LUND UNIVERSITY • CENTRE FOR EAST AND SOUTH-EAST ASIAN STUDIES

In Vino (Social) Veritas?

Wine Consumption and Middle Class Identity in Shanghai

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis was to explore the extent to which wine consumption and drinkers' perceptions on wine can help understand middle class identity in Shanghai. The research relied on 25 interviews of wine drinkers and non-participant observations, as well as previous studies on middle class identity and consumption in China. The data have been analyzed utilizing Bourdieu's theories on social distinction, focusing on the concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and taste. The study found that although wine is considered as an ordinary beverage because of its popularity among the middle class, it still carries the image of good taste, and taste itself allows educated middle class individuals to distinguish themselves from what they perceive as ostentatious "uneducated new rich." Additionally, the study found that what interviewees perceive as the differences and demarcations characterizing wine consumption in China – being social, generational, or geographical – also designate these middle class individuals as the "legitimate wine drinkers." This thesis concluded that whilst wine expresses urban middle class' tasteful, relaxed, and cosmopolitan lifestyle, its consumption also indirectly reflects and demarcates interviewees' ideal boundaries of middle class membership.

Keywords: Middle Class; Wine Consumption; Consumption; Class Identity; Social Distinction; Bourdieu; Shanghai.

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"千里之行始于足下"

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step

(Laozi, Tao Te Ching)

"Fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza"

You were not made to live as brutes,
but to follow virtue and knowledge

(Dante, Inferno, Canto XXVI, 119-120)

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Problem

At the end of January 2014, some of the world's biggest international news agencies (including Aljazeera, The Wall Street Journal, The Telegraph, and The Guardian) reported a striking piece of news that emerged from a market study conducted by the International Wine and Spirit Research (IWSR) and commissioned by the French exhibition center VinExpo.[1] The study reported that by 2014 China had become the world's leading red wine consumer, followed in turn by France and Italy. According to the report, between 2008 and 2013 wine consumption increased by 136 percent in China, with more than 155 million nine-liter cases or 1.865 billion bottles of red wine consumed only in 2013, whilst France and Italy "only" reached 150 million cases and 141 million respectively (VinExpo Asia Pacific, 2014: 2). In the same period, foreign wine imports multiplied by seven times, and imported wines accounted for 18.8 percent of all wine consumed in China, meaning that more than 80 percent of it was domestically produced (ibid.). Despite a slight decrease in domestic wine consumption in 2013, imported wine sales (mainly from France, Australia, and Chile) have continued to rise up to 1.447 billion dollars (China Daily, 2014). The main markets for imported wines are Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou (EU SME Centre, 2011: 1).

As Chinese people have started to manifest their interest in red wine since 2005 (VinExpo, 2014: 2), scholars and business researchers have mobilized to identify and group these consumers, and to explore the factors affecting wine consumption in China. Whilst early research was more focused on portraying wine consumers' profile and their consumption habits (Liu and Murphy, 2007; Resnick, 2008; Li *et al.*, 2010; and Camillo, 2012), recent research has shifted to consumers' wine preferences and willingness to pay (Xu *et al.*, 2014), in conjunction with China's wine market expansion and the wine's increased popularity among the rich and less affluent groups. Overall, it has been emphasized that most Chinese consumers are between 20 and 35 years old, are relatively affluent, and live in the urban areas (Resnick, 2008: 56). They have little knowledge on wine – as they mainly associate the whole category of wine only with red wine (Liu and Murphy, 2007: 102). They relate to wine the positive images of good taste, elegance, and status (Liu and Murphy, 2007: 104; and Camillo, 2012: 86), and they tend to purchase cheaper wines for home consumption whereas more expensive wines for gifts and public consumption – and this has been attributed to the Chinese cultural value of face or *mianzi* 面子 (Liu and Murphy, 2007: 106; Camillo, 2012: 84;

[1] The International Wine and Spirit Research is a London-based research institute and it is considered "the world's most trusted wine and spirit information source" (http://www.theiwsr.com/).

and Xu *et al.*, 2014: 277). Furthermore, Camillo (2012) segmented the Chinese wine market into four groups, which include "young royals," "aspirationals," "established money," and "patriots."[2]

Despite the purely business and marketing-related aspects of the wine phenomenon in China, data regarding wine consumption increase and wine drinkers' consumer behavior imply other hidden meanings related to the Chinese society, especially regarding the deep changes China has undergone since the economic reforms from the end of the 1970s. During the pre-reform era, China was an egalitarian and homogenous society, and people from both urban and rural areas had similar consumption patterns and lifestyles (Yan, 2009: 210). However since economic liberalization, the gradual dismantlement of public enterprises, the rapid emergence of the private sector, and the opening to international markets, many new economic opportunities have been created in China. Some individuals have benefited from these changes whilst others fell behind or have been left behind, leading to the formation of new social stratification and social classes. In this context, a new middle stratum – indeed, China's middle class – has gradually emerged.

China's rapid economic growth has deeply transformed consumer behavior. This transformation has been further reinforced since the end of the 1990s, when the Chinese government recognized consumption as the key to domestic economic growth and therefore started encouraging people to consume and spend more (Yan, 2009: 208). From this perspective, China's middle class and expanding consumerism have become strongly connected with each other – not only in terms of market, but also in the context of social identity. In fact, sociological and anthropological studies have pointed out the crucial role of consumption in the construction process of identity and personhood (Croll, 2006: 21-22). These studies show that goods become purveyors of meanings and messages linked to the consumer's wishes, aspirations, and cultural values (ibid.). Concerning this, various scholars have related consumption and middle class identity in China (Davis, 2005; Croll, 2006; Zhou, 2008; Yan, 2009; Elfick, 2011; Henningsen, 2012; Smith Maguire and Hu, 2013; Wang, 2014; and Yu 2014). They have proved that consumerism can be used as a lens through which to interpret middle class identity, culture, and values, since consumption of specific commodities and cultural products allows for the display and creation of a middle class identity (Wang, 2014: 2).

[2] Camillo defined "young royals" as professional men and women in their thirties with a high disposable income; "aspirationals" as young male and female adults who favor brand names that are affordably priced; "established money" as older men and women with high incomes who consume exclusive and high-end products; and "patriots" as middle-income consumers "who eschew the latest generation products for long-established local brands in some product categories" (Camillo, 2012: 86).

1.2. Research Aim

Generally, wine represents a crucial object of study in the sociological inquiry, especially because it is considered as "a food for hierarchy" in the West (Demossier, 2004: 93). Wine leads to the hierarchization of society, as its consumption conveys a sense of prestige and its appreciation represents a vital step within the distinction and social status acquirement processes (ibid. 100). Within the Chinese context, scholars have remarked the role of wine consumption not only as a purveyor of image, good taste, and social status (Liu and Murphy, 2007: 106; and Resnick, 2008: 56), but also as a reflection of the consumer's identity (Camillo, 2012: 73).

Starting with the assumption that wine consumption is considered a symbol of prestige and status, and that consumption of specific goods plays a key role in the display and definition of middle class identity, this thesis aims to explore the extent to which wine consumption and drinkers' perceptions on wine can help to understand middle class identity in Shanghai, which is one of the biggest wine markets in China (EU SME Centre, 2011: 1). The focus is therefore on imported wine rather than domestically-produced wine. The overall purpose was to shed light on one of the distinction practices through consumption in contemporary China in order to contribute to the wider field of consumption and identity.

1.3. Research Questions

The overarching research question of this thesis is: *To what extent can wine consumption help to understand Shanghai's middle class' social identity?*

When framing the role of foreign wine consumption as a lens to explore middle class identity in Shanghai, it is crucial to understand other aspects concerning wine consumption, which can take the form of supportive sub-questions to this research. As wine consumption has widely increased in China, how does middle class individuals perceive wine? Is wine perceived as a luxury good or an ordinary beverage? Accordingly, is wine considered a symbol of social status from the middle class? As consumption and lifestyles are deemed as indicators of middle class belonging, how can wine consumption be contextualized in relation to this?

1.4. Relevance

Although on the one hand numerous reports and business research on the wine market and wine consumers in China have flourished in the last few years, and on the other hand there exists a thriving body of literature on the Chinese society, middle class identity, and consumerism, currently

there are no known published works linking wine consumption and middle class identity in China. For this reason this thesis aims to fill this gap by bridging these two different topics and exploring the relationship between wine consumption and middle class identity in China. By doing this, this research contributes to the body of literature that inquires how China's middle class constructs its own identity and expresses class consciousness and social belonging by employing different forms of consumption.

1.5. Disposition

This thesis is organized into six chapters. This first chapter has introduced the context where this research originates, what this research aims to discover and which questions this thesis attempts to answer, as well as its relevance. The second chapter discusses the methodology employed to conduct this research, but also includes some of the researcher's personal reflections while conducting fieldwork and her critical stance towards the research process. The third chapter reviews the previous studies that serve as a fundamental background to contextualize and develop this research. It focuses in particular on the debates revolving around the different definitions on the Chinese middle class, as well as the role of consumption attributing social status and shaping social identity. It also discusses wine consumption in China's history and the role of spaces for wine consumption as purveyors of social structures and codes. The fourth chapter is centered on the theoretical framework in which this research is rooted, which is built upon Bourdieu's theories on social distinction and judgment of taste. The fifth chapter illustrates the empirical data, and analyzes and critically discusses this research's findings. Basing on interviewees' personal profiles, wine drinking habits and knowledge, as well as their ideas and perceptions on wine consumption in China, this chapter discusses the "boundaries" of distinction that wine consumption implies, and it contextualizes wine drinking within middle class lifestyle. The sixth and final chapter summarizes the whole research, including some ending remarks and reflections.

2. Methodology

This chapter illustrates the methodology employed in this research. It first justifies the reasons why a qualitative research design was chosen, and it secondly illustrates which qualitative research methods were selected (qualitative interviews and non-participant observations) and how they were employed (interview guide, sampling, and interview groups). After a brief discussion on trustworthiness and authenticity, as well as reflexivity and thesis limitations, this chapter highlights the research's ethical considerations and finally includes some personal reflections about the difficulties encountered during the fieldwork.

2.1. Qualitative Research Design

This thesis seeks to explore middle class identity in Shanghai basing on individuals' opinions, perceptions, and ideas on wine. For this reason, it employs a qualitative research, a research strategy that "emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman, 2012: 380); therefore it allows to look at a social phenomenon by understanding the meaning that individuals attribute to it (Creswell, 2007: 37). This research has thus entailed the employment of some of the key steps characterizing qualitative approach, including: (1) the researcher's data collection in the field and her direct contact and face-to-face interaction within the research context; (2) the employment of multiple qualitative methods (interviews and non-participant observation) to gather data; (3) the focus on participants' meanings on the issue; (4) the flexibility of the research design once the fieldwork started; (5) the employment of a theoretical basis; and (6) the interpretative inquiry of the researcher about the data collected (ibid. 37-39). With these premises, the research findings will provide the voices of the participants as well as the researcher's reflexivity and interpretation of the problem (ibid. 51).

2.2. Qualitative Interviews

The methodology utilized in this research has mainly employed qualitative interviewing, which is a flexible interview process that allows the researcher to extrapolate the interviewee's point of view on a particular issue (Bryman, 2012: 470). Its flexibility implied constant adjustments to the interview guide, including new or follow up questions according to the interviewee's replies, aiming at exploring new aspects or emphasize other nuances of the studied issue (ibid.).

