Cosmopolitan Culture and Counterculture among Chinese Youth: Face-to-face Communities in the Smartphone Era

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Abstract

Young Chinese people have come of age in a communicative environment that is radically new, involving near-pervasive mobile broadband internet access and unprecedented exposure to global media. I employ a mix of ethnographic and computational methods to compare two groups of cosmopolitan Chinese youth – elite university students and subcultural bohemians – to explore the political implications of their cosmopolitan communications. The cosmopolitanism of Chinese youth, understood as both communicative diversity and globalized cultural engagement, is shaped in divergent ways by the influence of China's orthodox Confucian and heterodox cultural traditions, with marked implications for patterns of online and offline communication. Constraints imposed by the university environment and Confucian social norms embed elite students in homogeneous networks that their extensive online communications do little to diversify. Exposure to the competing perspectives of global and domestic news and academic content generates both a normative relativism and a sophisticated grasp of practical political possibilities and constraints. This supports a hierarchical and pragmatic politics in which both national interests and those of their own social echelon, including progressive identity claims, are seen as being furthered by meritocratic authoritarianism. By contrast, bohemian proclivities for free-wheeling face-to-face interaction embed them in heterogeneous, cross-cutting networks, within which they synthesize discontents from diverse areas of Chinese society; combined with the influence of the heterodox tradition and the oppositional symbolic repertoires of global subcultures, this results in an egalitarian and reductively idealistic politics that supports opposition to the Party-State and its authoritarian system. The dominance of elite students' orthodox cosmopolitanism suggests that the internet-mediated, globalized communications of Chinese youth constitute little immediate threat to the authoritarian system. However, the increasing scale and influence of bohemian heterodox cosmopolitanism and its idealistic politics, driven by factors beyond the control of Party-State, may ultimately undermine the manageability of Chinese youth.

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1 Introduction

This thesis compares the communications of two groups of young Chinese people selected for their cosmopolitanism. The first group, elite students at Liangshan University (the institution and city are de-identified, as will be explained later), were characterized by a history of high educational attainment and expectations for future career success and international mobility. Although they had an extensive and sophisticated engagement with the wider world through the internet, their offline social lives were highly circumscribed. The second group was centered on my field site's live-music scene. This group, which I label 'bohemian' (the appropriateness of the label will be explained), were characterized by heterogeneous, cross-cutting networks of online and face-to-face interaction, generating powerful bonds of local solidarity that nevertheless also include diverse trans-local and global connections. Both groups were recruited in the same district of 'Liangshan', a mid-sized city in a highly populated region of inland China. 'Mid-sized' must be understood in the Chinese context – with a population of some millions, it is larger than any British city bar London, or any US city bar New York.

Contemporary Chinese youth have grown up under formative conditions of widespread prosperity, mobile-internet-enabled communicative diversity and cultural globalization that are radically new. Theories of social change suggest that these new conditions are likely to presage wider changes throughout society. Drawing on global survey data, Inglehart and Welzel argue that because 'generational differences are an enduring attribute of given cohorts', when 'younger generations are socialized under significantly different conditions from those that shaped earlier generations, the values of the entire society will gradually change through intergenerational replacement' (2005: 7, 99). The formative conditions under which American youth came of age in the 1960s, though very different to China today, were also highly novel, contributing to a dramatic cultural break with earlier generations. The so-called 'hippies' were wrong in believing that 'the ideas and ethics of the counterculture would soon predominate in society at large' (Miller, 2011: 111), but those

ideas – social responsibility, environmentalism, health and dietary practices, liberal attitudes towards sexuality, gender and race – have subsequently percolated through much of American society; though they remain contested, they have had notable political effects.

Bottom-up change of this kind may be less likely to emerge in China, given its authoritarian system and the unparalleled influence of the Chinese Party-State[1] over mechanisms of sociocultural reproduction. Bruce Gilley argues that to understand political change in China, we must study the state itself; he dismisses alternative state–society, society-centered, historical, and globalized research paradigms on methodological and empirical grounds. He suggests that 'provided…China's party–state continues to monopolize the production of norms in which authoritarian rule is not transitional and corporate but perpetual and dominating, its rule can persist' (Gilley 2011: 532). As we shall see, however, bottom-up change cannot be entirely dismissed. This thesis aims to identify some of its sources, even if it does not provide definitive answers about their potential role in political change.

Whatever the current degree of support for authoritarianism in China, we should be skeptical that any organization can literally monopolize the production of norms, political or otherwise, across a civilization comprising a fifth of the world population (Scott, 1990). While political actors may serve as 'critical gatekeepers in switching…on and off' (Gilley 2011: 523) elements of internal or external influence, there remain social and cultural trends in China to which the state's orientation is largely responsive (Weller, 2008, 2012). The power of the Party-State, however awesome, is not unconstrained; it can crack down on civil society, but not without incurring the consequences of this suppression. While many of the key trends in contemporary Chinese society can be traced back to reforms instigated by the state, and continue to be shaped thorough purposeful intervention, this by no means implies complete control over their future ramifications.

[1] My use of the term 'Party-State' denotes the entire governmental structure in China, while also accommodating its monopolistic domination by the more tightly bounded Chinese Communist Party.

