveau riche Chinese in cosmopolitan settings and his desire to show his difference from them:

> "When Chinese people go overseas, making travel outside of China, they don't know how to queue, they have no manners, they speak so loud, they do so weird things, like in other countries. Actually two years ago when I was in Bali, I went to a restaurant and during dinner they have a show, right? So at the table downstairs in front of the stage, they were speaking Chinese. When we're eating and they are acting, they are the only people who stand up and take pictures. So I was like, are you kidding me? Don't you know that you are going to hide everyone's view? No one can see anymore. And that's why I posted something on my Weibo, that the government should really publish or do something about it. I called it a manner test. Before they are going they should have the quality test. So before they go abroad they have to go to a special course and study it and take the test, and once they fail they should not get a passport or they should not pass through the costumes or whatever. So that's what I'm saying - if you don't want to lose face, do not go outside and do like that because you do not present yourself, you present the whole China. Or when you do something wrong you can say "I'm sorry!" (...) I think I feel embarrassed to be Chinese when I go outside and then those people do this kind of stuff. I feel like 'No, I'm not like them, but different.' They are the people who have the money, but they are not xiaozi. Xiaozi is not just about money. It's about their education. Their manners, their quality. (...) That's the new money people [tuhao]. They have got rich outside but they have not got rich inside."

Thus it is rather a well-mannered and cultivated habitus than an extravagant Westernized lifestyle that xiaozi people themselves think defines them as beings on a different level apart from other Chinese, similar to Weenink's definition of cosmopolitanism as a set of "bodily and mental predispositions and competencies (savoir faire) which help to engage confidently in such [transnational activities]" (Weenink 2008:1092). The boundary which the xiaozi draw between the xiaozi and the middle-class is thus the distinction between moderation/excess and sophistication/vulgarity. But to develop such bodily and mental predispositions (habitus) and competencies (cultural knowledge, or "taste" as savoir faire

translates into), as "xiaozi people need to fill themselves up with knowledge" as my informant Andy expressed it, takes time and training and consistent encounters, which my informants did not really want to admit to but all readily engaged in. In discussions on hipster culture they were very sensitive to my point of view and were ready to change their own perception easily; they inquired my opinion on their coffee-drinking and English accents. Christopher even admitted that he had trained on changing his accent and learned to speak British English to "blend in better" in transnational settings with his international friends: "I even tried to train to change my accent as well. Like: 'Such a nice day today, isn't it? [in aristocratic British accent] Hahaha!"

Lu has suggested that especially, but not only, the younger generation Shanghainese who has few or none memories of Maoist Shanghai and none of colonial Shanghai, has popularized Western aesthetics and references in the 1990s and 2000s (Lu 2002:177). One example of such Western-fetischized popular culture can be found in the foreword of the immensely popular semi-biographical youth book "Shanghai Baobei" *(Shanghai Baby)* (2000) in which the young writer Wei Hui made use of European references to strike a romantic and cosmopolitan tone - a sentimentality which permeates the book and obviously elicited a profound response among her many young readers:

> Just as I typed the last word on my computer, the phone rang. It was a long-distance call from across the sea. For quite a while I could not respond to the "HELLO"[sic] that came from the other end of the line, for my mood was unstable and I was in a trance at the moment. Outside the window, the sunlight was growing faint. Over the windows of my old French-style home climbed ivies. Upstairs a child was playing the piano - Für Elise. Eventually, I threw the remains of the cigarette in my hand into ashtray and started to talk over the phone, in German, "I love you." (Wei 2000:1).

Xintiandi's iconography is another sign of this cosmopolitan trend, and in my interviews I inquired about my informants feelings and thoughts about the European references which Xintiandi displays. Only two of my informants made references to 'Old Shanghai' and used it to explain their experience of the place;

the most frequent answers were that the place seemed either multicultural, or 'Shanghainese' to them - an identity which they also explained as multicultural. They all readily made references to the many non-Chinese elements of the place, but they also argued that such a hybridity foremost expressed the Shanghainese. The preserved shikumen houses were actually referred to by all as Western, and not preserving an old architecture but rather expresses something new - the global Shanghai. Lan, who said that she liked to come to Xintiandi because it reminded her of her visit to Rome, openly contested my inquiries about the categories foreign/Chinese by questioning: "What is foreign anyhow?" This rhetorical question can be explained by the statement of Alicia who said that "It is very trendy now among young people to be interested in the foreign."

None noted on Xintiandi's selective historicism or reported any negative sentiments regarding its celebration of colonial times - rather the opposite, one of my informants said that it reminded her of what she imagined as Shanghais' golden days, and that she liked to come there to get the feeling for the good taste that she thought that old Shanghainese culture had - for example the Western-style inspired Cheongsam dresses which Shanghainese women worn in the 1930s, which have become fashionable again (Lu 2002:171) and which are on sale in new design by the Chinese elite brand Shanghai Tang in Xintiandi. The references to European elite culture rather seemed to spur positive emotions of opportunity and desire to incorporate it into an accessible Shanghainese xiaozi identity. One of my male informants said that Xintiandi simultaneously reminded him of one of China's four classic novels, A Dream in Red Mansions, and his favorite television series, the British BBC production Downton Abbey. He explained that both stories revolve around elite families living in the 19th century, during the Qing Dynasty and the Commonwealth of Britain, both include a broad set of characters with various personalities and backgrounds, and both give detailed insights in the daily lives of the elite in feudal China and United Kingdom respectively. By using reading as a means for cultural exploration, he was able to compare the two stories in order to genuinely understand differences and similarities in Chinese

and Western elite culture, to overcome cultural boundaries and explore what he really thought to be of high quality.