2.2.1. Interview Guide and Interviewing Process

This thesis has employed semi-structured interviews to gather data, conducted either in English or Mandarin Chinese – depending whether the interviewees were willing to speak English, or if they

felt more comfortable to speak in their mother tongue. Professional translators were not required, as the researcher was able to interview and to discuss with participants in Mandarin Chinese. Interviews were not recorded using a recording device, as wine bars and cafés were usually relatively crowded and noisy. Instead, the researcher took notes on a notebook, writing down the answers given by the interviewees, either in English or Chinese. Interviews were then transcribed a few hours after they took place.

The first version of the interview guide, compiled a few days before starting the fieldwork, consisted of 12 questions (see appendix 1). The first seven questions aimed to portray the interviewees' personal profiles (age, job, education, family), whilst the remaining questions were centered on their drinking habits. A second version of the interview guide was formulated during the fieldwork, and it added some questions seeking to understand participants' ideas on middle class. The interviews also included some "final discussions" with the interviewees, which usually aimed to understand their thoughts on the increase of wine consumption in China and on wine drinkers' identity. However, because of the flexible nature of qualitative interviewing, not all interviews followed the same path: in some cases certain questions were avoided to give more room to others, or the "final discussions" part was more or less long and detailed according to the interviewee's time availability and willingness to discuss.

2.2.2. Sampling and Interview Group

This research has mainly employed purpose sampling, meaning that selected participants had "directed reference to the research questions being asked" (Bryman, 2012: 416). Both the contexts and participants were sampled. As for the former, fancy, Western-styled, and reasonably-priced wine bars, restaurants, and bistros, located in Down Town Shanghai (especially in the Old French Concession and Jing'An District) were chosen.[3] As far as participants are concerned, this research required Chinese citizens, men and women, wine drinkers and/or Western wine bars clients, of every age range. The researcher's original assumption was that mostly wealthy individuals, who are connected with Western culture and/or lifestyles, and with a certain level of education, would have been more likely to go to wine bars.

[3] Wine bars and restaurants were chosen consulting the following websites: http://www.smartshanghai.com/, http://www.timeoutshanghai.com/ (in English) and http://www.tripadvisor.com/ (in Chinese). Please see appendix 4 for further information regarding their location. Despite being SmartShanghai and Time Out Shanghai published in English, they represent a reference online platform for both Western and Chinese users.

Individuals were approached in the time period of January-February 2015. Interviewees were sampled in four different contexts: (1) seven popular restaurants and wine bars[4] in the city center of Shanghai in different time sessions; (2) during a mingling event[5] organized by the PR company Networking Events Club[6]; (3) the web group "Shanghai Wine Club" on the social networking online platform meetup.com[7]; and (4) in the wake of the snowballing process (and sampling), as most of the interviewees suggested other contacts that could have been relevant for the research.[8] The snowball effect has allowed the researcher to collect two interviews also in Beijing. Although this thesis is centered on the case of Shanghai, these interviews will be included in the data analysis because of their affinity with the whole research and the interesting insights they provided to it.[9]

Among the 25 interviews gathered, nine were collected within two interview groups (respectively of five and four people). The aim was to collect more interviews in one session and to confront different points of view together, rather than exploring the ways in which participants discussed and interacted between each other in relation to the issue at stake as in focus groups (Bryman, 2012: 501). Despite the advantage of collecting a significant number of interviews at once, group interviews were time consuming, especially for the participants who had to wait for their turn to answer a specific question – and this made them bored. Furthermore, it was noticed that answers given by a participant could influence another's within the group, so in the end replies given by different interviewees could have been similar between each other (ibid. 517-518).

2.3. Non-Participant Observation

In addition to interviews, the methodology utilized in this research has also included non-participant observation. Whilst participant observation implies the researcher's deep and extended immersion in a group, both observing and interacting with the people involved (Bryman, 2012: 432), the non-participant observer "observes but does not participate in what is going on in the social setting"

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[4] The second map in appendix 4 pinpoints the restaurants and wine bars where interviews and observations were conducted.

[5] The invitation to the event stated as follows: *"Networking Events Club is again inviting you to an evening of cocktails and friendship. Come out with your friends and colleagues to meet the locals and expats here in Shanghai. Always remember to come with plenty of business card or get your We Chat ready to add more friends. (...) Free flow on: beer, cocktails, and wine."*

[6] Networking Events Club is a PR company that aims to promote networking among locals and expats in Shanghai.

[7] http://www.meetup.com/Shanghai-Wine-Club/

[8] These potential participants were contacted via WeChat (*weixin* 微信 in Chinese), a Chinese application similar to WhatsApp that allows instant messages between the sender and the addressee. In general, this application has been extremely useful to get in touch with interviewees and to arrange with them the time and the venue for the interview.

[9] The Beijing sample is represented by interviewees 24 and 25 respectively. Interviewee 24 is a Shanghai-born man who lives between Beijing (for work reasons) and Shanghai (where his family resides). Interviewee 25 is a professional chef (therefore, an expert of the food and beverage sector in China) and a TV personality, and took part in the first edition of MasterChef China.

(ibid. 273). Therefore non-participant observers adopt a more distant level of involvement within the research setting (Liu and Maitlis, 2010: 610). Specifically, during these research sessions in wine bars and restaurants in Shanghai the researcher conducted covert non-participant observation, meaning that participants were not aware that they were being studied. However, restaurant managers were always asked permission to conduct observation and interviews by the researcher, and they never showed any forms of aversion to her requests.

When in the field, the researcher usually sat at a table located in an area that could allow for a clear view of the people surrounding her. She usually ordered a soda (as she was in a bar, she felt she needed to consume something), and started observing the people and the surrounding environment, taking jotted notes on a notebook. As she conducted unstructured observation, the researcher did not set a fixed observation schedule for the recording of behavior with the aim of developing a narrative account of that behavior (Bryman, 2012: 273).

Instead, she firstly tried to get a general overview of the people in the field, counting the number of Chinese people (rather than foreigners) and the ratio between men and women. Secondly, she focused on each single table and observed other aspects, such as what people ordered (*Which kind of wine? An entire bottle or just a glass? Also food? If yes, what kind of food?*), how they did consume wine (gestures and manners), their dresses and brands displaying, their behavior and interaction between each other. At the same time, she also observed the surrounding environment (interiors, lightning, music) and the way customers related themselves in it.

As Liu and Maitlis (2010) pointed out, non-participant observation enables to "capture the dynamics of participants' interactions with each another" (ibid. 610) and with the surrounding environment. However, this method can also be lacking, as there exists only the researcher's interpretation of what he/she observes. Moreover, as the authors further remarked, "an observation can never be truly complete in the events, activities, people, or interactions studies, or in the time period covered" (ibid. 611). As a consequence, other sources such as interviews as well as other documents and previous studies needed to be employed in order to support the research's validity, reliability, and completeness.

2.4. Quality of the Research

2.4.1. Trustworthiness and Authenticity

As this research ontologically identifies with the constructivist theory, which sees social actors in continuous evolution and in a "constant state of revision" (Bryman, 2012: 33), criteria of *trustworthiness* and *authenticity* – rather than *validity* and *reliability* – are utilized in order to validate the quality of this research. Trustworthiness assesses whether the researcher's findings and interpretations are credible and can be trusted (Lincoln and Guba, 2013: 103) to explain aspect of social reality he or she is studying (Bryman, 2012: 390). In this perspective, trustworthiness of this research and authenticity of its results are ensured not by detailed and accurate data collection, but also by the fair employment of the theoretical framework for the data analysis, as well as the consistent body of literature and studies supporting this thesis.

2.4.2. Reflexivity and Limitations

The researcher is aware of her own possible biases and not-fully objective interpretation of the data collected and analyzed due to her own culture, personal sensibility, values, and educational background (Bryman, 2012: 393). Her appearance as an European young woman doing research on wine consumption might have had a relative impact on the interviewees. This was the case especially for those who were interviewed "on the spot" in the field, without previous contacts, or for those who thought they needed to be professional drinkers in order to be suitable for the interview.

Furthermore, the researcher is aware that these findings cannot be generalized to the whole Chinese middle class, since the sample was relatively small – although it included both men and women from different ages as well as various educational and working backgrounds. Moreover, the focus of this research was on Shanghai, which welcomes one of the biggest Westernized communities in China. For this reason, this case is difficultly applicable to other cities in China, even the most developed and cosmopolitan ones. However, this case can represent a starting point to conduct similar research in other big cities in China, and to compare the differences and the similarities between these Chinese metropolises.

Lastly, the researcher acknowledges that wine drinkers represent only a limited part of the whole middle class in Shanghai, where other individuals might not consume wine for different reasons (health, religion, lifestyles, etc.). In order to get a wider and more complete overview on middle class identity constructed through consumption, this research on wine consumption needs to be

supported by other studies on other types of consumption (as it will be later discussed in the literature review).

2.5. Ethical Considerations

The researcher was constantly concerned that her research would follow the ethical guidelines provided by the Swedish Research Council (2006). When approaching potential interviewees in a public space, the researcher always introduced herself, gave her business card as Master's student, presented her thesis research, explained to the people involved the reason why they were selected, and asked them if they were interested in taking the interview.

If they agreed, total anonymity and confidentiality of the interviews were firstly assured; secondly participants were asked whether they preferred to take the interview at that moment or another day (as some of them might have felt bothered while relaxing or having fun in bar with some friends). Therefore consenting participants were thoroughly informed of the confidential and anonymous aspects of the interviewing, and were fully aware of their right to access transcriptions (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 70-71). Most importantly, the researcher always made sure that the participants were fully consenting and sober when conducting interviews in wine bars.

As far as non-participant observation is concerned, observations were conducted in privately-owned public spaces, where anyone is able to access, and anyone's intimacy and privacy are supposedly "exposed" to the public. Moreover, the researcher just observed the people and the environment surrounding her; therefore no specific or detailed notes were taken, as they were mostly mental or jotted notes. The only pieces of information gathered were aimed to draw a general picture of wine consumers, drinking manners, and the physical context in which wine is usually consumed.

2.6. Issues and Personal Reflections

Although the fieldwork and data collection proceeded relatively smoothly, the researcher encountered some difficulties when in the field. One of these was the Chinese New Year. This research's fieldwork in Shanghai started approximately on the 23rd of January 2015, less than one month before these festivities started.[10] During the Chinese New Year most of Chinese families leave the cities to go back to their hometowns, or they go on holiday abroad. Therefore, from the middle to the end of February no interviews could be scheduled and conducted – and by the time the Chinese New Year festivities were over, the researcher had already left Shanghai.

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[10] When this research was conducted in 2015, Chinese New Year started on the 19th of February.

Another issue encountered concerned the researcher's lack of self-confidence when supposed to approach potential interviewees (especially during the first times). This was due to her inexperience and fear of getting rejected, or to disturb people while relaxing with friends in wine bars. As far as interviews are concerned, another difficulty encountered was the capability to maintain participants' attention during the interview. Participants tended to "get bored" and to give shorter answers approximately twenty/thirty minutes after the interview started. This was especially the case of group interviews, as briefly mentioned in the previous section.

3. Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview on the relevant studies concerning the main "building blocks" characterizing this research. It starts by looking at China's middle class, its emergence and its main features, and discusses the different interpretations and definitions that scholars have related to it. As consumption and lifestyles can be considered two key elements to identify China's middle class, the second section discusses how consumerism and a consumer culture have developed and consolidated in China's post-reform era. The third and fourth sections look at the relationships between consumption-status acquisition and consumption-identity construction respectively – since consumption and experience of new lifestyles involve processes of status search as well as self-rethinking. The fifth section looks at wine consumption in China's history, whilst the sixth section analyzes the role of spaces of consumption as sites of self-transformation, and focuses on the specific places where foreign wine is usually consumed (Western bars and restaurants). Although this last section briefly touches upon women's consumption in China, it has been purposely avoided to explore the relationship between consumption and gender. Indeed, the core of this research is on consumption as the key to the construction of class identities, rather than consumption building gendered identities.