The speed of these changes in contemporary China – particularly among young cosmopolitan populations – should inspire caution in any assessment of the degree of state control over their trajectory, and over mechanisms of sociocultural reproduction more generally. Perhaps, given the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) institutional capacity for adaptation in the face of uncertainty (Heilmann and Perry, 2011), it does not need to control sociocultural change in order to sustain authoritarian rule over the long term. Nonetheless, rapid change of this kind cannot fail to have political consequences, even if only through determining the context for state action. The more we understand about how society and culture are changing in China, the more we learn about the conditioning constraints under which any future Chinese state must operate.

The complex causal interrelations between economic, social, cultural, and political change are beyond the scope of all but the most abstract social-scientific work. This thesis, even within the context of China-focused scholarship, can only offer partial evidence for wider systemic relations, since it examines two groups in one city. This research is at a more micro level; nonetheless, the ethnographic commitment to holism (Horst and Miller, 2012) demands a theoretical accounting of the relationships between its local participants and the wider global processes that impinge on their lives. My aim is to provide an explanation of the congruence of local and global forces at work among two highly distinct communities of young Chinese cosmopolitans, by depicting the sociocultural influence of global cultures and communications technologies on these groups, and their political ramifications. The wider theoretical value of this contribution – in understanding the resilience of political opportunities and constraints among Chinese youth more widely, or the impact of globalized internet-mediated communications on social change beyond the Chinese context – will emerge in the conclusions to this thesis.

1.1 Cosmopolitan Communications

The concept of cosmopolitanism is contested in the social sciences, with multiple competing definitions (Tyfield and Urry, 2010). I use the term in two distinct though interrelated senses: as a pattern of diverse social communications (Collins, 2009), and as a pattern of 'transnational cultural flows' (Appadurai, 1996: 49). Definitional issues will be discussed later; here, the important point is the broad nature of cosmopolitanism in both social and cultural senses: social communications can be diverse in various ways that make a substantive difference to the ramifications of this diversity, not least of which is whether they occur face-to-face or online. Similarly, global cultural flows can comprise many forms of content, points of origin, patterns of dissemination; all these differences, as well as whether such flows are mediated by the internet, are likely to shape their effects.

The cosmopolitanism of the two groups compared in this thesis was quite different: in cultural terms, among the elite students, it was chiefly manifested in near-fluency in English and other foreign languages, and extensive engagement with foreign entertainment and news media; among the bohemians, it was chiefly manifested in their extensive face-to-face interactions with foreigners and engagement with diverse global subcultures, including punk, reggae, and psytrance, as well as associated media. No adequate theory currently exists of the trans-cultural influence of globalized media consumption; attempts to demonstrate a direct, linear influence on culture of international media flows depend on so many provisos concerning cultural firewalls (especially for China) as to be unconvincing, and further tend to fall back on a conception of trans-cultural influence as uniform and unidirectional (e.g. Norris and Inglehart, 2012). In unpacking the ramifications of the divergent cosmopolitanisms exhibited by the elite-student and bohemian groups, I argue that any adequate theory of trans-cultural influence must necessarily be varied and multi-dimensional, to accommodate the degree of divergence that is encountered even at the local level.

The increasing cosmopolitanism of Chinese youth, reflected for example in widespread demand for televisual entertainment from overseas (Li, 2014; Gao, 2016), or the burgeoning appreciation for subcultural musical genres of foreign origin, such as hip-hop (Luo and Ming, 2020; Lin and Zhao, 2022), constitutes a potential threat to the Party-State's command over sociocultural reproduction in China. This threat is inextricably linked with young Chinese people's use of information technology, particularly the smartphone, which is near-pervasive in urban areas. One function of the border-level 'Great Firewall' (Tsui, 2008) that selectively insulates China from the global internet is to shield the population from cosmopolitan influences, heightening the efficacy of the Party-State's extensive controls over domestic cultural production (Zhao, 2008). However, almost every member of both groups compared in this thesis employed virtual private network (VPN) software to enable unrestricted access to the global internet. This distinguishes them from the great majority of Chinese internet users; Roberts (2018) estimates that only around five percent of urban internet users have ever evaded border-level censorship. Taneja and Wu argue for a 'greater role of cultural proximity than access blockage in explaining online behaviors', suggesting that the firewall does not render China's internet 'particularly isolated compared with other geolinguistic clusters [of websites] that take shape on the "open" Internets' (2014: 297). Yet both groups compared in this thesis were not only technically capable of reaching out beyond China's local internet ecosystem, but also possessed the cultural inclination and linguistic capacity to do so. If internet-mediated exposure to cultural content or political information from overseas is lessening the Party-State's influence on Chinese youth culture, then it is among groups such as these where such effects ought to be discernable.

Some decades ago, US President Bill Clinton noted that 'China has been trying to crack down on the Internet – good luck. That's … like trying to nail Jello to the wall … their effort to do that just proves how real these changes are and how much they threaten the status quo' (2000). In the intervening years, scholarship emphasizing the emancipatory qualities of internet use, facilitating democratization and challenges to authoritarian rule (Benkler, 2006;

Shirky, 2008, 2011; Yang, 2009), has increasingly been countered by arguments in the opposite direction (Hindman, 2009; Leibold, 2011; Morozov, 2011; Sunstein, 2017). One prominent reason for waning optimism in this area is the widely acknowledged success and sophistication of the Chinese Party-State's efforts to control online communication within its jurisdiction (King, Pan and Roberts, 2013; Roberts, 2018). I contribute to this debate through a detailed exposition of the political worldviews and contentious proclivities, including attitudes towards state internet control, of two groups who have been exposed at a formative age to China's radically new conditions of pervasive mobile broadband internet access. While both groups are subject to the influence of Party-State control over the domestic internet, in common with Chinese youth in general, their distinctive capacity to evade border-level censorship heightens their relevance to this debate. If the internet is undermining the resilience of China's authoritarian status quo, then evidence of this effect should also be discernable among groups such as these.