The strong association between 'art' and xiaozi culture was often expressed in the association between an artsy and international xiaozi lifestyle and its reflection in Xintiandi's aesthetic features (hybrid architecture, jazzy soundscape, international fashion) and commercial foreign experiences (such as coffee-drinking, high tea, hanging out in sidewalk cafés, and the Fashion Week). This was affirmed by people's description of Xintiandi as "a xiaozi place" and that "a lot of the people in Xintiandi are xiaozi." Ann defined Xintiandi as an "art atmosphere area" and Alicia as "one of the coolest places here [in Shanghai]" together with the Bund (the waterfront area along the Huangpu River; a colonial construction, and today a famous nightlife and art gallery location). Ann argued that "This is the first fashionable place here, in Shanghai I mean. Foreigners, the young, people who wanna catch the fashion, they come here. But now, more and more places are coming here in Shanghai where people can do that." In the macro-process of place-making in Shanghai (of becoming a global city) 'modernization' is made place by place, and the cityscape is unevenly developed (Li & Wu 2006; Zhang 2005; Vaide 2015:27). In my informants' minds, Xintiandi was considered one of the places in the city which lives up to international standard, and as such also offers internationally useful cultural know-how and artifacts. Alicia, who mainly interpreted Xintiandi as a French place because of its "romantic and delicate lifestyle" said that "the things sold in Xintiandi are xiaozi, and can improve the living of people. Like essential oils, or high tea." [high tea = a cultural practice which historically stems from British afternoon tea culture, but which in Xintiandi blends in as one of many European cultural experiences]. One of my male informants, the 24 years old engineer graduate Andy, said: "If I come to Xintiandi, I can refresh many sources of my life; the way people are dressing... what's new, what they [foreigners] bring with them... like using shorts...! Like that. (...) It is a great place to get close to the foreign ways." Thus, Xintiandi is perceived as a place which offers a

cosmopolitan setting where foreigners lifestyle can be explored and objects associated to that lifestyle can be bought.

4.5 The importance of cultural capital to lower middle-class individuals

While it might seem like xiaozi culture only is an expression of the reach of global consumer culture, it would be misleading to assume that it is simply the Westernized features that set xiaozi apart from the rest of society. As my informants explained to me, a person who attempts to be xiaozi but overdoes it might be labeled tuhao - a vulgar consumerist who tries to assert his sophistication through objectified Western cultural capital, without showing the tastefulness of one who knows how to behave in a transnational environment. This sensitivity to associations with mainstream society and its culture of consumption is a tendency which Mark Greif also has identified among lower middle-class American hipsters. Greif's research shows that American hipsters mainly come from two distinct socioeconomic groups; white rich youth who want to prove their own innate sense of style beyond wealth, whose lifestyle is being supported by their wealthy parents; and white lower middle-class youth who also want to prove their innate sophistication despite not having any family wealth or social position to prove it through. Greif suggests that style is so important and so sensitive for lower middle-class youth because they have so little other social and cultural capital to draw upon in their attempts to move up in society; "the most socially precarious - the lower-middle-class young, moving up through style, but with no backstop of parental culture or family capital." (Greif 2010). As a result, cultural capital through style becomes particularly precious, whether it is through anti-commercial style (American hipsters) or foreign consumer-style (Shanghainese xiaozi). When I asked Christopher about why it is so important for xiaozi people to drink coffee, he replied:

"It's not just about drinking coffee. Anyone can drink coffee - even the beggar in the street can do that. Being xiaozi has to be that their mind has to be a different level, not just be an ordinary guy, it has to be something higher. I would say you have to have some taste, and you also have to be of

a level of not the typical Chinese. That is actually related to each other. Once you're xiaozi it means that you have better education, that you have international friends, it means you have better manners - so you wouldn't be spitting on the street anymore, and also you be very polite, and you know how to... like let's say that you go to McDonald's, you would clean your own dish - you know how to react like people who have manners. That's not really about being international, it's about education. From your family. (...) or, I'm not sure actually. Their parents can give them some better education - like manners, you get that from your parents. So then you can be xiaozi earlier. But also you can learn it from somewhere else, like friends. Because when you're xiaozi you also have to hang out with other people who are xiaozi, you wouldn't hang out with people who are..."

"Lower?"

"Yeah."

The quote above once again points to how the perception of the xiaoizi's "taste" which is "of a level of not the typical Chinese" is used as an argument to establish their higher quality and promote their higher social status in society. It also reveals the important social mobility aspect of the xiaozi lifestyle - that it is a ticket to new social circles, and explains how to adopt such a lifestyle can become a way to jockey for a higher social position despite one's original lower social origin. As Christopher pointed out, despite that one's parents may not have the cultural or economic capital to provide them with the style of a high quality individual, it is also possible to acquire such cultural capital (style, manners, taste, know-how) by hanging out with other people who do - by "getting close to the foreign ways", as Andy put it. While the xiaozi lifestyle mostly seemed to be a way for my informants to assert and maintain the higher social position which they had achieved to reach by other institutionalized means, such as university education or professional occupation, it sometimes also functioned as a direct vehicle for upward social mobility. For example Alicia told me that her interest in and pursuit of a Europe-oriented education and knowledge of European culture and language had helped her to land the internship which she was currently doing at a German joint venture firm in Shanghai. My informant Jelena, who had a migrant background, had met her German boyfriend one night at Yongkang Road, a party street with bars run by

foreigners and one of the most popular places in the city for foreign expatriates to hang out. This was also the place where I met Christopher, as he started to talk to me in the line to the bar one night out. All my informants readily went to places such as Yonkang Road and Xintiandi, to meet their xiaozi friends, go shopping, have coffee, or party with foreigners. Thus, these sort of social activities which xiaozi youth embark upon do not only have a cultural symbolic which helps them to form an identity which confirms their self-perceived superiority, but it also opens up new possibilities for them to convert that cultural capital into social capital as they can meet international friends or boy/girlfriends, to make up for the fact that they do not have much economic capital nor social connections in Chinese society. The xiaozi lifestyle thus also functions as a strategic practice to attain upward social mobility, with various individual success.

4.6 Questioning the middle-class imperative

While the foreign consumption habits are objectified expressions of my informants desire to distinguish and distance themselves from other social groups in society, it seemed to be grounded in a discontent with Chinese culture and its social norms, and the high costs, both financially, emotionally and mentally of establishing a high quality middle-class life. They often referred to the immense pressure from parents and society to conform to the middle-class norm, something which they thought was a negative trait inherent to Chinese culture. The pressure from parents to establish a middle-class life and their own ambiguity towards establishing such a lifestyle was constantly battering their minds. Their parents desire for them to buy property and marry was the most constant conflict which they referred to. According to my informants, property investment in China is not a conjugal affair - it is a transaction which involves both families of the married couple and especially the man's family is expected to pay a majority of the costs, whether in cash or in interests on loans. Thus to my informants to buy property did not mean to buy their own house, but to tie

themselves economically tighter to their parents through the common investment. This was particularly pressing since such an investment would be a large expense and long-term investment in family economy and thus, social relations. Jelena said; "Why would I want that, for my parents to buy me a house? To tie me up for the rest of my future?"