3.1. Chinese Middle Class: Debates, Interpretations, and Definitions

Chinese middle class is a debated and uncertain concept within academia as various studies have employed different approaches and criteria to address it (income, education, ownership, consumption patterns and lifestyles, occupation, etc.). In some cases, several discussions within China have even questioned the existence of a Chinese middle class, emphasizing the uncertainty and the universalist/inclusive character of this term (Goodman, 2014: 93). Moreover, many disputes have also arisen around its labeling (Guo, 2008: 43-47).[11] Employing actual data or numbers to represent income as a measurement might be misleading as many Chinese citizens tend to under-report their earnings for taxation purposes (Goodman, 2008: 7). Instead, occupation can be utilized as "the main dominator" (Wang, 2014: 4) by which to identify China's middle class, as it indicates both income levels and socioeconomic status.

[11] As Guo (2008) pointed out, the Chinese words for 'middle' are *zhongchan* 中产 (middle-propertied), *zhongjian* 中间 (intermediate), and *zhongdeng* 中等 (middle range), whilst the Chinese words that are often translated into 'class' in English are *jieji* 阶级(class), *jieceng* 阶层 (stratum), and *qunti* 群体(group); if combined together, these words originate nine synonymic phases. As Guo highlighted, here is where the dispute arises: "these phrases have different political overtones and may or may not refer to the same groupings, and the use of different terms is part of the contestation over the constitution of the middle class and its implications for China" (ibid. 43).

Because of the difficulty to address the concept of middle class in China, David S.G. Goodman (2008) formulated the idea of "new rich," who are those that are considered wealthy and one of the consequences of economic liberalization and globalization in China (ibid. 1). From this perspective, people's level of wealth can be employed as a parameter to assess whether they belong to the middle class group. China's "new rich" are both the beneficiaries as well as the drivers of China's economic transformation (ibid. 2). They are "a disparate group" (ibid. 2) that includes not only economic and political élites, but also professionals and the petty bourgeoisie, even though they "are not all by any means super rich" (ibid. 3). They can be mainly identified as private entrepreneurs, business people (ibid. 10-13), professionals, and managers (ibid. 13-15).

Similarly, Cheng Li (2010) emphasized the status-quo oriented and risk-averse nature of this "complex mosaic" of individuals (ibid. 4), and made a similar categorization by grouping them into three different "clusters" (economic cluster, political cluster, and cultural and educational cluster) according to their occupational and sociological composition (ibid. 5). Xiaohong Zhou (2008) further considered China's middle class as the middle or new group of people with medium income, as an alternative to the traditional working and farming classes (ibid. 110). According to Zhou, middle class' six "basic components" are: (1) the owners of newly-born private and township enterprises; (2) other kinds of self-employed people; (3) the political class (officials, intellectual, and the leaders of state-owned enterprises); (4) white collars and managers in joint-ventures; (5) managers of enterprises and social organizations (who have possibly pursued a high level of education); and (6) high-income people working in other sectors (lawyers, doctors, architects, real estate agents, etc.) (ibid. 115-116).

On the other hand, Xin Wang (2008) argued that the employment of wealth as a criterion to define middle class could be lacking and insufficient, as it "overlooks political, social and intellectual capital possessed by the middle class and tends to exclude some segments from the group" (ibid. 57). According to Wang, the whole classification system should include not only wealth (in terms of income and ownership), but also power (social and political power), education, employment and occupation, and residence (urban or rural) as indicators for middle class belonging (ibid.). On this basis, the author portrayed Chinese middle class mainly as urban residents, with a stable employment, a medium/high income (from 60,000 RMB to 500,000 RMB per year), who attained high education (university or specialized schools), and who own different kinds of properties (such as a car or an apartment) (ibid. 61). They share similar social interests and practice self-enrichment activities (such as travels, sports, and education), but most importantly they all pursue economic

prosperity and quality of living (as they are not content with their status quo), consume branded goods, and aim to climb higher socially and to acquire status (ibid. 63-65).

Despite these debates and the different definitions provided by both Chinese and Western scholars, most of China's social scientists have reached a level of agreement regarding the general characterization of the Chinese middle class (Goodman, 2014: 95).[12] As Goodman (2014) pointed out, these academics see China's middle class as employed in specific high-status occupations and "holding positions involving supervisory obligations and the exercise of managerial authority" (ibid. 95). They expect these individuals have attained a high level of education (ibid.) and they especially consider consumption and lifestyles as two key elements to identify the middle class (ibid. 96). This research utilizes this last definition to address middle class in the analysis section of this thesis.

3.2. Consumerism and Mass Consumption Throughout the History of the PRC

During the Maoist era the economic system was centrally planned, meaning that production, price, and distribution were regulated by the State. The emphasis was on heavy industry, production, workers, and comrades, whilst the concepts of consumption, consumer preferences, and demand were completely neglected (Croll, 2006: 16). At that time "consumption was reduced to the minimum" (Yan, 2009: 210) as it was even counterproductive for the Chinese State, which had to provide its citizens with subsidies for basic goods, housing, and transportation. This meant that the more people consumed, the more subsidies the State had to issue (ibid.). During Maoism, consumption patterns and lifestyles were basic and similar, to the extent that "people basically wore the same kind of clothes, ate more or less the same kind of food, and lived in similar kinds of housing" (ibid.). Social status was mainly given by party membership, and luxury goods and comfortable lifestyles were condemned by the Chinese State, as they were considered symbols of bourgeoisie (ibid. 210-211).

However, economic reforms starting at the end of the 1970s, the shift from a centrally planned to a market-led economy, new policies encouraging spending and consumption, and the consequent rise of incomes deeply changed Chinese people's consumption patterns and lifestyles. Both Elizabeth Croll (2006) and Yunxiang Yan (2009) identified three different stages characterizing China's consumption changes. Croll (2006) indicated three different "phases" of China's "consumer

[12] Goodman particularly refers to Li Peilin and Li Chunling from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Li Qiang and Sun Liping (Tsinghua University), Zhou Xiaohong (Nanjing University), Li Youmei (Shanghai University), Li Lulu (Renmin University), Lu Hanlong (Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences), and Lin Xin (Fudan University).

revolution" (ibid. 30), specifying that desired categories of goods "have demarcated and come to symbolize each phase of the consumer revolution" (ibid. 31). The first phase started in the 1980s and was characterized by the development of new sites of consumption and an increasing interest in goods, brands, and style (ibid. 18). During the first phase the "three big items" were refrigerators, televisions, and washing machines. The second phase (mid to late 1990s) mostly revolved around electronic goods, especially telephones or mobile phones, air conditioners, video recorders, hi-fi units, and microwaves (ibid. 32). During the third phase (2000s), consumption has shifted to leisure activities (travels and sports), housing, cars, and personal computers (ibid.).

Similarly, Yan (2009) identified three distinct "waves" of mass consumption (ibid. 212), which however differ from those delineated by Croll. Both the first (1979-1982) and second (1985-1989) waves arose in the context of a shortage of consumer goods, and they were respectively initiated by peasants demanding products of light industry and the urbanities questing for foodstuffs and other consumer goods of all types (ibid. 211-214). However it was the third wave starting from 1992 that according to Yan bore "the essential features of consumerism, such as the emergence of a buyer's market, the shift of emphasis in expenditure from food to other goods, the awareness of individual rights, and the development of a consumer movement" (ibid. 214). The third wave witnessed the emergence of buyer's market, the new trend for ordinary citizens to have shopping on a daily basis and "to purchase goods they want but not necessarily need" (ibid 215), as well as the change of urban households' expenditures and consumption patterns – from "hard consumption" (food and other basic goods) to "soft consumption" such as tourism, sports, entertaining, and other leisure activities (ibid. 214-217). Accordingly, it is in this third "phase" or "wave" where increased wine consumption can be contextualized.

3.2.1. The Urban Privilege

This burgeoning consumer revolution, however, primarily involved the urban population. As economic reforms were mainly directed to develop cities in the coastal areas, following Deng Xiaoping's guideline "let some people and some areas get rich first,"[13] it was citizens from the metropolitan cities who had more opportunities to acquire new goods as well as to experience modern lifestyles (Croll, 2006: 49). This was particularly due to their increased income, which almost doubled during the period 1985-1988, as well as better social welfare arrangements (Yan, 2009: 212). In this context new affluent and élite groups, who could sample new and modern goods

[13] The original text of this quote can be found at: http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/34136/2569304.html (in Chinese).

thanks to increased purchasing power and higher disposable incomes, started to emerge in China's biggest cities such as Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen (Croll, 2006: 49).

3.3. Consumption and Status Acquisition

Search for status through consumption of goods and display of wealth was widely explored by Thorstein Veblen (1899), who formulated the concept of *conspicuous consumption* as a means of ostentation, reputability, and decency to the individuals belonging to the superior classes (the "leisure classes"). He specified that, "the consumption of these more excellent goods[14] is an evidence of wealth, it becomes honorific. Conversely, the failure to consume in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit" (ibid. 53). Consumption of specific categories of goods is therefore a powerful symbol of upper classes' "pecuniary strength" (ibid. 49) and wealth. Additionally, the social performance and display of wealth through consumption are essential for the transformation of wealth into status (Trigg, 2001: 100).

This was especially the case in China's post-reform era, where the acquisition, exhibition, and conspicuous consumption of new possessions (in particular those that were perceived to be both Western and modern) were a source of immediate status, especially in the urban areas (Croll, 2006: 45). In relation to this, Yan (2009) explained that in China's cities many *getihu* (individuals from humble origins who have made a fortune with the marketization of Chinese economy and have become the first groups of rich people in the cities) and young professionals were eager to "show off their wealth through conspicuous consumption of fancy clothes, luxurious banquets, leisure activities […] and various forms of senseless competition" (ibid. 225) to improve or maintain their status and social position.

Similarly, LiAnne Yu (2014) emphasized China's "national obsession" for upward social mobility and ownership, use, and display of brands and consumer goods (especially by the upper-middle class) – to the extent that it is "unparalleled in any other time in the country's history as well as any other place in the world" (ibid. 63). The author highlighted these young, middle-income urban residents' obsession for luxury goods (often associated with European and American brands) to reflect their quality of life, to pursue prestige and uniqueness, and to display their success (ibid. 63-75). Moreover, since Chinese people feel discomforted with the fixed, static aspect of status and class (ibid. 79), they perceive social distinction and a higher social status when someone is able to

[14] Here Veblen referred to "food, drink, narcotics, shelter, services, ornaments, apparel, weapons and accoutrements, amusements, amulets, and idols or divinities" (Veblen, 1899: 53).

move upward thanks to his/her work and practical skills to realize his/her own success (ibid. 82). Therefore the display of ownership and upward mobility are two key factors that are necessary to understand the processes of status making (and marking) for China's upper and middle classes.

3.4. Consumption and Identity Construction

Generally, accumulation of goods and acquisition of new lifestyles involve consumers in an ongoing process of self-recreation; in this way individuals understand consumption as an opportunity to rethink themselves and acquire new individual and collective identities (Croll, 2006: 20). Consumption plays a vital role in people's construction of personhood or identity, since the goods they purchase and the lifestyles they experience are also a means to communicate and a reflection of their wishes, aspirations, and affiliation to specific social categories and cultural values (ibid. 21-22). In this way, the acquisition and consumption of certain goods in the post-reform China were not only a source of immediate status, but also powerful means to associate one's identity "with 'the outside', 'the global' or 'the cosmopolitan' and particularly 'the West'" (ibid. 46). In this way, consumerism in China promoted agency, celebration of choice, and individuation (Davis, 2005: 706-708).