1.2 Chapter Summary

Against this background, an outline of the thesis chapters can now be given. In the second chapter, I review various fields of scholarship that pertain to the shared and distinguishing characteristics of the elite-student and bohemian groups: on Party-State controls over online communication in China, on the cultural underpinnings of divergent online environments, on cosmopolitanism as both communicative diversity and globalized cultural engagement, on the dynamics of social interaction in mainstream and subcultural groups, and on Chinese culture in the orthodox Confucian and heterodox traditions. I highlight the political implications of this scholarship, and then discuss political contention in China generally, before elaborating my research questions.

In the third chapter, I outline the mix of research methods employed in this multiple, embedded case study, including ethnographic participant-observation and interview methods, as well as computational techniques used in data gathering and analysis. I discuss the

limitations of these methods and the practical constraints from which these limitations derive. I outline the ethical issues raised by this research, including de-identification measures.

In the fourth chapter, I introduce my field site and the social environments occupied by both groups, describing both their physical settings and their use of information and communications technologies (ICTs). I explore the impact of these environments, as well as the orthodox Confucian and heterodox traditions, on their divergent patterns of social organization, while depicting their communicative diversity in internet-mediated and face-to-face interactions. I further explore the impact of these differences through quantitative data and visualizations of their egocentric social networks.

In the fifth chapter, I outline the divergent cultures of the two groups, drawing on evidence from their online output, cultural consumption, and embodied practices. I elaborate differences between the two groups' characteristic evaluative frameworks, their influence by China's orthodox Confucian and heterodox cultural traditions, and the distinct cosmopolitanisms reflected in their information environments.

In the sixth chapter, I show how elite-student and bohemian political worldviews differ between pragmatic hierarchical and idealistic egalitarian politics, while highlighting connections between those outlooks and the social and cultural differences between the groups that I have outlined in earlier chapters. I then turn to the two groups' distinct information environments, dispositions towards news information and state information control, and the constraints to which they are subject in their own online communications. Finally, I explore their distinct patterns of contention, both in online and offline spheres.

In the seventh chapter, I bring together my argument concerning the confluence of social, cultural, and technological factors that underlies the divergence between the orthodox cosmopolitanism of elite students and the heterodox cosmopolitanism of bohemians, and how they interrelate with the pragmatic and idealistic politics of these groups respectively. Then, I contextualize elite-student and bohemian by comparing them with other forms of internet and

smartphone-enabled contention within China and across the globe. Finally, I discuss the structural interrelation of these various forms of contention.

In the eighth and final chapter, I discuss the wider implications of this thesis for the ongoing capacity of the Party-State to maintain control over Chinese youth culture, especially in the burgeoning bohemian influence on culturally mainstream youth. I discuss general theoretical implications for arguments concerning the role of the internet in fostering network diversity and democratization, and consider the ramifications for the ongoing stability of China's authoritarian system, distinguishing between the effects of the internet itself, and of the Party-State's control over it.

2 Literature Review

Over the past several decades, China has undergone economic, technological, and social change of a scale and pace perhaps unparalleled in human history. Especially within China, these developments are often seen as a vindication of that country's single-party political system which, despite considerable refinement in its capacity for responsiveness (Nathan, 2003; Weller, 2008), remains fundamentally authoritarian. There are, nonetheless, good reasons to suppose that some of these dramatic changes will serve to render China's population less manageable and less amenable to authoritarian control – especially for those youth groups, such as those compared in this study, who have grown up entirely within China's radically new conditions.

This thesis is focused on two groups of young Chinese people who bear the hallmarks of these radically new conditions – especially the use of ICTs. Internet use was universal among both groups, particularly through smartphone devices, reflecting the increasing pervasiveness of these technologies in China as a whole: 72.6 percent of China's urban population were internet users by the time of my fieldwork; 95.1 percent of Chinese internet users accessed the internet on a mobile phone (CNNIC, 2017). However, both groups also used the internet in a manner that was much rarer; almost all, with a few exceptions only among the bohemian group, used VPN software or other methods of border-level censorship evasion to access the global internet beyond China's "great firewall". Though the prevalence of such practices is difficult to quantify, Roberts (2018) suggests that only five percent of the urban population have ever jumped the firewall. While the firewall does not cause Chinese people to access foreign websites less than other geolinguistic groups (Taneja and Wu, 2014), it undoubtedly inhibits their globalized communications in certain areas, to which VPN users are unconstrained in their access. This use of communication technology can be seen as one manifestation of both groups' high levels of cosmopolitanism, understood both in the general sense of engaging in diverse communications (Collins, 2009) and the more specific sense of familiarity with foreign cultures (Hannerz, 1990). These two groups, in their distinctive

cosmopolitanism, can be seen as the vanguard of broader developments among Chinese youth in general, who in recent decades 'have become very internationalist in their outlook, and … are strongly affected by global trends' (Rosen, 2009: 361).