On the other end, the xiaozi's preference for foreign things seemed to be of little interest of their parents. Andy said that his parents cared little about his lifestyle apart from the question when he was going to marry, which he thought was silly; "First I want to explore more new things. You know the Land Rover commercial which says that some are born with a discovery gene? Yeah. I think I have that, like a discovery gene. I want to discover more, see more." As a matter of fact, none of my informants mentioned any concern from their parents about their foreign consumption habits, but rather their unwillingness to cope with the middle-class norm; what Ann described as "to make money to buy house to get married!" This circle, money, property and marriage, seemed to collide with their own wish to "try many different things" and "explore what they want". Christopher said:

"If they get married, their parents are probably gonna force them to become middle-class, and then they have to buy an apartment. But among the new generation, if their parents are really open-minded then they will not force them to buy an apartment. And then they do not have to pay for that, to become middle-class."

Likewise, Ann claimed that because of the enormous costs of marriage and property in the bigger Chinese cities the quest of finding a partner today had become a quest for finding a partner you could afford to marry, not someone you love.

"... the way they grew up didn't provide this environment to allow them to be what they are. So that's why they want to express themselves again, to do something like they want to be, to do. (...) [Xiaozi] want to express themselves now when they can, because before those people cannot afford it, or their parents wouldn't let them do it. (...) But I think it's going to be hard for them to do that. Because the big environment is like, that you have to do this, do that. The pressure from the parents is not... You know that China is very family-oriented place? So unless you want to cut off

everything from your family, or if you're not the only child, then some pressure is taken off from your shoulders. If you are the only child, they probably expect more. But also if you are the only child, your parents can provide you more. So you don't really have that much pressure."

One of the most intriguing cases was my 23-year old informant Jelena. Jelena originally comes from a poor background in Anhui but managed to enter university in Shanghai, and works as a real-estate broker on the side of her studies. Despite a humble background Jelena does not live on the brink of poverty. She and her German boyfriend went on three trips abroad during the four months which we were in contact, she had her own brand-new scooter, and often posted pictures on Wechat of herself and her girlfriends in classy bars in Shanghai. But she fiercely detested the splurging lifestyle of richer people than herself, and openly defined herself as xiaozi. "... I'm not like one of those 90s Chinese girls (...) they will go shopping and eat and travel like idiots because they have no idea how hard it is to make money. Because I am still young so even I have that much money I would save for travel or investment for my future. Anyway I spend money on the things I like, for example I would pay a lot for nice clothes, but not the famous brands but something seriously worth and nice." By depicting richer girls' shopping for expensive brands and social status in negative terms, and describing her own "xiaozi" habits as based in a profound aesthetic appreciation and self-conscious choice, Jelena seemed to gain a sense of superiority towards those with more social and economic power than herself. She told me that she had said no to her parents offer to buy her and her boyfriend a house, because they were saving to move abroad and travel. She particularly emphasized her preference for spending her money on travel and what she viewed as aesthetically fulfilling experiences, rather than to try to establish a Chinese middle-class life with house and car in a suburb, which she claimed was the dream of most Shanghainese girls.

Indeed, Jelena seems to correspond well to how xiaozi are characterized by Laughlin in *China Daily*: "In a society where memories of scarcity are none too distant, xiaozi live for the present. Many Chinese people see home ownership as

the mark of an eligible bachelor, but xiaozi regard such notions with disdain. As real estate prices skyrocket, they prefer to rent and spend any extra cash on escapes to Yunnan province or foreign-language novels and DVDs." (Laughlin 2012). Jelena was very aware of her financial limitations and had made it very clear to her parents that she wanted to have no part in bank loans and tying herself to her family for the rest of her life; she and her boyfriend were going to use all their savings to leave China, travel and live a more casual, but "happy" life. She said: "I think you guys [foreigners] know how to enjoy the life, really. (...)." Such an image of the individually emancipated, carefree and cool foreigner was an imagination which Jelena shared with almost all of my informants and which they often referred to in their descriptions of their desires of how to be and live. They envied the individual freedom which they thought Western youth has to explore their own preferences and steer the course of their life in the direction they want, and in contrast they accused Chinese culture and society for not allowing them such individual expression. Their idealization of the foreigner as the carefree, cool and emancipated individual shaped their own desire and strive for a more individually fulfilling life, and inspired their vision of what constitutes the ideal person of highest quality.

4.7 The role of the foreigner in xiaozi youth's minds

The idealized imagination of the foreigner was an important source of inspiration for my informants in two senses; it seemed to spur their desire of greater individual emancipation; and the lifestyle of foreigners in Shanghai also seemed to challenge the norms of how to enjoy life (e.g. different cultures of consumption) which they had conceived from their Chinese upbringing. The majority of my informants were convinced that foreigners are better at enjoying life; that their lifestyle per se is very xiaozi, or relaxed and enjoyable, and the way that they take on life is better for achieving personal development and personal happiness, with more time and space for self-exploration and trying out different lifestyles and identities. This was as a personal trait which was

beneficial to cultivate because, as one of my informants echoed the words of the Quality for Education campaign, it makes one more "all-round" and "we know more about the world, we can communicate with much more people with all-round knowledge". One of my female informants, 27-year old Iannis, who has an American boyfriend since about a year ago, explained how their different attitudes towards leisure played out in their relationship and how she traced that back to their different cultural origins:

"Chinese are not that relaxed, you know. We think too much some times. We cannot enjoy our life. We think like: 'Oh, I need to get up early in the next morning, so I don't wanna hang out tonight.' Or 'I need to do this later in the day, so I cannot do this now.' We do this way too much. But that's what I learned from Patrick [her American boyfriend], he taught me how to. He said 'It's fine. Do something, just once, just to relax. Enjoy your life..! Not that we should do that every night, you know, hang out late every night, but sometimes you CAN do that, just enjoy! For Chinese people we always think too much. (...) And I need to change. We are always arguing about that, because he wants to hang out every night and drink you know, that is the only problem with him. But we need to balance that, and chill at home sometimes. (...) I always used to think 'It's not good for you to hang out' and 'It's not good for me to hang out' but now, I've changed my idea of that: 'Hm, why not?' You know once, or twice, it's fine. We need to do that, to make myself happy..! That's because of the culture and the education in China; because the parents always tell you, 'You cannot do this!', 'You cannot do that!', that's the way of Chinese education - but sometimes, you can! You know? You will find out different areas of your life, different fields and minds towards your life."