3.4.1. Consumption Shaping a Middle Class Identity

Following the idea of "you are what you buy" (Elfick, 2011: 198), Xin Wang (2014) focused his analysis on China's middle class and the way middle class identity is constructed through rising consumerism and consumption of specific commodities (including conspicuously spending money on housing, home furnishing, travelling, and luxury brands). According to Wang, "consumption is a cultural process through which an emerging middleclass actually creates itself as a sociocultural entity" (Wang, 2014: 19). Since individuals manifest their interpretation of class consciousness through lifestyles and consumption, consumption not only contributes to class formation, but consumption of particular commodities and the social practices of taste also become an integral part of middle class membership within Chinese society (ibid.). In such manner, China's middle class employs consumption as a way of distinction from lower and upper classes (ibid. 20).

3.4.2. Housing Consumption Patterns: The Practice of Good Taste and Social Exclusion

Middle class social identity and consumption can be explored utilizing a wide variety of case studies and modes of consumption. One of these is housing. Luigi Tomba (2004) and Choon-Piew Pow (2009) provided insightful findings on urban middle class identity basing their research on housing and gated communities in Beijing and Shanghai. As residents living in Beijing's

compounds generally share similar features, including middle-to-high income, high education, work positions that entail a certain level of responsibility, and a well-defined consumer identity (Tomba, 2004: 5), housing becomes a meaningful determinant of status and class position (ibid. 6), representing a proper "path for status enhancement" (ibid. 25). In this way, gated communities and residential segregation are identified as markers for social stratification (ibid. 15).

By the same token, gated communities in Shanghai allows for the "performance of class identities and the development of a self-conscious middle class aesthetic sensibility" (Pow, 2009: 375). Middle class residents' assimilation and practice of good taste and aesthetic sensibilities are exemplified in the rigid aesthetic regime characterizing the landscape and the organization of space within these gated communities (ibid. 380). Therefore aesthetic appreciation of landscapes and cultivation of good taste (also related to lifestyle choices, consumption patterns, and visual pleasures) act as two "subtle yet high effective" mechanisms for both deliberately affirm élite class identity and enhance urban segregation and social exclusion (ibid. 387).

3.4.3. Foreign Goods Conveying Individualism and Social Belonging: The Starbucks Example

Foreign goods, even the most ordinary ones like coffee, carry significant symbolic power. Accordingly, consumption experiences in Starbucks are also emblematic within this research. Firstly, because some of the interviewees who took part in this research compared wine consumption with Starbucks coffee. Secondly, because experiences in Starbucks allow an insightful understanding on how Chinese consumers perceive and engage with foreign brands and goods. In relation to this, Lena Henningsen (2012) argued that China's *xiaozi* view consumption in Starbucks as a "search for authenticity" (ibid. 408), which enables them to construct, imagine, and display the self in an environment of globalized mass consumption (ibid. 409).[15] As *xiaozi* identity is defined by cultivating special lifestyles and tastes, the consumption of coffee, especially in a relatively new and cosmopolitan site like Starbucks, indicates one's belonging to the group of *xiaozi*. Coffee consumption in Starbucks therefore represents a powerful means to mark *xiaozi*'s cultural distinction and individualism (ibid. 411-412).

Similarly, Jennifer Smith Maguire and Dan Hu (2013) utilized the case of Starbucks in China to explore the role of consumption of foreign brands in the construction of Chinese consumers'

[15] As the author pointed out, *xiaozi* are a social group that shape their identity through lifestyle and consumption, aiming to distinguish themselves from the rest of Chinese society through cultural distinction – namely by "consuming the 'correct' books, movies, music, lifestyle journals, and brands (…) even though much of their taste and lifestyle may classify as mainstream culture" (Henningsen, 2012: 412).

individual and collective identities. Indeed consumption in Starbucks uncovers the double-dimensioned aspect of identity construction in China. On the one hand, consumption in Starbucks and the fashion, lifestyle, and Western perception it entails enable the "projection of a particular self, as an individual" (ibid. 681). On the other hand, it also involves group membership and the consequent reproduction of collective identities (through class, tradition, and nationality) (ibid.). As the authors further remarked, these individualistic and collectivistic dimensions are not in contrast between each other, but are linked by a process of negotiation and interplay (ibid.).

3.4.4. Distinction among Similar Income Groups: Middle Class Professionals in Shenzhen

Jacqueline Elfick (2011) also emphasized the role of consumption as a means of expressing social identity. Using the case study of middle class professionals in Shenzhen, a city with a high turnover of population and no established social hierarchy (ibid. 198), Elfick demonstrated how these individuals attempt to distinguish themselves from the so-called "new rich" (*baofahu*). They do so employing their individual tastes and engaging in different consumption patterns and behavior, including goods with a different design aesthetic, travels, and more individualistic leisure activities (ibid. 202-206). The individualistic aspect of these professionals' activities represents a component of their consumer behavior, and "serves as an articulation of a collective social identity" in the process of social distinction from the "new rich" (ibid. 207).

3.5. Wine Consumption and Status in China

In China, foreign wine consumption has generally been considered as a sign of affluence and as a status symbol. However, Zhengping Li (2011) highlighted that wine boasts a long tradition in China, and Chinese wine production can be traced back to the Neolithic Yangshao culture in 4000 BC (ibid. 1). Traditionally, Chinese alcoholic drinks are mainly made from grain, and their consumption has always been related to political, economic and social conventions (ibid.). Alcoholic beverages production and consumption have developed throughout China's various ruling dynasties (ibid. 2-9), but it was only during the early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) that European wine was officially introduced to China (ibid. 134). Increased imports and consumption of many varieties of foreign wine flourished during the late Qing Dynasty, when Eastern and Western powers opened foreign concessions in many Chinese cities because of the unequal treaties imposed to China (ibid. 135).

Foreign wine consumption was then prohibited and banned after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, as it was seen as a Western luxury good (Li, 2011: 135). However, with

the intensification of economic reforms in the 1980s and 1990s foreign wine consumption has steadily increased. As Li remarked, until the beginning of the 1990s foreign wine could be tasted only in hotels in China's big cities, and could not be bought with Chinese currency but only with foreign exchange certificates (ibid. 136). Thus, wine was an exclusive beverage. Moreover, in the 1990s only China's richest individuals could afford expensive foreign wine; therefore it was considered a symbol of wealth, status, and affluence (ibid. 137). With China's access to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and the consequent decline of import duties, many shops selling and serving foreign wine have opened in China's main cities, and the variety of foreign wine has expanded (ibid.). As the author further pointed out, "foreign wine has made a considerable impact on traditional Chinese lifestyles and consumption patterns, and it has exposed Chinese consumers to the wine culture of the Western world" (ibid. 138).

3.6. Spaces of (Wine) Consumption

Reforms and opening up have also led to the proliferation of new spaces of consumption and leisure centers in Chinese cities, which have all become sites where people can express the changes in their own life since the economic transformation (Yu, 2014: 32). During the Maoist era, even free time spent outside home was strictly monitored and organized by the State. Leisure activities, which were planned by the working unit one individual belonged to, had to reflect Mao's propaganda and ideology, and sociality revolved around auditoriums and workers' clubs (ibid. 57). Since economic reforms, new modern spaces for recreation and goods display became very popular not only for the mere act of shopping and purchasing (Croll, 2006: 40), but also to nurture familial bonds and, in particular, to explore personal identities and individual desires (ibid. 58).

3.6.1. Consuming in Western Restaurants

Focusing the attention on the locations where wine is usually consumed in China, it is interesting to note how Western restaurants can be conceived as "systems of social codes" (Yan, 2009: 244), where it is possible to explore the social meanings connected to food consumption – as food consumption itself involves the process of social distinction between classes (Bourdieu, 1984: 177). In this context, eating foreign food has become a means for individuals to convey their sense of belonging to the middle class group (Yu, 2014: 46). Foreign restaurants enable the experience of new lifestyles and identities. For example, they allow people to explore new forms of socialization and to feel a higher sense of freedom (as Western restaurants appear to be something 'exotic', far away from tradition) (ibid. 47). In particular, foreign restaurants are seldom associated with greater permissiveness and sexual equality: they not only represent a new place for women to freely

participate in public life, but they indeed convey women's willingness to have equal status of men in public (Jula, 2009: 424). Women's increased participation and consumption in these contexts can be thus interpreted as an "indication of changes leading to the gradual improvement of women's official, public role in the social life in contemporary China" (ibid.).

3.6.2. Bars or Barriers?

The anthropologist James Farrer (2009) examined the role of bars in Shanghai, emphasizing their double aspects as symbols of social activities (such as business deals and dating), but also as sites of "class stratification of leisure culture with local, national, and transnational dimensions" (ibid. 22) and showcases of class-based geographies of consumption (ibid. 23). Referencing to fancy and Western-styled bars such as those located in Xintiandi, on the Bund, or in the French Concession, which emphasize Shanghai's cosmopolitanism and modernity, Farrer explained how these bars recreate the "exotic Western appeal"[16] (ibid. 33) to China's middle classes (including white collars, overseas, and returnees). However, these bars also emphasize the discriminating and exclusionary aspect of this cosmopolitanism, as they are mainly accessed by specific social, racial, ethnic, and gender groups (ibid. 35). Similarly to the case of gated communities described by Pow (2009), bars in Shanghai become sites of gentrification, stratification, and segregation of China's social classes – indeed, according to their consumption patterns. These elements are significant for this research, especially when considering the locations where observations and most of the interviews took place.

[16] According to the author, most of Shanghai's middle class families look for "exotic décor, a floor shows, filling food, novelty, status, and excitement" when dining or having a drink out (Farrer, 2009: 33).

4. Theoretical Framework

As argued in the previous chapters, on the one hand wine consumption in China is perceived as an expression of good taste (Liu and Murphy, 2007: 104), and on the other hand cultivation of good taste is a common feature among middle class members (Pow, 2009; Henningsen, 2012; and Wang, 2014). In order to connect these two aspects and to shed light on the relationship between wine consumption and middle class identity in China, this thesis employs the theoretical framework provided by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1984), focusing in particular on the key concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and taste. This theoretical framework also makes use of the analyses made by Diane Seymour (2004), who develops and expands Bourdieu's theories to explore the social construction of culinary taste, which represents a crucial element in this research.

4.1. Defining Social Classes

4.1.1. Different Forms of Capital

According to Bourdieu, social classes can be defined by the amount of capital they possess. However, the concept of capital does not merely refer to the economic sphere (such as one's economic resources and properties); it also includes other non-economic forms of capital, which are cultural and social capital.[17] Whilst social capital mainly refers to one's networks, memberships, and social ties (Coleman, 1988; and Putnam, 1995), cultural capital includes factors such as cultural knowledge, experiences, linguistic competences, vocabulary, modes of thoughts, world view, and his/her capacity to evaluate and appreciate cultural products (Allen and Anderson, 1994: 70).

Bourdieu (1986) argued that cultural capital can exist in three forms, namely (1) the embodied state, in the form of long-lasting dispositions of mind and body; (2) the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods such as books and works of arts; and (3) the institutionalized state, in the form of academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986: 243). Cultural capital is acquired through complete immersion in habitus; it can be accumulated during a lifetime, and can be inherited from generation to generation (Seymour, 2004: 4). It is unreflectively absorbed and cultivated within the familial, social, and local contexts, and further reinforced in schools or through other institutional forces (Allen and Anderson, 1994: 70).