In seeking to understand the impact of these general trends, the marked differences between the two groups makes their comparison productive. These differences can be understood in cultural terms. The elite-student group was closely integrated with China's dominant mainstream culture, with its fusion of neoliberal and orthodox Confucian hierarchies; the bohemian group was subcultural, drawing on diverse oppositional global subcultures as well as China's egalitarian heterodox tradition. These differences can also be understood, however, through the distinct patterns of social interaction and organization that their cultural differences both sustained and depended upon. Much of this thesis is devoted to analyzing these interrelated bundles of social and cultural attributes, which have implications for the theoretical understanding of Chinese society and culture specifically, and more generally for relationships between online communication and social organization and between cultural globalization and social change. However, my intention is to draw out the political ramifications of the orthodox and heterodox cosmopolitan trends that these two groups represent, and the likely ongoing implications of those trends for the Chinese Party-State's capacity to manage youth groups in general. In this chapter, then, as I explore various fields of scholarship that pertain to the characteristics of these groups, both shared and distinguishing, I highlight their political implications, and then briefly discuss political contention in China generally. Finally, I draw out the implications of this academic literature in elaborating a series of research questions, which guide my comparison of the elite-student and bohemian groups in subsequent chapters.

2.1 Chinese Online Politics and Self-Censorship

There are strong theoretical grounds to suppose that the increasing proliferation of online communication in China will have social, cultural, and political effects. Manuel

Castells offers a grand theory that accommodates both the impact of new communication technology and the autonomous bubbling up of innovative social practices around the use of that technology. One implication of his theory is a broadly Gramscian (1971) perspective, in which 'the fundamental power struggle is the battle for construction of meaning in the minds of the people'. Because meaning is largely produced 'in the process of socialized communication', 'the transformation of the communication environment directly affects the forms of meaning construction, and therefore the production of power relationships' (Castells, 2012: 7). Technology, by affecting social communications – which consists of the networks, interactions and flows of digitized content in which meaning is made – shapes the deep culture in which power is ultimately rooted. He characterizes this technological change as the advent of many-to-many, 'mass self-communication', having 'prompted the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication', and driven the 'circulation, mixing, and reformatting of any digitized content' (2009: 65). Social media render the flow of information and media content increasingly co-extensive with networks of social interaction, and indeed blur the distinction between dissemination and interaction, content and conversation. Partly because these networks 'by and large, are difficult to control by governments or corporations' (2012: 7), Castells suggests that the internet serves to encourage social, organizational and cultural autonomy, leading to a 'synergy between the rise of mass self-communication and the autonomous capacity of civil societies around the world to shape the process of social change' (2009: 303), such as during the 2011 Arab Spring (2012). Castells thus argues for powerful effects of internet technology on society and politics, while retaining a significant role for the social shaping of that technology by recognizing meaning-making – culture – as the intermediate field in which these forces interact.

However, the Chinese Party-State possesses a system of unparalleled sophistication for intervening in these linkages between society, culture, and politics – through internet censorship. King *et al*. depict that system as intended to 'eliminate discussions … that have collective action potential—where a locus of power and control, other than the government,

influences the behaviors of masses of Chinese people'; because of this suppression, they argue, 'the Chinese people are individually free but collectively in chains' (2013: 14). What is more, in an authoritarian context the effects of direct suppression are magnified by further indirect effects – by inducing the self-censorship of contentious political communication. In a study such as this, concerned with the political attitudes and contentious communication of its participants, self-censorship constitutes a confounding factor that complicates efforts to discern the phenomena of interest. Yet self-censorship itself is also an important focus of inquiry. The degree to which members of the bohemian and elite-student groups consciously self-censor their political online output, and the reasons why they do so, tells us a great deal about their engagement with politics and the political engagement of groups like these, among Chinese youth in general.

Self-censorship undoubtedly occurs in China, given the coercive measures employed by the Party-State, but it is difficult to operationalize in social-scientific research. Defined strictly, it is counterfactual, conceptually dependent on a given causal factor without which communication would have occurred; attempts to empirically measure the phenomenon have often focused on the chilling effects of specific events or changes (e.g. Penney *et al.*, 2016). It is quite valid to define a certain kind of self-censorship in terms of its underlying cause, then measure that phenomenon empirically. Yet existing scholarship proposes a variety of such causal mechanisms; this suggests that self-censorship, as the term is colloquially used, refers to a composite phenomenon – a complex and poorly understood set of mechanisms that any single, tightly scoped operational definition is unlikely to capture in totality.

Consider three distinct accounts of self-censorship. Hampton, Shin and Lu argue, drawing on the 'spiral of silence' (Noelle-Neumann, 1993) theory of communicative constraint and public opinion formation, that the advent of social media, by generating 'pervasive awareness of the opinions of social ties' (2017: 1091), induces greater self-censorship of political views by increasing the prevalence of social control, wherein the emotional sanctions of interpersonal interaction maintain the appearance of conformity

among peer groups. This account portrays online self-censorship as the effect on political communication of social and technological causes that are present across a wide range of national contexts. By contrast, Arsène's study of online self-censorship in China presents the phenomenon as driven chiefly by cultural factors that are specific to that country: a set of framing conventions around responsibility and civility which preclude critical political communication in public online settings, and have roots in the 'modernization discourse that is omnipresent in China today' (2012: 66). Other work on self-censorship in China takes fear and coercion to be its underlying motive force, emphasizing the multiplicative effects of a deliberately vague threat of state sanctions that are inconsistently yet punitively applied (Stern and O'Brien, 2011). For example, Stern and Hassid claim that as 'fear permeates everyday life [in China], self-preservation pushes most citizens to avoid politics as much as possible' (2012: 1240).