Andy made use of a geometric abstract metaphor to explain his understanding of Western and Chinese approaches to life and his desire for a more Western-inspired lifestyle:

- "We realize now that foreigners have more sources of enjoying their life. (...) Foreigners are more causal. Chinese life is like a straight line, but foreigners life is more like a circle. They all reach the same place, but you do more different things. (...) We are growing, now we know more, and so we want more personal happiness."

- "And you think you should learn from foreign cultures about that..?"

- "Yes, yes; I think that is the main point."

The questioning of the middle-class life imperative in Chinese society - the will to challenge norms and establish a different life than their parents is a trait which xiaozi culture shares with modern youth cultures around the world. But can the xiaozi youth continue to pursue their different lifestyle and values in life as they grow older, or will they conform to their parents and societies expectations of achieving the highest quality middle-class life when they become adults? This question is yet to be answered. Christopher was skeptic but hopeful about such a societal change:

"I think xiaozi is like on the way to middle-class. It's reaching the point. But it also depends on themselves... if they want to continue to be xiaozi all the time, or if they want to get an apartment and pay like tons and tons of loans to the bank for the rest of their future."

4.7 Summary

In this chapter I have described the social definition of xiaozi in Shanghai as a group who 1) have enough money to spend on discretionary consumption but are not really rich, e.g. belong to the lower middle-class; and 2) feel a need to distinguish themselves from the rest of society due to their belief that their 'quality' is superior to others, despite their limited economic and social capital and humble origins. Therefore cultural capital, or taste and style, is incredibly important for xiaozi youth. They seek to express and maintain their social distinction by appropriating foreign legitimate cultural practices such as coffee-drinking, cultivating British accents, listening to jazz music, drinking French wine, watching and learning from British entertainment culture, and seeking inspiration from international fashion; by going to the places in Shanghai where foreigners go (ex. Xintiandi, Yongkang Road) and socializing only with other xiaozi people and foreigners. Xiaozi also put a lot of emphasis on the importance of what they perceive as being the proper corporal intonation and civilized manners in international settings, as a proof of their sophistication. The cultural capital which xiaozi create through their lifestyle can also turn into social capital, if they meet foreign friends or partners, which sometimes serve as a

vehicle for upward social mobility. More often, the assertion of themselves as being of high quality despite their lower middle-income status functions as a self-affirming mechanism to confirm their own superiority within the discourse on ideal personhood (quality). Lastly, I have described the sociopsychological issues which xiaozi youth grapple with, such as their discontent with Chinese cultural norms, education and parenting, and how this prompts them to question the middle-class aspirations which their parents have planned for them. They feel that such plans are overwhelming and very costly, leave too little room for their own self-exploration and enjoyment, and therefore question their parents' and society's definition of middle-class as high quality and the most desirable life.

5. Discussion

In this chapter I discuss my findings related to the theory on social distinction, the mainstream discourse on quality and the individualization of Chinese society. I will argue that the xiaozi ideology is a reaction to the mainstream discourse on ideal personhood and middle-class attainment in China, promoted by young people who want to transcend local definitions of social stratification and have the financial capacity to use what they imagine as international and modern cultural practices to elevate and establish their status in the emerging globalizing Chinese society. I begin with analyzing xiaozi subculture through the lens of Bourdieu's theory on social distinction; how taste is misrecognized and promoted as cultural knowledge by xiaozi youth, and how the authenticity of such superiority is questioned by others to miscredit xiaozi youth as aspirational. Then I discuss how such power struggles reveal how social stratification in contemporary China is narrated along an imagined linear path towards a modern Chinese society, whose population ultimately will be of the same standard as other modern nations. Lastly I discuss how the power struggles of xiaozi youth are situated within the larger process of the emancipation of the Chinese individual through state-directed modernization as they challenge traditional Chinese definitions of the ideal life.

5.1 Power struggles in the politics of recognition for social status

My most consistent findings in conversations with young Chinese people, both among those who defined themselves as xiaozi and those who did not, was the struggle for recognition as individuals of high quality. Similar to Fong's (2007) description of how her young Chinese informants reconstructed the quality discourse to favor their personal strengths, so did my informants try to subvert the quality concept by drawing boundaries between their own lifestyle and that of others to enable a favorable symbolic hierarchy. It was a struggle for social status which reinvented itself with every informant, as every person slightly shifted the values in the discourse to reflect their own personality and lifestyle. It was by

observing this power struggle from within that I gained awareness of the politics of recognition for social status which the xiaozi youth are implicated with, and the difficulties and achievements for recognition which they experienced as they attempted to transcend the definitions for social stratification in the quality discourse by appropriating foreign cultural practices.

What was noteworthy was that all my xiaozi informants were youth who came from fairly humble backgrounds; their parents were teachers, shopkeepers and salesmen, with stable incomes but limited economic capital, and no or few social connections to the higher strata of society. But all had begun to achieve some upward social mobility - by entering a prestigious university, getting an internship at a foreign joint venture firm, or meeting a foreign partner. They were by no means on their way to enter the elite segment of Chinese society (such as the bohemian bourgeois in the big American cities) but possibly on the track to achieve the Chinese dream; a middle-class life with an university degree, a white-collar job, an apartment and a white-collar partner, possibly even a foreigner. They were in a transitional position in society, and seemed to feel a need to prove their social worth. While drinking coffee at Starbucks obviously was not going to get them as far ahead in society as a degree from Fudan or Jiatong University, it seemed to be a way for them to mark and maintain the higher social status which they had achieved and which was very important to them. However, in some cases it evidently also had direct social mobility effects; for example for Jelena who met her German boyfriend by visiting the foreigners favorite hang-outs, and Alicia who had managed to land her internship at a German joint-venture firm because of her knowledge of European culture and language. The xiaozi lifestyle thus both functioned as a vehicle for upward social mobility in combination with other channels for mobility, and as a "social weapon" to mark and maintain the higher status which they had achieved to those who were still superior to them in status, e.g. the established middle-class and the rich. Because of their lesser economic and social capital, the cultural capital which their lifestyle could create for them

became even more important to assert themselves as people of 'authentic' high quality.