[17] In his essay *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes three types of capital: "*economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications; and *social capital*, made up of social obligations made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility" (ibid. 243).

Within the notion of cultural capital, Bourdieu also formulated the concept of symbolic capital, which refers to the "acquisition of reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honorability" founded on a dialectic of knowledge and recognition (Bourdieu, 1984: 291). Messages, signs, and different interpretations that confirm respectability vary according to one's position in the social hierarchy, in a way that "what is valuable symbolic capital in one group is not necessarily worth much in another once these [valuable] practices are removed from the particular habitus which give them value" (Seymour, 2004: 6).

Moreover, cultural forms and symbols belonging to the superior classes acquire cultural legitimacy because of these individuals' higher social position and possession of a greater habitus (which will be explained in the following section); on the other hand, the culture of subordinate groups is seen as tasteless and vulgar (Seymour, 2004: 6). As a consequence, the dominant classes (those with large amounts of capital) tend to impose a hierarchy of taste and preferences on the tasteless and those with less capital – namely the dominated classes (Allen and Anderson, 1994: 70).

4.1.2. Habitus

In addition to the amount of capital possessed, classes are also determined by other more subjective factors, such as dispositions and practices. In this context, Bourdieu formulated the notion of habitus, which is individuals' "capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products" (Bourdieu, 1984: 170), and it is "internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions" (ibid.). In other words, habitus is an open set of actions, practices, dispositions, attitudes, and choices that are deeply connected to one's position in the social world (ibid.) and are therefore conditioned by one's upbringing and education.

In this way, one individual is more likely to adopt certain practices and make specific choices according to his/her class position. Because habitus disposes individuals to take certain choices, they behave in ways that appear natural and obvious given the social context in which they are embedded (Seymour, 2004: 3). As a consequence, individuals from the dominant classes who grew up in an environment with a higher level of cultural capital are more likely to succeed in the educational system, to be more familiar with the symbols and codes of education, and to perpetuate their privilege to other generations (ibid. 4).

Seymour further added that, “the tendency is that individuals sharing a particular habitus (and therefore class position) will react in similar ways, make similar choices and share similar judgments of taste” (Seymour, 2004: 4). As the social context disposes one’s likeliness to take certain decisions and conduct specific lifestyles, it results that habitus is the product of social conditioning rather than human agency (Allen and Anderson, 1994: 71). To put it in Allen and Anderson’s words, “one’s class is not, therefore, a structural straight jacket that determines with certainty one’s actions. But, on the other hand, there is a certain probability that persons exposed to similar life experiences will display similar ‘lifestyles’ and behaviors” (ibid.). In this way, habitus emphasizes the fact that tastes and choices are more “a matter of class rather than individual personality” (Seymour, 2004: 3) and implying tastes are mostly socially constructed – rather than individually constructed.

4.2. Taste and the Process of Distinction

As explored in the previous sections, social classes are both defined by the amount of different kinds of capital they possess and their class habitus (Bourdieu, 1984: 260). In particular, specific practices and manners serve the different fractions of the dominant classes (constituted of individuals with large amounts of economic and cultural capital) to “distinguish themselves precisely through that which makes them members of the class as a whole, namely the type of capital which is the source of their privilege and the different manners of asserting their distinction which are linked to it” (ibid. 258).

In this context, Bourdieu identified taste as the key marker and the expression of different social classes. Taste (indeed, the ability to appreciate certain objects or to confirm a sense of aesthetic to lifestyle choices) “classifies the classifier” (namely the social subjects) (Bourdieu, 1984: 6), and in this way different tastes (which are the legitimate taste, middlebrow taste, and popular taste) can be distinguished according to individuals’ educational levels and social classes (ibid. 16). Taste works as a social orientation, allowing to “sense or intuit what is likely (or unlikely) to befall […] an individual occupying a given position in the social space” (ibid. 466).

On the other hand, taste is utilized as a “social weapon” to distinguish, appreciate, establish, and mark differences by a process of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984: 466). Tastes not only allow for social distinction, but also define social classes and secure positions of status in the social hierarchy (Trigg, 2001: 105). Similarly, since consumption of specific goods is seen as a “stage in a process of communication” (Bourdieu, 1984: 2), consumption realm becomes a field of power relations and

a site of struggle where individuals and classes try to maintain or improve their position – which is also deeply influenced by the amount of economic and cultural capital they possess (Allen and Anderson, 1994: 70).

In this way middle classes employ their judgments of taste not only as a strategy to conform to the legitimate culture dictated by the dominant classes, but also to distinguish themselves and to take a distance from the vulgarity and tastelessness of the working classes (Seymour, 2004: 6-7). In other words, the middle classes aspire to improve their position by "imitating" and appropriating the taste of the dominant classes. However, when these social groups manage to acquire the symbols of distinction of the upper classes (whether objects, practices, or skills), the dominant classes will be urged to redefine and change these symbols to preserve their distinction from the lower social groups and fractions (ibid. 8).

4.2.1. Culinary Taste

Taste and preference in food (not only the product itself, but also the way it is served, treated, presented, and offered) is one of the most insightful examples of how class is enacted (Bourdieu, 1984: 193-200), as food is consumed and conceived differently by social classes. Accordingly, the working classes tend to have abundant and "elastic" meals, served with a spoon or a ladle to avoid too much measuring and counting (ibid. 194), men's plates are usually filled twice as a symbol of manhood, and plates are not changed between dishes (ibid. 195). In this way, in the working class perspective food is considered a nourishing and filling substance.

On the contrary, for the upper classes food consumption is governed by a set of formalities, manners, symbols, and conventional structuring, which all express the bourgeoisie's emphasis on the form, of quality over quantity, their habitus of order, stylization of life, and aestheticization of the practice of eating (Bourdieu, 1984: 196). Moreover, the map of food tastes depends on the combinations of cultural and economic capital that different fractions of social classes have, meaning for example that those with high in cultural capital and lower in economic capital will tend to prefer healthy and exotic food in smaller portions, whilst those with high economic capital and lower cultural capital prefer spirits and alcohols in larger quantity (Seymour, 2004: 11).

By this token, different ways of approaching food consumption reveal different class habituses; in relation to this, food taste and the practice of eating for the dominant classes are an expression of their art of living and idea of refinement (Seymour, 2004: 13). This leads to the fact that taste is

constructed through “membership of a particular habitus located in the hierarchy of class relationships” (ibid. 14), and that the expression of taste becomes a way to claim distinction in the social struggle for legitimacy, status, and power (ibid.). In conclusion, food (and wine) consumption and eating (and drinking) practices, which are strictly related to one’s class and habitus, represent an insightful expression of social distinction and judgments.

5. Empirical Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents the data collected during the two-month fieldwork in Shanghai, including the small sample of interviews conducted in Beijing. It analyzes the data using the theoretical lens provided by Bourdieu and relates them to the existing literature. The first and second sections introduce the interviewees who took part in this research, as well as their wine preferences, drinking habits, experiences, and wine knowledge. The third section discusses the extent to which these middle class individuals, despite not perceiving wine as a source of status and respectability, make use of their judgment of taste to distinguish themselves from another important group of wine consumers – indeed what have been named as "uneducated new rich." The fourth section then points out the "boundaries" of distinction connected to wine consumption that have emerged from the interviews. The fifth and last section contextualizes wine drinking as one component of a new set of habits characterizing the middle class lifestyle.

5.1. Interviewees' Profile

Participants in Shanghai consisted of 12 females and 11 males, ranging in age between 20 and 65 years old (with an average age of 32,78). Eight of them were originally from Shanghai, whilst the remaining fifteen came from other Chinese provinces, namely Zhejiang (4), Heilongjiang (3), Beijing municipality (3), Anhui (1), Fujian (1), Inner Mongolia (1), Shaanxi (1), and Sichuan (1). One of these interviewees was a male Beijing resident who comes often to Shanghai for business-related reasons. The oldest interviewee also possesses the American citizenship, as he moved to the U.S. with his family when he was a child and spent most of his life in California. In addition, among participants in the interview groups there were two Singaporean males residing in Shanghai. Their interviews, however, are not taken into account for the data analysis since the research is focused on Chinese middle class identity, rather than on the Shanghai-based middle class.

Among these 23 participants, 21 have attended university (13 only attained a Bachelor's degree, whilst eight also got a Master's degree), either in China (16) or abroad (5). Both of the interviewees who have not attend university possess a senior high school degree (*gaoji zhongxue* 高级中学). Eight participants hold managerial tasks (being them managers, directors, or business owners), four work as public relations agents, two are freelancers in different sectors (human resources and media), one is a music teacher in a public school, and one is still enrolled in a Bachelor's program at Shanghai University. The remaining seven participants are either white collars or professionals working in different business sectors, including media, advertising, investment banking, education, fashion, and information technology, working either in Chinese companies or in foreign

multinationals. Moreover, three participants have a work that is somehow related to wine, and interestingly two of them (who import foreign wine to China) did not attend university.

As for participants' family background, only two of them come from the working class (being their parents farmers or factory workers). Five participants have their parents working as government officials, whilst the remaining come from a middle class family, being their parents entrepreneurs, professionals, businessmen, or teachers.[18] As far as experiences abroad are concerned, five participants have never travelled outside China, whilst the others have had the chance to travel to other countries either for business or pleasure (or both).

Lastly, the researcher had the chance to meet few interviewees also in Beijing, who were recommended by other participants in Shanghai. Among these, two interviews were selected because of their affinity with the whole research and the interesting insights they provided to it. Interviewee 24 is a Shanghainese man who lives between Beijing (because of his job as manager in the national TV) and Shanghai (where his family lives). Interviewee 25 is a professional chef (therefore, an expert of the food and beverage sector in China) and TV personality, and who took part in the first edition of MasterChef China. They are aged 38 and 32 years old respectively, they both graduated from university, and travelled abroad either for work or pleasure.[19]

5.2. Wine Drinking Habits: Experiences, Frequency, and Preferences

Most of the interviewees drank wine for the first time during a social occasion, such as a wedding banquet, a family dinner, friends' party (either in China or abroad), or during a business meeting. By that time, however, most of them did not like it, because it was either "too sour" (interviewees 1 and 9), or because were not used to it (interviewee 7 and 20). In other words, they were not familiar with this new flavor. However, they started to like wine "more and more with time" (interviewee 10), once they got more used to its taste. In this context, some of them (interviewee 5, 6, and 7) remarked how some years ago many Chinese people used to put soda or coke on wine to make it sweeter.

Most of the respondents consume wine in bars and Western restaurants as well as at home, either while having dinner (even with Chinese food) or before going to sleep, as it is cool, relaxing, and it

[18] This categorization is based on Cheng Li's (2010) classification, which has been delineated in the literature review (ibid. 115-116).
[19] Considering the size of the sample, a summary table with all the information related to the interviewees can be found in appendix 2.

facilitates sleep (interviewee 1 and 7). This means that wine is not consumed only during special occasions such as holiday celebrations or business meetings (Liu and Murphy, 2007: 103); indeed, wine is also consumed on a regular or even daily basis, both in domestic and informal contexts. With the only exception of interviewee 3, who is almost 40 years old and consumes wine only during business meetings, the remaining five interviewees who do not drink wine at home (interviewees 4, 9, 17, 19, and 25) are on their 20s or early 30s, and they mainly have wine during the weekends while partying or dining with friends. This means that wine drinking is not part of their daily habit, but an activity that they do only during special occasions to socialize and to relax with friends. In other words, they consume wine for social communication, as also proved by Li *et al.* (2010) in their inquiry on wine drinking behavior of Chinese young adults.