These three studies highlight quite different mechanisms, partly due to differences between the groups on which they were empirically based. Hampton et al. survey US-based social media users who are in any case at little risk of punitive state sanction for their online speech. Arsène draws on interviews with fifty Beijing residents selected for their intensive use of the internet in 2006 – culturally elite individuals likely to be more strongly influenced by discourses surrounding modern, civilized behavior than much of China's now greatly expanded internet user-base. Stern, O'Brien and Hassid, for quite valid reasons and in common with much research on political communication in China, focus specifically on sensitive groups, including activists, NGO workers, academics, lawyers and journalists. Each mechanism of self-censorship, to which I will subsequently refer as social (stemming from interpersonal relations), cultural and political respectively, is likely part of the picture, shaping online communications in China to some degree. However, assuming any one of these mechanisms to be primary, pervasive across large swathes of the Chinese public, has strong implications for how one understands political authority or state-society relations in that country.

Accordingly, comparing the political lives of groups such as the elite-students and bohemians requires careful consideration of how online political communication in China is distributed among and varies between different social groups such as these. It may be that, as Stern and Hassid (2012) suggest, self-censorship is induced widely through fear in China, beyond sensitive groups whose ethnicity, location or professional obligations necessarily bring them into contact with the limits of politically permissible communication. And yet, as critics of the tendency in Western scholarship to view online communication in China through the prism of politics have long pointed out, in fact, 'political content comprises only an extremely tiny portion of China's cyber-cacophony'[2] (Leibold 2011: 1027; see also Damm 2007). One cannot test Stern and Hassid's thesis among a group to which it does not apply.

If not entirely pervaded by fear, a rather more plausible picture of communicative life in China is that political self-censorship is limited to a minority of the population. In this picture, fear multiplies out from the inherently sensitive groups, to whom coercive state sanction is chiefly applied, into a surrounding penumbra of individuals who would likely have participated in critical online communication in the absence of this threat. Communication theory has long distinguished the information environment occupied by the public at large from the discourse of a political elite, either defined narrowly as those who 'devote themselves full-time to some aspect of politics or public affairs' (Zaller 1992: 6), or more loosely through extensive engagement with political information, whether from professional obligations or personal interest. Recent research into Chinese internet control has supported this stratification; Roberts contrasts the great majority of Chinese citizens who are, as in any country, 'rationally ignorant' (2018: 30) about politics with the small, elite minority who require or desire unfettered access to political information.

[2] While one might explain this absence of online politics as a product of widespread fear-induced self-censorship, Leibold suggests this is unwarranted. We do not feel compelled to explain the comparable scarcity of online political content in the United States (Hindman 2009), for example, by invoking coercive state suppression.

Roberts sheds light on this elite through survey data on users of censorship-evading VPN software, suggesting that its users are more affluent, better educated, more knowledgeable about politics, more politically active, less trusting of the government and have more foreign connections and foreign-language ability than non-users. The permeability of the Chinese censorship system, which 'taxes, rather than prohibits, information' (2018: 4), is thus construed as a deliberate design feature. Comparatively minimal costs and inconveniences – which Roberts terms 'friction' – are sufficient to shield the great majority of internet users from exposure to sensitive political information; yet allowing elites to evade censorship avoids further alienating groups that are 'potentially threatening to the government' (2018: 172). Furthermore, because this arrangement 'structurally separates activists issue publics in China from the Chinese public at large' (2018: 163), it allows the state to avoid the undesirable consequences of imposing coercive sanction on the entire population of internet users, by instead 'targeting fear-based censorship towards those who are most likely to find and synthesize damaging information: the political elite and the media' (2018: 56).

Roberts thus explains the comparative scarcity of online politics through the depoliticization of the Chinese public at large, construed as a rational, indeed inevitable response to the scant individual benefits that engagement with politics yields in an authoritarian state. This accords with ethnographic evidence suggesting that Chinese people generally 'do not conceive of social media as an appropriate or potential place for discussing politics and criticizing the central government', as a result of which, for the great majority, 'there is no need for specific acts of [state] coercion' (Miller *et al.*, 2016: 148). However, while purporting to describe the online dissemination of political information in general, Roberts does so through a characterization of the costs and incentives that surround purposeful information-seeking. This is problematic, because with the many-to-many mass self-communication (Castells, 2009) that the internet has enabled, online exposure to political information now often occurs passively, through content posted by one's contacts on social

media. And whereas online information-seeking largely occurs in private (from one's social peers, if not state surveillance), the act of posting political content online is inherently public, and therefore subject to a quite different set of incentives that flow from this social visibility. By treating the dissemination of political information as though it were not subject to social incentives, Roberts offers an economistic explanation, predicated on individual-level rational calculations of material costs and benefits; and yet, as new social movements theories have served to highlight, as well as the more general cultural turn in the social sciences, group behavior itself serves to modulate those costs and benefits. As Melucci writes, 'the motivation to participate which develops at the level of the individual, cannot be considered as an exclusively individual phenomenon' (1989: 31).