While the cultural hybridity in Xintiandi as such didn't mean much to the xiaozi, which is what have concerned all previous scholars who have analyzed Xintiandi's hybridity and place-promotion (He 2007; He & Wu 2004; Lu 2002; Wai 2006; Xuefei 2008), it was more important for them to prove their ability to conduct themselves confidently in the multicultural and modern environment. This was observable in their sense of superiority and security as long as they believed that they interpreted the place and its foreign social practices properly by international cultural standards - like Lan who proudly made architectural references to Rome, or Christopher who described how to behave at McDonald's, and condemned those who did not know how to "react to the proper behavior". But likewise in their anxious feelings about not understanding such social settings properly and about acting or doing wrong - for example by taking an English name that is considered vulgar, misunderstanding the meaning of the hipster concept, drinking their coffee in a way that is considered childish, or believing that Starbucks is a really cool, 'high quality' place if it is, in what they imagine as 'international' culture, as a matter of fact maybe not. As they struggled with these fine and highly subjective cultural interpretations, they were also concerned about being accused by fellow Chinese youth to be considered pretentious (zhuangbi) and imitating Western culture without knowing what they are doing, which they often accused other people of, directly or indirectly. This was particularly sensitive since vulgarity or tastelessness was not considered to be able to exist within the boundaries of the culturally aware and sensitive fine line of authenticity which xiaozi people draw around themselves in order to separate themselves from the richer middle-class and the poor. The constant references to the vulgar, the fake, and the risk of losing face both to degrade others social status but also to express one's own fear of trying to be more than one might actually be (both in terms of self-appreciation and others appreciation) displays an anxiety regarding how to be authentic xiaozi, which tainted their persuasive attitude.

Such power struggles over definitions of authenticity is what comes by what Bourdieu calls the misrecognition of taste as an intellectual and innate ability, and not a judgment structured by Chinese society's cultural [symbolic] hierarchy. Thus this is not a social phenomena which is particular for the xiaozi; in his sociological inquiry of American hipsters Greif described similar patterns of fierce power struggles over cultural capital; "... the habits of hatred and accusation are endemic to hipsters because they feel the weakness of everyone's position — including their own. Proving that someone is trying desperately to boost himself instantly undoes him as an opponent. He's a fake, while you are a natural aristocrat of taste." (Greif 2010). The fine line between 'authentic' and 'wannabe' and high and low quality is a boundary which is constantly being drawn and redrawn, which my informants also were aware of. Or more aptly put by Christopher; "If you have good taste you can make Alexander McQueen look like fashion, but if you have no taste you can also make it look like two kuai [the Chinese currency Renminbi] shit from the street." For a young adult who comes from a lower middle-class background and is struggling to move up in society, the last thing you want to be associated with is two kuai shit from the street. You want to be associated with the sophistication of international fashion and gain the respect that European taste and manners has in Chinese society. But to attempt to establish oneself as trendy and cosmopolitan is also a risk if people think like Ann: "you are really not that much about art. You are really not at that level." This judgment, both from other Chinese but also from foreigners such as myself, made them uncertain in their assertion of themselves as worthy of a higher social status.

These anxious feelings are very typical of class-journeys; the appropriation of new and foreign habits, tastes and manners and the acceptance or defiance of change in lifestyle and social status by one's social surroundings (such as parents, friends and strangers) is a psychologically demanding and vulnerable process which easily can become implicated with feelings of uncertainty and insecurity. Their self-perceived 'cosmopolitanism' was obviously a sensitive topic; it was not uncommon that they became a little offended when I asked about their knowledge

of foreign cultures, or about the 'cosmopolitan' character of Shanghainese identity. In our conversations their attitude could be very changing - from being very persuasive and boasting about their cultural knowledge, to insecure questioning the very next moment. Their susceptibility to my opinions and habits showed how sensible and willing they are towards changing themselves to become what they thought was more authentic or 'real'.

This also explained their mixed feelings towards adopting xiaozi as their social label, because of its associations to the pretentious and the effete, but simultaneously a sign of someone who has taste and some money. This awareness and questioning of the authenticity of the xiaozi lifestyle displays the power struggles for recognition and social status among the young Chinese, and reveals how it is implicated with other forms of social and economic capital. Only my richer informant pointed to the fact that the xiaozi lifestyle demands a certain level of family wealth, which inevitably also makes it a question of class. For example, Christopher pointed out that Chinese citizens must be able to prove that they have a minimum of 50,000 Renminbi (~$8057) in their bank account when they apply for travelling outside of China, which inevitably limits the possibilities for many Chinese to travel abroad. As the emphasis on the 'petit' (or xiao = small, in xiaozi, small capitalist) part of their bourgeois lifestyle points to, it is evidently so that the xiaozi lifestyle is limited and enabled by its particular economic abilities. This, however, was never mentioned by the xiaozi themselves, who argued that it is their intrinsic good taste, cosmopolitanism and modern manners which differs them from the rich and the poor, whom were equally condemned as of lower quality due to their uncivilized and tasteless lifestyles and manners. Sometimes it was startling how they could talk very openly about how they had consciously changed themselves to appropriate foreign cultural practices and corporal manners and intonations, and how others had not had the good taste to do so, while simultaneously arguing that it was due to their intrinsic good taste. Paradoxically the misrecognition of their own lifestyle choices as a result of taste and not socially structured judgments, co-existed in their minds with an

assumption that they were part of a macro-change of Chinese society and that "in 10 or 20 years most Chinese will be like this" and that "the Chinese are on their way" - along a linear path towards modernity in which they considered themselves as the avant-garde, or "the new generation Chinese."