Liu and Murphy (2007) suggested that Chinese people generally assume that all wine is red, ignoring the existence of white wine (ibid. 102). Although red wine is still considered a popular beverage both for the rich and the less affluent groups (Xu *et al.*, 2014: 266), data collected reveal that a significant number of participants prefer white wine to red wine, as it is "sweeter" (interviewee 1), "easy in the mouth, clearer, and softer" (interviewee 17), "fresh, easy to taste, not too sour" (interviewee 18), and "cooler, cleaner, and doesn't have so many flavors" (interviewee 21).[20] This also reverts to Liu and Murphy's assertion that Chinese people generally prefer stronger tastes when it comes to wine preferences (ibid. 102).

Furthermore, Liu and Murphy (2007) emphasized Chinese people's minimal or lacking knowledge on wine (ibid. 107). However, data collected suggest that most of the interviewees possess some general knowledge on wine. Indeed, they could distinguish different kinds of wine, they knew about the production as well as the great variety of countries of origin. Eleven interviewees expressed their appreciation for New World wines, and interestingly these people mainly consume wine at home.[21] This is related to the fact that Chinese people tend to purchase less costly wines when it comes to their own consumption (Xu *et al.*, 2014: 277).[22] As highlighted by interviewee 20, a female journalist who writes about wine, "Chilean wine has allowed more people to drink wine [in China]" because of its relatively affordable price. On the other hand, only interviewee 3 and 4, who are also occasional drinkers and who are aware of their lacking knowledge on wine, stated that their

[20] When asking which kind of wine they preferred, ten participants responded red wine, ten participants white wine, and six participants did not provide a specific answer (such as "it's the same" or "sweet wines").
[21] The term "New World wines" refers to wines mainly coming from Chile, South Africa, Australia, and Argentina.
[22] As a consequence, they are more likely to favor New World wines, which are mid-to-low-priced as they cost between 150 and 300 RMB per bottle (EU SME Centre, 2011: 4).

favorite kind of wine was the French one only because of its popularity (interviewee 4) and because "greatest wines come from France" (interviewee 3).[23]

5.3. The Judgment of Taste: Wine Appreciation Vs. Wine Consumption

Understanding interviewees' drinking behaviors and experiences with wine, as well as their family, education, and working background, represent a crucial step to address and identify their class habitus. In this context, it is essential to understand how interviewees perceive wine, whether they consider its consumption special or ordinary, forced or natural, to eventually assess whether wine consumption has been integrated within middle class' set of habits and lifestyles in Shanghai.

In relation to this, Bourdieu (1984) argued that preferences and consumption of different genres and works of art within the most "legitimate areas" (such as paintings or music) are associated with different degrees of capital. In this way, works such as *Concerto for the Left Hand* (which presupposes specific modes of acquisition) are opposed other works (like Strauss' waltzes) that can either belong to lower genres or have been "popularized" by a process of integration within the middle-brow culture (ibid. 14). Based on these interviews, it is possible to draw a similar double-dimensioned categorization.

The first dimension concerns wine drinking as an activity. Since its first appearance in China, wine was considered as a Western luxury item (Li, 2011: 135), and in the aftermath of the economic reform (when its ban since the establishment of Maoism was abolished) only the dominant classes (such as rich people or powerful government officials) could afford it and consume it. As a consequence, wine was considered a symbol of social status and wealth (ibid. 137). With the increasing level of incomes and quality of life since the economic reforms, more and more people from the medium strata started to access it. Eventually, they gradually appropriated this symbol of prestige that used to belong only to the dominant classes.

As the middle class has become wealthier and wine drinking has been "popularized" within the middle-brow culture, wine not only is no longer perceived as a luxury good, but it is also considered as an ordinary beverage, to the extent that three interviewees have compared it to Starbucks coffee. Indeed, interviewee 14 claimed that, "red wine is like coffee: everyone can drink it!". In other words, because wine has become more popular and "popularized" within the habitus of the middle

[23] Please see appendix 3 for a summary table of interviewees' drinking habits.

class, its consumption is no longer perceived as a source of status and respectability. In Bourdieu's terminology, wine consumption is no longer a source of symbolic capital.

> "Wine is cheap: it doesn't make you special. People don't use wine to show off, because it's not a luxury good, it's affordable!" (Interviewee 1)

> "I don't think that wine is a luxury good. Wine is popular. Luxury for me is something very expensive, something that I cannot afford. For me wine is easy to get if I want it!" (Interviewee 10)

> "Most Chinese think that wine is a luxury good. I don't think so. People can drink it every day. Many people still think that wine is just something that you give as a gift in some occasions. Prices are still OK, but of course you buy more expensive wine for wedding or business. Not all the wine we need is expensive." (Interviewee 20)

> "Wine is not fancy or luxury. It's something ordinary. Anyone can afford wine, it's like water." (Interviewee 21)

> "No, Coco Chanel is luxury, but not wine. It's not very expensive; everyone can buy it. […] Ten years ago wine was luxury. Now it's just a healthy lifestyle." (Interviewee 22)

> "People don't use wine to show off, because it's not a luxury good, it's affordable. Wine doesn't label you, it doesn't make you unique." (Interviewee 23)

The second dimension of this categorization concerns different social groups consuming different kinds of wine. Just as different music genres and works of art can be associated to various degrees of capital (Bourdieu, 1984: 14), in the same way different wine tastes and preferences can correspond to different levels of cultural and educational capital. Many interviewees associated consumption of expensive French red wine with "rich people" in need to show off their status when in public. According to interviewee 1, most of these people "aren't educated, they speak loud, they don't have much confidence […], that's why they need to prove that they are successful and they show it off." Similarly, interviewee 11 stated that, "if they order very expensive wine, it means that they want to show off." Interviewee 20 has also added that,

> "Businessmen and rich people drink what looks luxury, they choose wine in golden bottles from France […] businessmen just know about Bordeaux and Burgundy because they're famous, they believe only in traditional wine from France, Spain, and Italy."

By this token, consumption of "mainstream" French red wine is associated to individuals with high economic capital but with relatively lower cultural and educational capital, who lack of the knowledge and the manners to appreciate wine properly (as interviewee 23 pointed out, they drink it "in the Chinese way, taking one shot"), and who need to show off their wealth by consuming large amounts of expensive wine. Thus, they favor quantity over quality (Bourdieu, 1984: 196). On the other hand, consumption of New World wines is indirectly associated to those middle-class individuals who possess a higher cultural capital, who have attended university and even studied abroad, who are modern and open-minded, and who live in a cosmopolitan city like Shanghai. Because of their higher cultural capital, these people have the knowledge to recognize and appreciate good wine, which in turn does not necessarily need to be expensive.

To this extent, it is possible to argue that the key element that separates these middle class interviewees, who are well-educated but possess a relatively lower amount of economic capital, and the category of "uneducated new rich" businessmen who consume high amounts of expensive wine without being able to appreciate it properly is *taste*. Indeed, no matter how many bottles of expensive French wine *Lafit* individuals from the latter group buy, their middle class counterparts will always label them as vulgar behaving forcedly and unnaturally – and this is what Bourdieu (1984) called "aesthetic intolerance" (ibid. 56). The habitus in which these "uneducated new rich" grew up did not dispose them to the cultivation of taste, which eventually would have allowed them to appreciate wine (ibid. 6).

On the other hand middle class' habitus and cultural capital predisposed them to a certain natural, taken for granted judgment of taste that also led (and still leads) them to explore and fully practice certain activities and lifestyles, including wine appreciation. By consuming New World wines, these individuals further attempt to distinguish themselves employing their individual tastes. In this way, they behave similarly to Shenzhen's middle class professionals who consume goods with an alternative design aesthetic to distinguish themselves from the "uneducated new rich" groups (*baofahu*) (Elfick, 2011: 203-207). This confirms that wine preferences and consumption practices reveal drinkers' different habituses, degrees of capital possessed, and social group belonging.

5.4. Wine and Its Boundaries of Distinction

As mentioned in the previous section, a large number of interviewees perceived wine consumption as an ordinary and "natural" activity, to the extent that "everyone [in China] drinks wine, everyone can afford it and everyone can buy it" (interviewee 23). Nevertheless, at the same time these interviewees were eager, in a way or another, to emphasize the differences or, in other words, to demarcate the "boundaries" characterizing wine consumption in China. These differences-boundaries that emerged from the interviews and that eventually constructed the ideal "legitimate Chinese wine drinker" encompass three key dimensions, which are the (1) social, (2) generational, and (3) geographical dimension. On the basis of these demarcations, interviewees further emphasized their sense of distinction, and eventually portrayed what they perceive as the "legitimate Chinese wine drinker" – a middle class individual (social dimension) born in the post-80s (generational dimension) and residing in Shanghai (geographical dimension). In other words, the "legitimate wine drinker" they designed is a reflection of their identity.

5.4.1. Social Dimension

The social dimension concerning interviewees' sense of distinction involves two aspects. The first aspect was discussed in the previous section, and it involved "proper" and tasteful consumption of New World wines by the educated and cultivated middle class in opposition to the ostentatious consumption of expensive French wines by the "uneducated new rich" businessmen. The second aspect revolves around the interviewees' perception of their superiority concerning knowledge on wine and consumption of wine when compared to other lower non-specified social groups – indeed, what they generally named "Chinese people."

> "Most people here in China think that red wine is French wine." (Interviewee 1)

> "Most of Chinese don't know much about wine and the quality of wine. […] Most Chinese think that wine is a luxury good. I don't think so." (Interviewee 20)

> "[…] But Chinese people are still not used to wine." (Interviewee 22)

> "I would say [I have] normal knowledge [on wine], but more than the average Chinese people." (Interviewee 23)

Again, what emerges here is that these interviewees try to detach themselves from the wider group of Chinese wine consumers, because they perceive themselves as knowing more about wine – even

though most of them replied that they "did not know much" about it when asked to evaluate their knowledge on wine. This can be explained by the fact that once the symbols of distinction of a superior social group (in this case, foreign wine consumption) are acquired by more individuals from a lower social group, the upper class (in this case, the middle class) attempts to redefine these symbols of distinction to maintain its social distance (Seymour, 2004: 6-8) – in this case, by claiming that although more and more people consume wine in China, their knowledge is very superficial and that they are not able to properly appreciate it.

5.4.2. Generational Dimension

> "Older people from 40 years old drink *baijiu*, younger people drink wine, because it's not so heavy and it's trendy." (Interviewee 1)

> "People on their late 20s up to 40s [mainly consume wine]. […] The traditional *baijiu* is drunk by old people, but it's too strong." (Interviewee 5)

> "Most of them are young people, and old people usually don't drink wine. Young people like foreigners and Western culture." (Interviewee 6)

> "People from the 80s drink only for the sake of drinking [instead of showing it off] […], especially in China's bigger cities. My father and mother wouldn't drink wine." (Interviewee 20)

> "Not so many old people [consume wine in China], they prefer to drink *baijiu* instead. […] Wine is mainly for people between 26 and 40." (Interviewee 25)

The second aspect of this sense of distinction involves the generational dimension, by which five interviewees emphasized that wine consumption is an activity that mostly concerns individuals from the *balinghou* 八零后 (post 80s) generation. In particular, these interviewees associated consumers of foreign wine to the generation they belong to, which is younger, modern, open-minded, more international, cosmopolitan, and culturally more connected to foreigners and to the Western culture. On the other hand, older people belonging to the pre-reform generation are more traditional; in other words they lack of mental flexibility (and, perhaps, the curiosity) to experience and get to know different cultures and new products.