The importance of group behavior is not lost on those working within the rational-choice framework. Scholars such as Kuran (1989) and Lohmann (2000), as a corrective to Mancur Olson's (1971) classic problematization of collective action, have emphasized the role of signaling, whereby 'a person rationally takes informational cues from the aggregate number of people taking action. As a consequence, the incentives to act fluctuate across individuals and over time' (Lohmann, 2000: 656). This may offer insight into the periodic 'information cascades' through which the large-scale viral dissemination of politically sensitive rumor temporarily outpaces the Party-State's capacity for censorship (Xiao, 2011: 53). It presumes, however, that while observing collective behavior shapes individual incentives by providing signals concerning of the risks and efficacy of participation, the fundamental motivating interests and grievances are largely fixed and rationally calculable at the individual level. The obvious problem with this is that, as Snow *et al.* argue, 'too much attention is focused on grievances per se … to the neglect of the fact that grievances or discontents are subject to differential interpretation' (1986: 465). While this points to the role of interpretive or cultural mechanisms in shaping political motivations, the cultural influences on Chinese youth are increasingly cosmopolitan – often originating from beyond that country's borders.

2.2 Cosmopolitanism: Communicative Diversity

Cosmopolitanism, in the intuitive sense of engagement with foreign cultures, is dangerous for a Party-State that is concerned to maintain control over Chinese culture. One way of looking at the Party-State's iron grip over the flow of information is as a set of policies designed to constrain cosmopolitanism, from the border-level 'Great Firewall' (Tsui, 2008) to the 'cultural firewall … [that] helps to fence off influences from other cultures' (De Kloet and Fung, 2017) on Chinese youth, maintained partly through control over the education system (Yan, 2014). But cosmopolitanism is also inescapable. Without reverting to totalitarianism, it would be impossible for the Party-State to entirely prevent exposure to diverse, unauthorized flows of information. Nor would this be a desirable outcome. China needs interpreters, diplomats, journalists, academics – professional specialists in countless fields that positively require competent familiarity with cultures and systems antagonistic to the Party-State's own. It is therefore obliged to guide, to constrain how foreign cultures are experienced and by whom, to shape the burgeoning cosmopolitanism of China's youth population and thus to derive its necessary benefits without adverse political consequences.

However, cosmopolitanism is amorphous; though readily recognizable in real-world settings, it is difficult to operationalize in social theory. Tyfield and Urry (2010), for example, identify six competing conceptions, none of which exhaustively capture the term's implications in its colloquial use. In this thesis the term is used in two interrelated senses; firstly, I discuss a conception of cosmopolitanism advanced by Randall Collins, in which it is defined quite simply as 'the diversity of communication one is involved in' (2009: 39). This perspective offers several advantages: while it does not capture everything we mean intuitively by 'cosmopolitan', communicative diversity has a good claim to conceptual priority over other, more specific conceptions. Cosmopolitanism understood as, for example, 'competence with regard to alien cultures' (Hannerz, 1990: 240) must clearly first be inculcated through exposure to diverse communications. Moreover, communicative cosmopolitanism forms part of Collins's general theory of social stratification which predicts

and explains variation between the cultural outlooks of different social groups. To understand the implications of this theory, it is necessary to also introduce a further element of social communications that interacts with cosmopolitanism in determining group outlook, and which may help explain the differences between cosmopolitan groups: mutual surveillance.

Collins's (2009) stratification theory argues that among the fundamental determinants of group culture is the structure of social communications within that group. Here he distinguishes the concept of social density, which Durkheim (1984) employs to similar ends, into two dimensions: cosmopolitanism, defined as diversity in the content of communications, and mutual surveillance. Collins argues that a high degree of mutual surveillance between members of a group leads to an acceptance of group culture, and an expectation of conformity in others, whereas low mutual surveillance leads to individualistic attitudes. While Collins's theory emphasizes the necessity of physical co-presence for this effect to obtain, subsequent scholarship has extended this insight to electronically mediated communication (e.g. Meyrowitz, 1985; Wesch, 2009; Marwick and Boyd, 2011).

Collins also argues that cosmopolitanism – the diversity of communications within a group – affects that group's culture, regardless of whether it stems from 'encountering or corresponding with a great many different kinds of people … or from constantly being given new messages' (2009: 34) from a limited number of sources. High communicative diversity, he argues, results in abstract, relativistic, long-term thinking, whereas low communicative diversity results in concrete, short-term, localist thinking, and a sense of the wider world as alien and uncontrollable. Communicative diversity forms an important part of his theory of social stratification because, by occupational necessity, the 'higher classes … are more cosmopolitan in all societies' (2009: 37), which underlies cultural differences between different socioeconomic classes. This theory supports an expectation that the elite students, given their educational backgrounds and complex, globalized, multilingual online communications, would be more socially cosmopolitan than the bohemians. Collins argues that regardless of whether communication is mediated or face-to-face, from one source or

many, the overall extent of diversity is what matters. However, in practical terms, differences between face-to-face and online communication affect overall communicative diversity because, as I will subsequently show, differences between the social affordances of face-to-face and online interaction tend to ensure that patterns of face-to-face interaction exert a stronger influence on patterns of online interaction than vice versa.