5.2 Social stratification along the linear path towards modernity

Friedman has argued that "[t]he globalization of class structure is expressed at the elite level by an increasing self-consciousness of world position." (Friedman 2000:653). Such self-consciousness was strikingly evident among my informants, who made constant references to China's position in the world and their subsequent position in it as Chinese subjects. It was striking to see the correspondence between the official rhetoric of the CPC about the need to elevate the quality of the Chinese population and the view among my informants on the Chinese population as "uneducated", "uncivilized", and even "disgusting", and its traditional culture as of "low quality". These statements were enabled by the comparison with other specific cultures; the Taiwainese, the Japanese, the South Korean, the American and the European. By way of this imaginary stratification along a global hierarchy they stated that the Chinese "has to develop", and "are on their way" and "are not yet on that level". These statements also imply that they imagine a point, or a telos [purposive goal] in the future when the Chinese population would have reached a level on par with, or superior to, other cultures with which they compared themselves to. This imaginary linear path towards what they perceive as modernity and its implications with the perception of foreign cultures explains how the concept of the foreign and modernity mixes in many Chinese minds - supporting Yan's argument that for many Chinese 'modern' actually means 'American' or 'the international' (Yan 2009:264).

This conceptualization mirrors what Gabriel has described as "the modernist narrative along a linear path towards a telos" (Gabriel 2006:9). It might be constructive here to remind oneself of Habermas historical inquiry of how the concept of modernity itself implies a rupture and attempt to objectify change in

history, rather than it define a certain characteristic of the contemporary epoch. In his inquiry of the concept of modernity, Habermas uncovered how the Latin word *modernus* has 'appeared and reappeared' in Europe ever since the late fifth century when structural societal transformation have taken place and the need has emerged to differentiate the new order relative to the earlier societal order, to establish a new epoch (Habermas 1987). Modernity thus is an abstract means to define change by objectifying time (for example, pre-/postmodern), something that also seems to permeate the thinking of both the CPC and the xiaozi; that they are producing "something new", "the new generation", the embodied beginning of China's modernization and thus, at the forefront of a desirable change that eventually will come to all Chinese subjects. The linguistic history of the use of the word, however, sheds light on the fluidity of the concept. The attributed meaning of modernity as understood today has been constituted by the characteristics of the societal transformation which the European Enlightenment brought with it: rationalism, [Western] science, and a pursuit of progress (Arce & Long 1999:4) but it has continuously been, and is being, dialectically engaged in the formation of other discourses such as colonialism, urbanism, liberalism, capitalism and cosmopolitanism (Vaide 2015:19), and in contemporary China, the general discourse on 'quality' or ideal personhood.

My informants vision of how China now also is set on the track on the road to 'modernization' thus also implied many other meanings which they attribute to the contemporary concepts of 'modern nation' and 'modern human beings' as someone who differs from the previous, traditional and non-modern Chinese, which explained their desire to set themselves apart and maintain distinction from the poorer and backward sections of the emerging Chinese society. In their struggle against other richer social groups for social status in the new modern Chinese society, the style and manners of 'modernity' becomes their most viable weapon to establish a higher social status; the importance of being a person who eats at McDonald's and disposes of her or his own trash; knows not to call herself Lady Gaga in public; have the decency not to spit on the street; and drinks coffee

without milk at Starbucks, or maybe at the Italian trattoria - in short, a well-mannered habitus which "knows how to react to the proper behavior". Simultaneously, they often also expressed that the Chinese are "searching for their own way" or their own way of being modern, but that in the attempt of doing so they imitate other cultures which they perceive as proper modern. This fine balance act of cultural production of Chinese modernity is especially precarious for xiaozi youth since they are so dependent on their cultural capital in comparison to their richer peers, and explains the anxiety with which they appropriate foreign cultural practices. The xiaozi badly wanted to establish their own sophistication as something which was intrinsic and unique for them, something they were born with, similar to how richer classes assert themselves as a distinct breed worthy of power and respect. Although the xiaozi's assertion of their social worth was blended with visible uncertainty, the 'born with taste'-arguments was an attempt at making their cultural capital inaccessible to other groups, richer and poorer, and safeguarding the social status which their lifestyle could bring them.

The fact that my informants stratified themselves along a transnational scale and linear path towards modernity also explains how the xiaozi could jockey for a position as the highest quality people of all in Chinese society, despite their limited local social and economic power. Along the imagined linear path towards modernity they perceived themselves as the one's who have come the furthest, the one's who are "catching up" (one of my informants' favorite terms) on the outside world the fastest, even faster than the richer classes. The way by which such transnational comparison permeates the local discourse on quality proves the value (cultural capital) that is vested in the attributed meanings of foreign and modern taste and manners among Chinese young. The xiaozi's appropriation of foreign cultural practices motivated by their attribution to it as modern and civilized, well exemplifies how cultural production takes place in the global system (Friedman 2000:645) dependent upon the experienced subjective attribution of meaning which individuals appropriate as their own and maintain -

and why other cultural meanings are not maintained, such as traditional Chinese cultural practices. The choice of the foreign coffee over the native tea might seem like a question of taste, but as my informants desire to drink coffee despite their lack of fondness of it showed, it is a type of behavior which is connected to a symbolic hierarchy where the transnational is positioned above the local. Such symbolic hierarchy explains why and how the xiaozi, positioned in the middle of the domestic Chinese societal hierarchy, attempts to capitalize on the regional globalization of Chinese society by adopting particular foreign and modern cultural practices which they perceive as a legitimate form of cultural capital (for example, to drink coffee and listen to jazz music, not to do Bollywood dancing or dress like manga figures), to socially and mentally elevate themselves. However, their opportunities for social mobility by such a lifestyle are limited and must be combined with other empowering sources, and should be understood as a coping strategy to the fact that they lack the economic capital and social connections to reach the higher echelons of Chinese society.