> "The former generation had a different mentality. They worked for life, to eat, for the child, to send him to school. The new generation, like me, is more like the Western one. We want more

> freedom; we want to do what interests us." (Interviewee 1)

Interviewee 1 clearly highlights the different values and principles between the older generations and the post-80s. The life goals of most of the individuals from the older generations revolved around the family, children's upbringing, and work. This was also due to the fact that they lived in a time period that emphasized the working class culture, and in which the symbols and lifestyles of the bourgeoisie were condemned (Li, 2011: 136-137), consumption was reduced to the minimum (Yan, 2009: 210), and leisure activities were more directed towards the community rather than the individual (Yu, 2014: 57). Taking a step further, what emerges from these interviews is that it is because of older generations' habitus that these people are more likely to consume the traditional Chinese spirit, *baijiu*, and to even not consider the idea to experience something new and foreign – such as wine.[24]

5.4.3. Geographical Dimension

> "In South China people drink wine, in the North they still prefer Chinese spirits, *baijiu* for example." (Interviewee 2)

> "Here in the South we prefer wine. In the North they prefer Chinese spirits and beer." (Interviewee 6)

> "The Chinese way of consuming wine would be for business occasions, without really tasting it, taking one shot. They do it especially in the North of China." (Interviewee 23)

> "You also have to know that there're big differences between the North and South of China. In Shanghai they tend to drink more wine." (Interviewee 25)

The third aspect concerns the geographical dimension. According to which five interviewees perceive that foreign wine is mainly consumed in the "modern" South of China, whilst in the North of China people still prefer traditional beverages (*baijiu* and beer).[25] Because of this, people from the North of China are perceived as lacking of the tools to fully appreciate foreign wine, to the extent that they consume it in the Chinese style (taking one shot), without really tasting it (as above-

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[24] *Baijiu* 白酒 is a kind of Chinese spirit. Chinese spirits boast a long tradition in China's history; indeed, they have been made for nearly 1000 years. They are usually made from sorghum, corn, and barley, but also from other ingredients such as sugar, rice, rice wash, and bran. Generally, Chinese spirits have a high alcoholic content and are transparent (Li, 2011: 30).

[25] The first beer brewery was opened in Harbin in 1900 by a group of Russians, and since then the brewing industry has continuously expanded, to the extent that beer is now one of the most widely consumed beverages in China. Additionally, China has become one of the world's largest beer producers in the last few years (Li, 2011: 45-47).

stated by interviewee 23). Interestingly, interviewee 24 (the Beijing-based Shanghainese) further added,

> "In Shanghai people tend to spend more on food and drinks, on tasty things, whereas in Beijing people tend to buy clothes and branded bags, so they show off more. […] In the South we prefer softer tastes such as wine; in the North they prefer stronger tastes, such as *baijiu* and beer. They're more traditionalist. For example, I went only once to have wine with my colleagues here in Beijing. They're more close, more traditionalist."

The general picture that follows portrays people in the North of China as more tied to Chinese traditions and less willing to "absorb" new foreign lifestyles, contrasting with to the open citizens from the South who welcome, embrace, and enjoy these modern habits, including wine consumption. In particular, wine consumption is perceived as an ordinary habit in the cosmopolitan, multicultural, and international city of Shanghai – and this perception is deeply connected to the city's colonial past, when it firstly started to acquire and increase its status as "the vanguard of China's engagement with colonial food" (Swislocki, 2008: 125).

> "We're in Shanghai, Shanghai is a big city and it's international. This is a special case." (Interviewee 7)

> "In Shanghai people drink wine very casually, because Shanghai is international and multicultural." (Interviewee 10)

> "People in Shanghai follow Western lifestyles, because it's a big city and it's more international. In smaller cities they follow the other people's styles." (Interviewee 11)

Living in Shanghai and having the chance to experience modern and fancy (and consequently tasteful) lifestyles is therefore perceived as a privilege, as a plus – indeed as a marker of distinction from other areas or cities in China. Taking a step back from interviewees' perceptions and focusing on the social reality, Bourdieu (1984) explained that differences in lifestyles as well as material and symbolic appropriation also depend on geographical space and geographical distance, and not merely on economic, cultural, and social capital (ibid. 124).

5.5. Trendy, Healthy, and Relaxing: Contextualizing Wine and Middle Class Lifestyles

In the literature review it was highlighted that many scholars have agreed on considering consumption and lifestyles as two key indicators of middle class identity. In order to assess whether wine consumption is also part of middle class identity, this section analyzes the interaction of participants' perceptions and ideas on middle class on the one hand and on wine drinking on the other, contextualizing wine drinking within the set of activities typical of middle class lifestyle.

Perceptions and ideas on middle class	Perceptions and ideas on wine
"Middle class is when […] you don't have to worry or stress out. […] In terms of lifestyles, if you're middle class you don't mind to spend money and you enjoy yourself. You go to nice restaurants, partying with friends, etc." (Interviewee 9) "In my opinion, middle class is firstly 'mind': being open minded and multicultural. […] [What they do is] going abroad at least twice per year, staying in good hotels, at least for 10 days, going to better restaurants like this one, meeting friends, being very relaxed." (Interviewee 10) "[Middle class is when you can] afford what you want, good taste, don't need to care about children's education." (Interviewee 12) "[Middle class is] a lot of free time, opportunity to travel." (Interviewee 14) "[Middle class people] spoil themselves, they enjoy life." (Interviewee 16) "Middle class is what you receive is enough for you. You can pay and buy what you like and enjoy your life. […] It's just enjoy your life and relax." (Interviewee 17) "[Middle class people] go to the gym, they dance, they travel abroad twice per year, they have a pet, they're busy at home." (Interviewee 22)	"[Wine] is international, trendy, enjoy life." (Interviewee 1) "For the Chinese middle class wine is definitely a lifestyle. Wine creates atmosphere and is relaxing, whereas beer creates competition and drinking spirits is a 'suicide'! Wine is special, it allows you to talk, to relax, it's enjoying, it's lifestyle." (Interviewee 7) "Regular drinkers are rich people or from the upper-middle class, or people who studied abroad. They have time, mood, and money. If you're stressed you don't develop this habit." (Interviewee 9) "It's the attitude, wine makes people relaxed. Nowadays many people drink it because it makes you relaxed." (Interviewee 10) "Wine is not one of the main activities [for the middle class], but you can buy it and drink it." (Interviewee 22) "Wine is a product of taste. The middle class has […] high levels of lifestyles, so they mainly care about taste and health. For example, our *baijiu* is not healthy, whilst the wine it is." (Interviewee 24)

According to these interviewees, being part of the middle class means conducting a comfortable and "carefree" life that allows for a relaxing lifestyle. Because of their financial means, middle class people do not need to hurry and to worry about their job. Additionally, they have enough time to dedicate to their hobbies and other leisure and social activities, including sports, travelling, going to

restaurants, and meeting friends. Thus, the middle class lifestyle can be described with the words "enjoy life" (as many interviewees have remarked). Similarly, interviewees associated wine drinking with relaxation and enjoyment. Wine is not just something formal to be consumed in public or during business occasions to maintain and preserve one's value of face or *mianzi* 面子 (Liu and Murphy, 2007: 106; Camillo, 2012: 84; and Xu *et al.*, 2014: 277). Wine can also create a pleasant and intimate atmosphere that allows people to relax, chat, and cultivate their social ties.

It is possible to note that interviewees' ideas on middle class' lifestyles and perceptions on wine match and interact between each other. As middle class people can enjoy both more free time and financial resources, they are able to conduct a comfortable and enjoyable lifestyle, and this relaxing lifestyle clearly includes wine, which is a "healthy"[26] beverage of relaxation and enjoyment, both for men and for women. In this way, wine places itself in a wider context of activities constituting middle class' lifestyle, which in return reflects middle class identity. Indeed, an identity that is built on the notions of good taste, education, cosmopolitanism, relaxation, and enjoyment. As interviewee 9 claimed, "wine consumption is *definitely* for the middle class!".

Lastly, it is interesting to note that some of the interviewees tended to detach themselves from the middle class group when asked to define middle class, using the words "they" or "middle class people." Aside interviewees 1, 11, 19, 22, and 23, who explicitly responded "yes" when asked whether they believe they are part of the middle class group, all the others tended to underestimate and deny their middle class belonging. However, when considering factors such as their level of education, their job, some of their properties (interviewee 20, for example, possesses a house and a car, but she thinks she is not part of the middle class), and especially their hobbies and their level of satisfaction of their lifestyle, all reflect and match with their definition of middle class.

> "During the weekends I watch movies and cook. I used to go to yoga […]. At the end of this year I want to get the driving license! […] At the moment yes [I'm happy about my life], because I think now I like my job, and during the weekend I see my friends and go to various events. […] I'm not workaholic, I relax and I go out." (Interviewee 9)

> "I like parties, meeting friends, shopping, play the piano, KTV, gym. […] I'm very happy about my life because I like it. […] It's a modern city lifestyle." (Interviewee 10)

[26] All interviewees have emphasized that wine is becoming more and more popular also for its health benefits. In relation to this, Saritha Pingali (2011) explained that wine has become an alternative to *baijiu* following the Chinese government's increase of taxes in high-strength spirits, coupled with the media's promotion for healthier drinking habits (ibid. 26).

“[I like] drinking wine, travelling around the world, writing articles, watching movies, cinema, drama, art, going to galleries, swimming, and reading books. Yes, [I’m happy about my life] because I do the job that I want, I can learn from my job, I can travel and know about the world. I have a comfortable lifestyle. I can do everything that I want. I feel comfortable and free.” (Interviewee 20)

6. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to explore the extent to which wine consumption and drinkers' perceptions on wine could help understand middle class identity in Shanghai. In order to proceed with the whole research, this thesis has relied on both 25 semi-structured interviews to middle class wine drinkers in Shanghai (employing also two interviews collected in Beijing), as well as several sessions of non-participant observation in wine bars and restaurants (primary sources). It also utilized existing studies on middle class and consumption in China (secondary sources). Data collected have been further analyzed employing Bourdieu's theoretical framework, focusing in particular on the notions of cultural capital, habitus, and cultivation of taste.

This research's findings suggest that wine consumption habits have changed in China in the past years. Wine knowledge has generally increased, as people do not assume that all wine is red and French. In fact, many interviewees not only preferred white wine to red wine, but also expressed their appreciation for New World wines. Moreover, wine is also consumed on a regular basis in the domestic and intimate contexts, in addition to more formal occasions. This can be explained by the fact that wine has become more accessible and popular within Chinese society. Whilst some years ago wine was a symbol of prestige and wealth because mainly consumed by China's élites, now it has been "popularized" and integrated also within the middle class' consumption habits and habitus. Consequently, middle class individuals perceive wine as an ordinary beverage, and according to them its consumption is something obvious, which no longer represents a purveyor of social status.

However, wine still carries the image of good taste. Taste represents the key element to distinguish and assess proper wine appreciators from ostentatious consumers, or, based on the interviewees' perceptions, educated and cultivated middle class from "uneducated new rich." Middle class consumers, who possess a university degree, some of whom have studied abroad, who are open-minded and curious to experience new things and lifestyles (in other words, who have higher cultural capital) perceive themselves as the proper wine appreciators, in contrast to showy rich businessmen who consume large amounts of expensive wine to show off their wealth and success. This confirms Bourdieu's theory that taste is deeply connected to one's cultural capital and that it can also work as a social indicator, defining social groups and allowing them for social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984: 466).