Furthermore, whether communicative diversity is manifested in face-to-face or mediated communications also impacts on the extent of mutual surveillance, due to the obligatory exchanges of social information that occur under conditions of physical co-presence. The conformity-inducing effects of mutual surveillance are greatest when physical co-presence is constant and privacy is absent – as in barracks for the training of new military recruits or other 'total institutions' (Goffman, 1961) – because such conditions prevent the differentiation of quotidian backstage and individualistic frontstage self-presentations. While private online communication with people outside one's immediate social group can offer some escape from mutual surveillance, the absence of physical privacy nonetheless induces conformity. Access to private online spaces does not prevent the flow of social information between physical backstage and frontstage areas that are shared by members of the same group. Conversely, access to physical privacy in backstage settings permits individualistic and stylized public self-presentations by constraining this information flow – even when awareness of other group members' frontstage online performances is rendered 'pervasive' by social media (Hampton, 2016).

One expects elite groups to be more socially cosmopolitan than members of a deviant subculture. However, the chiefly internet-mediated nature of the elite-student group's communicative diversity, as well as constraints on their face-to-face interactions that do not apply to the bohemians, introduce a certain degree of ambiguity. Bohemian cultural scenes may introduce elements of communicative diversity unavailable in elite university environments. Moreover, while we might expect the relativism generated by communicative diversity to have political effects, such as engendering tolerant or pluralistic views, these

tendencies are compatible with a range of political worldviews. Elite outlooks are shaped by communicative diversity, but also by elevated positions in structures of power, leading to identification with the ideals that order and legitimize such hierarchies (Collins, 2009). While youth groups typically occupy subordinate positions, Chinese elite students experience order-giving within the internal hierarchies of student societies and, further, are subject to 'anticipatory socialization' (Merton, 1968: 320), given expectations of career success generated by their prestigious educations. In China's authoritarian context, where opportunities for self-expression are hierarchically allocated (Yan, 2009), the pluralism generated by communicative diversity among elite youth may not be egalitarian. Accepting the validity of diverse opinions need not imply that all opinions have equal merit – or that everyone possesses the civility and responsibility to choose between them. However, while social cosmopolitanism may not have determinative effects on political outcomes, further insight is offered in the differences between these two groups' cosmopolitanisms in a separate sense – their engagement with global cultures and subcultures.

2.3 Cosmopolitanism: Cultural Globalization

The cultural globalization of Chinese youth groups may be thought of as a manifestation of their cosmopolitanism in Collins's sense of communicative diversity, though imparting potential further effects that are not readily interpretable within his theoretical framework. Symbols have their own internal logic, and when they are transplanted from one cultural context into another, their original logic is never entirely erased. This thesis offers local-level evidence for the general argument advanced by scholars such as Appadurai (1996) – that the cultural impact of globalization is by no means linear, uniform or even entirely predictable. But while Appadurai has been critiqued as offering a 'chaos theory … approach to cultural globalization' (O'Connor 2004: 176), I am suggesting that while the overall impact of cultural globalization is highly complex, its effects between different groups are largely predictable on the basis of their local cultures, and the structures of social, economic and

political organization that inform them. I suggest that the elite-student and bohemian groups represent two prominent forms of the cultural cosmopolitanization that contemporary Chinese youth culture is undergoing, enabled by the internet.

Scholarship on the effects of cultural globalization has often sought to identify the overall, aggregate impact of this phenomenon. Perhaps the most sophisticated of such efforts is the work of Ulrich Beck. Beck's work is difficult to summarize due to a high degree of complexity and abstraction; it is perhaps best approached through his characterization of the current era as one of second modernity, which is distinguished from the first modernity of the industrial age by its quality of reflexivity, or societal self-awareness under conditions of globalization, particularly as concerns the negative consequences of modernization itself. Underlying the second modernity are three main, interrelated processes: the emergence of a world risk society (Beck, 1992), individualization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), and cosmopolitanization (Beck, 2006).

At the risk of oversimplification, Beck sees the ever-greater interdependence under economic, cultural and informational globalization as creating new risks with which society is increasingly preoccupied; at the same time, the disembedding of individuals from traditional social structures and state welfare provision serves to offload the management of risk from the state to the individual. The sources of risk therefore become global, beyond the control of nation-states. This new world risk society is *cosmopolitan*, although Beck employs this term in at least four separate ways: analytical, empirical, reflexive, and normative. Firstly, he argues that contemporary conditions of interdependence and interconnectedness demand a social science that follows 'methodological cosmopolitanism' and rejects the dominant 'methodological nationalism' (Beck 2006: 33) with its 'zombie categories' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 27) of analysis that make sense only within nationally defined jurisdictions. He uses the term 'really existing cosmopolitanism' to describe the empirical reality of the globalized world and its interpenetration of culture and economy, distinguishing this from the process of 'cosmopolitanization', which is the development of a reflexive societal awareness

of the interdependence that globalization creates. Finally, he uses the term ‘cosmopolitanism’ or ‘philosophical cosmopolitanism’ (2006: 18) to describe a normative outlook, common to Kant’s enlightenment perspective and the term’s ancient Greek roots, which embraces world citizenship as a response to globalized interdependence. It is on this last normative sense of the term, and how to actualize it in political and institutional terms, that much other scholarship on cosmopolitanism has focused (e.g. Held 2010).