5.3 Individualization and social mobility

The anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann has argued that identities, beliefs, and experiences are mutually constitutive (1989), and to understand the formation of my informants beliefs and xiaozi identity, I took my point of departure in their descriptions of their experiences of and feelings towards Chinese society and the norm which governs it, namely that of middle-class attainment (which equals the highest quality attainment). The most frequently cited reasons given by my informants for why they wanted to escape the mainstream norms of middle-class attainment was based on their straining experiences from the Chinese education system, the high expectations from their parents as the only child, their limited opportunities for attainment of a middle-class life and the immense burden which embarking upon such a road implied. Simultaneously they frequently expressed their desire for a qualitative life of their *own* where they could explore more of their own desires and characteristics which they saw among the Westerners which

they met. Equally important for them seemed to be the practical question of finances; the overwhelming cost of establishing a middle-class life in Shanghai seemed to be one of the major reasons for why they had doubts about and rejected the worth of attempting at such a lifestyle. They questioned the parental expectations in line with tradition that the spouse must provide the bride with a home as they marry; this practice was disregarded by all the girls who said that they rather wanted to live with someone they love than someone who can buy them a house. Their belief that their own xiaozi lifestyle was better because of its innate and emotionally fulfilling foundation, and their disdain for people who wanted the middle-class life merely because of its social status, thus were beliefs which were mutually constitutive and confirmed their perception of their own lifestyle and themselves as people as the most qualitative.

The relationship to foreign culture was of specific concern for my xiaozi informants not only because of its cultural symbolic but also because of their perception that its individualistic lifestyle was preferable to the Chinese traditional approach to life, which they experienced was implicated with feelings of condemnation, guilt and pressure. Their references to what they perceived as the more individually enjoyable lifestyle of the foreigners which they encountered in Xintiandi and other places in the city, and their own desire to explore new ways of living, thinking and expressing themselves to pursue their personal happiness, was something which they often referred to as inherent to the xiaozi attitude to life: "Enjoy your life!" Their often strong condemnation of Chinese culture, education and parenting methods which they thought left little room for individual enjoyment of their *own* life was continuously countered with comparisons of the more casual, relaxed and happy lifestyle which they thought that young Westerners enjoy. Simultaneously they were also wary about the difficulties of maintaining other 'high quality' characteristics as considered by the surrounding society, but mainly revolving around parental expectations, such as marriage, property ownership and prestigious careers. The young xiaozi's orientation towards Western culture should thus also be understood as an imagined means for

them to pursue a lifestyle which enables more room for individual happiness and self-exploration, which they all expressed a desire for but which they perceived as not being possible to the same extent within the boundaries of the mainstream Chinese societal norms.

I argue that the xiaozi's questioning of normative definitions of what constitutes a high quality life and personhood (although such questioning is being implicated with their particular structural position in Chinese societal hierarchy), the embracing of individual pursuit of happiness and the search for self-identity must be understood as part of the long-term individualization of Chinese society. All of the following traits found in xiaozi subculture; the questioning of societal and family norms; the wish to express one's own identity; the search for inspiration in foreign or non-mainstream culture; and the inevitable pressure to choose "a life of one's own through conformity" (Beck and Beck and Gernsheim 2002:151), are very typical of modern youth subculture and are signs of how Chinese society is being detraditionalized (Giddens 1984) and how it compels the new generation of Chinese to "compulsive and obligatory self-determination" (Bauman 2000:32).

Simultaneously the individualization of family relations without individualism in China, what Yan describes as how the individual child is the focus of family relations and who's upward social mobility is supported, but the determination of the individual identity of the child is still deeply embedded in the families social identity, norms and tradition (Yan 2009:xxxii), was also visible in the struggles which my xiaozi informants experienced when resisting their parents' desire for them to establish a middle-class life. The conflict played out both in the practical and the normative sense between their parents' wish for them to invest their money in marriage and family-owned property and loans on the one hand, and on the other hand the children's wish to invest in individually fulfilling things such as art, travel and Western fashion, reject the bride wealth tradition, and rent apartments which can be left at any time. Yan has argued that the key aspect of the deep restructuring of Chinese society is the "emergence of a Chinese form of

individualism that combines global processes with local processes" (Yan 2009:xiii), a traction which is especially visible in the externally oriented lifestyle of xiaozi youth in Shanghai. While increasingly engaging in and taking part of foreign modern cultural practices as a means for self-expression, social distinction and upward mobility, my informants were also still deeply implicated with family values and expectations to meet the standards of the mainstream discourse on quality. Their desire for increased individual emancipation from their family's expectations was constantly struggling against their awareness of their dependence on their family for social and economic support. Out of all my informants it was only Jelena who was about to detach herself from her family by means of the ticket out of China which her German boyfriend offered - the others still had not chosen path for a more or less individualized future, and it seemed likely for most of them that they would pursue a middle-class lifestyle in the future - but they wanted to push that moment further into future.

Such an extension of the youth period in the individual's life-span is a general trend in modern societies as a result of increased family wealth, increasingly advanced economies and demands of extended education (Sukarieh & Tannock 2015:115), and perhaps the xiaozi's norms and behavior are emerging as a similar response to detraditionalization and change in lifecycle patterns in the modernizing China as in other developed countries. But as cross-cultural psychological research has shown, individualization as a result of the expanding youth period is also dependent on the youth's context-specific social relations. It has been proven that Chinese youth spend less autonomous time with their peers than with their parents compared with American youth, which also effects their individual emancipation and sense of autonomy (Chen et al. 1996; Chen & Farruggia 2002). While in the case of China, the importance and power of urban youth in effecting social change as consumers of global culture have increased with the growth of the Chinese national economy and the subsequent increase in family wealth, the opening up to global trade, the decline in birth rates due to the one-child policy and the nuclearization of Chinese family relations (ibid.:266),

(e.g. structural modernization processes), but the young continue to be reliant on their social networks tied to family obligations and social expectations which the economic and social investment of two parents and four grandparents accumulate during an upbringing. The emergence of the xiaozi consumer lifestyle is fundamentally dependent upon these factors; and to a large extent supports Yan's argument that individual emancipation in China still largely is displayed through consumer politics of identity and recognition rather than individualistic emancipation (Yan 2009:289). Due to these social structural factors the xiaozi youth subculture is specific to the contemporary Chinese context, and therefore it is impossible to equal their significance to other Western aspirational youth cultures, such as yuppies, hipsters and bobos, without taking the different Chinese structural societal factors into account. The strong desire for individual emancipation which my informants expressed and which they defined as a core value of xiaozi youth was described as the right to pursue one's own personal happiness, which currently is restrained by the determination to take part in fierce social competition coupled with dependence on and expectations from one's social network. The struggles among my informants of how to accomplish social upward mobility and personal happiness by attempting at shifting, and not just adhering to, societal norms and family expectations are signs of how Chinese youth are becoming more individual-oriented.