In this way, even though participants remarked several times that wine can be consumed by "everyone in China," these interviews unveiled three key boundaries (that encompass the social,

generational, and geographical dimensions) concerning wine consumption in China. These boundaries of wine consumption portrayed and at the same time circumscribed what interviewees perceived as "legitimate wine drinkers" – indeed, those who are able to fully and properly appreciate wine. *Belonging* to certain social groups (urban middle class), generational groups (the post-80s), and geographical areas (South of China and Shanghai) implies high levels of education, cultural knowledge, modes of thoughts, and openness (in other words, cultural capital). In the same way, *membership* to these groups represents a condition for fully accessing and assessing "legitimate" wine culture. Those who are outside these demarcations lack of the possibilities, or better perhaps, they lack of the cultural capital that would allow them to fully appreciate wine – and, to this extent, to access legitimate culture.

It is possible to conclude that wine consumption provides significant insights regarding middle class identity in Shanghai. Firstly, this research has showed how wine manifests urban middle class' tasteful, fancy, and cosmopolitan lifestyles, based on the notions of enjoyment, relaxation, and recreation. This confirms that lifestyles communicate and reflect individuals' wishes, aspirations, and affiliation to specific social categories and cultural values (Croll, 2006: 21-22). Secondly, this thesis has highlighted the extent to which middle class' perceptions and "rules" of proper wine appreciation also indirectly reflect and demarcate their ideal boundaries of class membership (based on cultural capital, education, and taste). In conclusion, this research reveals that, when studying consumption and middle class identity in China, assessing the "*what*" or the object of consumption is not sufficient. It is necessary to look at other additional factors, such as the consumption manners: indeed, the "*how*." In this perspective, the logic of "you are *what* you buy" (Elfick, 2011: 198) needs to be juxtaposed to the notion of "you are *how* you consume."

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Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

Questions aiming to identify interviewees' personal profile (family, education, work…).

1. How old are you?
   你的年龄是什么？
2. Where do you live in Shanghai/Beijing? In which area?
   在上海／北京你住在哪里？什么地区？
3. Are you from Shanghai/Beijing or did you move there from another Chinese city?
   你是在上海／北京出生的还是还是你在上海搬了？
4. What is your job?
   你的工作是什么？
5. Did you attend university? Bachelor's or Master's?
   你上大学了吗？本科还是硕士？
6. What is/was your parents' job?
   你父母（以前）的工作是什么？
7. Have you ever been abroad? Where did you travel? Why did you go there? (business, travelling, exchange, visiting)
   你出国了吗？你去了什么国家？是为了旅游还是工作？

Questions aiming to identify interviewees' wine consumption habits and perceptions on wine.

8. Do you remember your first time tasting foreign wine? Was it in China or abroad? On which occasion? Did you like it? Why?
   你记得你第一次喝过外国葡萄酒了吗？你是在哪里喝的？你喜欢了吗？为什么？
9. How much wine do you consume every week? Do you drink it only when you're out or also at home?
   你每个星期喝几杯／瓶红酒？你在哪里喝红酒 （在家，在酒吧，在西方饭馆）？
10. What are your favorite bars/wine bars in Shanghai/Beijing? Why?
    你在上海／北京最喜欢的葡萄酒酒吧是什么？为什么？
11. What kind of wine do you like? Why?
    你喜欢什么样的红酒？为什么？
12. If you have to choose between consuming good wine in a relatively bad wine bar or consuming bad wine in a fancy wine bar, what would you choose?

如果你必须在一个一般般的酒吧里好酒和在一个高大上的酒吧里和一般般的酒之间选择，你会怎么选择？

13. Do you think do you possess any kind of knowledge about wine?
    你觉得你关于红酒的知识怎么样？
14. Do you think that wine is a luxury good? Why?
    你觉得红酒是奢侈品吗？为什么？
15. Do you think that there is a link between wine consumption and status? Why?
    对你来说，红酒和身份有关系吗？为什么？

Questions aiming to identify interviewees' ideas on middle class.

16. According to you, what is middle class?
    对你来说，中产阶级是什么？
17. What are your hobbies?
    你的爱好是什么？
18. Are you satisfied about your life? Why?
    你对你的生活满意不满意？为什么？

Questions introducing the unstructured part of the interview.

19. Why do you think that more and more people consume wine in China?
    对你来说，为什么越来越多中国人喝红酒？
20. Who consumes wine in China?
    在中国谁喝红酒？

Appendix 2 – Interviewees' Profile

	Gender	Age	From Shanghai	District	University Degree	Job	Parents' Job	Abroad
1	M	35	Yes	Xuhui (French C.)	Bachelor	Short movies producer/Director	Farmers	No
2	M	29	Yes	Pudong	No	Manager (Import/Export Sector)	M: Shop Assistant F: Worker	No
3	M	39	No, Beijing (In SH for work)	–	Bachelor	Owner/Director of a Media Company	M: Teacher F: Business	Yes
4	F	20	Yes	Jing'An	(Bachelor) Student	Assistant/Student	Business	No
5	M	65	Yes, but also American	Downtown	Bachelor (US)	Agent/Events Organizer	Restaurant Owners	Yes
6	M	42	Yes	Huangpu Area	Bachelor	Owner of Travel Agency	Business	Yes
7	F	40	No, Harbin	Pudong	Master (UK)	Freelance Headhunter	M: Sales Industry F: Company Manager	Yes
8	M	33	Yes	Jing'An	No	Manager in a Wine Import Company	–	Yes
9	F	27	No, Heilongjiang	Jing'An	Master (UK)	Training Coordinator	M: Teacher F: Company Owner	Yes
10	F	31	No, Heilongjiang	Xujiahui (French C.)	Master	General Music Teacher	M: Accountant F: General Manager	Yes
11	F	31	No, Beijing	Xujiahui (French C.)	Master	Buyer/Company Owner	University Teachers	Yes
12	F	25	No, Zhejiang	Pudong	Bachelor	IT	Official Workers	No
13	M	26	No, Zhejiang	Changning	Bachelor	Advertising	Artists	Yes
14	F	29	No, Zhejiang	Hongkou	Master	Advertising	Writers	Yes
15	F	30	No, Zhejiang	Zhabei	Master	Editor	Lawyers	Yes
16	M	27	No, Xi'An	Jing'An	Master	Fashion Buyer	Engineers	Yes
17	M	28	No, Xiamen	Jing'An	Bachelor	PR	Government Officers	Yes
18	M	30	No, Beijing	Jing'An	Bachelor	IPR	Government Officers	No
19	M	31	No, Chengdu	Jing'An	Master	PR	M: Teacher F: Engineer	Yes
20	F	35	Yes	Shanghai Library	Bachelor	Freelancer, Editor, Media, Wine and Travel Writer	Teachers	Yes
21	F	37	Yes	Xujiahui (French C.)	Bachelor (UK)	Manager	M: Government Officer F: Manager	Yes
22	F	32	No, Anhui	Pudong	Bachelor	Investment Banking	Bankers	Yes
23	F	32	No, Inner Mongolia	Xujiahui	Bachelor	Business Owner Interior Design	Government Officers	Yes

Small Sample Collected in Beijing								
24	M	38	(From Beijing) No, Shanghai	Bowuguan	Bachelor	Manager (Media and TV)	Father: Manager Mother: Cook	Yes
25	M	32	Yes	City Centre	Bachelor	Chef and TV personality	Workers	Yes

Appendix 3 – Interviewees' Drinking Habits

This table summarizes interviewees' data concerning their drinking habits and preferences.

	First Time?	Liked?	Drinking Frequency?	Where?	Preferences?	Knowledge?
Interviewee 1	Wedding banquet	/	Always in summer, before going to sleep	At home, mainly	White, from Chile ("it's more emotional")	No
Interviewee 2	Family party	No	Twice a week, while eating or before going to sleep	At home, mainly	Both white and red (from France, Germany, Chile)	"I'm a professional drinker" (job)
Interviewee 3	Business meeting	/	/	When he goes out with friends	Only red wine (from France, because "it's popular")	No
Interviewee 4	Friends' party	No	Only when partying during the weekends or when she goes to wine bars	Only out	Only red wine (from France, because "it's famous")	A little bit
Interviewee 5	Friends' party (US)	/	Every other month	At home, after dinner	Sweeter wines, such as Moscato or Lambrusco (Italian)	No
Interviewee 6	/	/	More while travelling abroad	Both at home and in wine bars	White, Tokay from Hungary	A little bit
Interviewee 7	Working in hotel	No	Two bottles of wine per week	Mainly at home, before going to sleep, or when dining in Western restaurants (twice per month)	Red and dried, Merlot and Cabernet (Chile, Australia, South Africa, Spain, Italy, and France)	On a "learning process"
Interviewee 8	/	/	Every day	Both at home and outside	White wine	Yes (job)
Interviewee 9	Friends' party (UK)	No	Every weekend	Only in bars or at parties – no alcohol at home	Red, light, fruity, and sweet wines	No
Interviewee 10	Friends' party	No	At least two glasses of wine per week	Both at home and outside	Red wine from Chile	A little bit – "I know what I like!"
Interviewee 11	Friends' party	No	Every day	Both at home and outside	Sweet wine	A little bit – "I know how to choose good wine."
Interviewee 12	/	/	Once or twice per week	Both at home and outside	"Everything is the same"	Basic knowledge
Interviewee 13	/	/	Once per week	Both at home and outside	"Everything is the same"	No
Interviewee 14	/	/	Every day	Both at home and outside (bars, clubs)	Fruity wines and champagne	Yes
Interviewee 15	/	/	Every day at home, twice per week outside	Both at home and outside	Red wines and rosés	A little bit
Interviewee 16	/	/	Three times per week	Both at home and outside	Red wines and champagne	A little bit
Interviewee	Family	"It was	One bottle per	Only in bars	Chardonnay	No – "You don't

17	dinner	fine”	week			need any knowledge!”
Interviewee 18	Friends in a pub	Yes	Sometimes every day, sometimes only during the weekends (depending on the mood)	Both at home and outside	Chardonnay	No – “I’d want to”
Interviewee 19	Friends’ dinner	Yes	One bottle per week	Only outside	Chardonnay	No
Interviewee 20	Friends’ party	No	A glass of wine every other day	Both at home and outside	Riesling and Pinot	Yes – “I have the knowledge to choose and recommend” (job)
Interviewee 21	Friends’ party	Yes	One bottle and a half per week	Mainly at home	White wine (from Italy)	A little bit – “I mainly follow my instinct”
Interviewee 22	Friends’ party	No	One bottle per month	Mainly at home	White wine	A little bit
Interviewee 23	Family party (CNY)	Yes	One bottle per week	Both at home and outside	Pinot noir	“More than the average Chinese people”
Interviewee 24	Friends’ party	Yes	Two bottles per month	Mainly at home	Merlot from Chile	No
Interviewee 25	Friends’ party	Yes	One bottle per week	Only outside	Red wine from Chile, South Africa, and Australia	A little bit

Appendix 4 – Maps and Wine Bars in Shanghai

Map of districts in Shanghai

Source: China Tourist Maps

Map of wine bars were observations and part of the interviews were conducted (all located in downtown Shanghai)

1. Malabar (Spanish restaurant and bar. Average prices for wine: 40 RMB/glass, 250 RMB/bottle)
2. Enoterra (French bistrot. Average prices: 150-299 RMB)
3. Burdigala (French bistrot. Average prices: 150-299 RMB)
4. Wine Connection Bar&Bistro (French bistrot. Average prices: 150-299 RMB)
5. Bella Napoli (Italian restaurant. Average prices: 50-149 RMB)
6. Doctor Wine (French-oriented bistrot, with a wide selection of wines from other countries. Average prices: 150-299 RMB)
7. Fumo (Italian wine bar. Average prices: 150-299 RMB)

More information on these restaurants and bars can be found at: http://www.tripadvisor.com/, http://www.smartshanghai.com/ and http://www.timeoutshanghai.com/.