6. Conclusions

In the light of Bourdieu's theory on social distinction (1984), the behavior of the xiaozi youth appears as a viable consumerist strategy for higher social status attainment in a contemporary Chinese society which is marked by fierce competition for social upward mobility, structural socioeconomic obstacles and high expectations on urban youth for social and economic success. But in contrast to earlier scholars who have studied this type of social distinction in China, I argue that 'cosmopolitanism' is the wrong academic term to use to describe the

cultural capital which is associated with particular foreign cultural practices in China. As my findings show, it is not only a transnationally connected Chinese elite which take on and appropriate foreign cultural practices, but also lower middle-class individuals who want to assert themselves as 'cosmopolites'. This also challenges Song & Lee's (2012) argument that it is the Chinese elite who well can afford such a lifestyle that appropriate foreign styles and manners. Rather than just applying the mainstream academic discourse on 'cosmopolitanism as cultural capital in a globalizing world' to the Chinese domestic context, it seems more constructive to study globalization and cultural change through the lens of Friedman's theory (2000) on how symbolically global cultural production is structured by local social relations, to understand how different foreign cultural practices are being adopted into Chinese urban culture (and the rural, but within yet another local cultural field) and what meanings global symbolism gains in the local Chinese context. For example, the popularity of the global franchise Starbucks in China could not be explained by an innate fondness for coffee among the Chinese populace, but must be analyzed with an understanding of how coffee has gained an associated meaning to the abstract concept 'modernity' in urban China, and how the desire which Chinese urban youth has to establish what they perceive as a modern identity and lifestyle creates its symbolic and highly marketable value. The xiaozi's consumption strategy to capitalize on such symbolic meanings to assert themselves as the ultimate Chinese modern individual evidently is structured by the importance of recognition of quality as the determinant factor of social worth in contemporary Chinese society; their limited amount of other possibilities to gain such social status; and the quality discourse's implication with Chinese ideas of modernity. Such a complex local process of adoption of global consumer culture is poorly served by being conflated with the term 'cosmopolitanism'. My informants saw themselves as 'modern', not 'cosmopolites', and the sort of consumption habits which Rofel, Song and Lee describes as a consumptive adoption of a cosmopolitan identity is mostly referred to as Westernization, not 'cosmopolitanism', among the Chinese people I've discussed the matter with. Thus the term 'cosmopolitanism' seems to

be a misleading terminological short-cut which does not well grasp and express the empirical cultural change which globalization is affecting in urban China, and should be used with heightened precaution.

The xiaozi's attempt to distinguish themselves through very particular consumption choices also supports Yan's (2009) argument that consumerism and its politics for recognition is a crucial process for individual identity formation for Chinese youth in a time and societal structure when possibilities for individual emancipation from social relations and personal networks remain limited, and social mobility is so dependent on personal social relations. However, this study also shows a tendency among Chinese xiaozi youth to want to break away from traditional social relations and gain more individual freedom beyond their means as consumers, although this desire for emancipation is coupled with issues of dependence. Such normative change and struggle among the younger generation along with Chinese society's structural modernization is a case example of the current individualization of Chinese social relations. These changes ought to be continued to be studied to add insights to the individualization theory (Bauman 2002; Beck 1992; Beck & Gernsheim 2002) from a Chinese modernization perspective.

Of what cultural significance is the xiaozi's challenge of the normative middle-class imperative in Chinese society? Are their self-perceived role as the "new generation" only pretentious, or are their values a message of social change in urban China? Are their social codes becoming dominant in Chinese urban social life, giving new structure to personal lives of young individuals? Considering that xiaozi predominantly is considered a positive and desirable social label it seems as if they do have the ability to have impact on norms and values in Shanghai. Furthermore, the xiaozi's increased will to spend rather than save to invest in the skyrocketing real-estate market is also a sign of changing consumption habits in urban China, a change in spending which the Chinese government is promoting as the Chinese economy ought to shift from an industrial production-driven economic model to a service consumption-driven economic model, to sustain

domestic growth. The high symbolic value of consumption choices in Chinese society as means for expressing quality and establishing social status and social worth is probably the strongest drive for Chinese individuals, such as the xiaozi, to change their consumption habits - to buy a coffee at Starbucks or a drink at Yongkang Road to socialize with foreigners, instead of putting all savings in the bank account for later investment in property and bride wealth.

Further studies of xiaozi youth in other Chinese cities would be needed to map to what extent the xiaozi lifestyle and values are diffusing in contemporary China, for example in Beijing and Guangzhou but also other less international cities such as Shenzhen, Chengdu, Nanjing and Chongqing, to determine the external validity of my findings of xiaozi culture in Shanghai. It would also be instructive to study the xiaozi subculture from a gender perspective since it is mainly women who seek to embrace a xiaozi lifestyle; to explore its rationale and how this relates to changing gender relations in urban China when young women increasingly gain power as professionals and consumers. Another suggestion would be to conduct a comparative study of the creative class in the US (Brooks 2000; Florida 2002) and the xiaozi in China, in order to explore what connections and differences which appear when analyzed from a global systemic perspective; for example how class-struggles and societal composition change with the emergence of information societies and increasing globalization.

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Appendix I

Questionnaire for guided conversations:

- What means xiaozi to you?
- How would you describe a xiaozi person?
- For how long have you known about the concept?
- How do xiaozi youth differ from middle-class youth?
- Is xiaozi a positive or negative thing to you?
- What do you think is the reason for why xiaozi people choose to live the xiaozi lifestyle?
- How is the quality of xiaozi people? Compared to middle-class people?