Beck does not posit a necessary causal relationship between cosmopolitanization – which he suggests frequently emerges in a ‘banal’ or ‘deformed’ form (2006: 19-20) – and the emergence of normative cosmopolitanism, but the logic of his argument suggests that this normative outlook is the appropriate and likely response to globalized risk. This is reflected in his identification of the ‘cosmopolitan imperative’ of international cooperation; drawing on Anderson’s account of the emergence of national identities as ‘imagined communities’ (2006), he suggests that global interdependence results in trans-national ‘imagined communities of global risk’ (2011: 1346). His terminology is confusing and, in applying the term ‘cosmopolitanization’, he has an unfortunate tendency to slide between its empirical and normative implications. His theory has been criticized for its Eurocentrism (Calhoun, 2010; Zhang, 2018); attempts to apply it to China and Asian countries more generally have uncovered negligible empirical evidence in support (Yan, 2009; Chang, 2010b, 2010a; Alpermann, 2011; Zhang, 2018), as Beck (2016) himself concedes. As Tyfield and Urry emphasize, there is a considerable ‘interweaving of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the Chinese case’ (2010: 279). This nationalist cosmopolitanism is evident among both groups compared in this study, although unlike the elite students, who tend on balance to be proud of their government, the Party-State is more likely to induce feelings of shame among bohemians, who often see it as a national embarrassment.

At the same time, both groups compared in this study do exhibit a degree of engagement with globalized communications that reflects a ‘cultural disposition involving an intellectual and aesthetic stance of “openness” towards peoples, places and experiences from

different cultures, especially those from different "nations"' (Szerszynski and Urry, 2002: 468). Both groups also do, in line with Beck's theory, demonstrate a normative cosmopolitanism, seeing themselves as part of global imagined communities. And yet, these global imagined communities are sufficiently different as to cast doubt on the utility of theories of cultural cosmopolitanism which predict unitary effects. Members of the elite-student group see themselves as part of a global elite, whereas members of the bohemian group see themselves as part of, or at least connected to and sympathetic with, global subaltern groups. These perceptions are likely to be reflected in, or indeed inextricable from, the kinds of global cultural content these groups consume.

Most scholarship in this area has focused on how globalized cultural consumption affects the culture of local groups; I am arguing here that local culture, and indeed local cultural variation, strongly shapes the character of this influence. When we consider the vast array of possible content from which local groups can choose, it seems obvious that different kinds of global culture will appeal to different Chinese groups based on their position in existing social hierarchies. One would expect young members of China's social and educational elite, having acquired considerable cultural capital in their indigenous culture, to be drawn also to elite cultures from overseas. One would also expect young people in the conformist social environment of the Chinese university to be drawn to forms of foreign entertainment that are commercially successful, and thus more likely to be popular among their peers. Similarly, we would expect members of a deviant subculture, subject to some degree of social exclusion (Merton, 1938), to be drawn to cultural content that expresses or valorizes their marginalized position, which is largely unavailable in the tightly controlled Chinese culture industries.

Local social and cultural differences strongly shape the impact of cultural globalization, because whether young Chinese people engage with foreign cultural forms tells us less than the *kinds* of foreign culture they engage with. We should not be surprised that the forms of global cultural content with which elite students engage tend to reinforce their self-

perceived elite status, and do not undermine their broadly contented position within existing Chinese hierarchies and political arrangements. By contrast, while engagement with underground, oppositional culture from overseas does not necessary lead to political resistance, except under a definition of the term in which explicit political intention is largely irrelevant (e.g. Hebdige, 1979), it nonetheless helps to inculcate a certain way of looking at one's own position in the world, a certain kind of imagined community of which one is part. For those individuals extensively involved in the local reproduction of these cultural forms, these communities are likely to be realized through actual social connections at the global level; as Dunn notes 'the ways in which local punk scenes are networked together – horizontally and through informal, independent and decentralized flows – makes them politically significant' (2016: 98). Perhaps most importantly, cultural forms such as these provide a rich repertoire of symbolic resources that may, though by no means necessarily will, be deployed in political ways.

Thus far this discussion has largely focused on qualities shared by the elite-student and bohemian groups. In their use of smartphones and social media, their use of VPNs, their communicative diversity and globalized cultural engagements, these two groups had more in common than that which divided them. However, the mediated communications of such groups are likely to be strongly shaped by cultural differences – especially when they imply quite distinct relationships with China's dominant mainstream culture.

2.4 Group Culture and Online Information Environments

Because of the social visibility of online political contention, the interpretations of interests and grievances that motivate it are shared at the group level, in the 'meaning construction' that Castells (2012: 7) sees as the interface between social communication and politics. In other words, political dispositions are shaped by culture, of which Fischer provides a broad but useful definition: 'the collection of shared, loosely connected, taken-for-granted rules, symbols, and beliefs that characterize a people' (2010: 10). However, culture

can be highly variegated even at the local, micro level of analysis with which this study is chiefly concerned. Fine employs the term idioculture to describe the 'knowledge, beliefs, behaviors and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction'; in this sense, 'every group has to some extent a culture of its own' (1979: 734). As Castells argues, this relationship between group culture and social interaction underlies the political implications of the technology through which communications are mediated, which in turn pattern the interactions within local groups and their interconnections with other groups at a global level. This is because, while culture in this sense includes everyday social norms, it also includes the shared symbolic frameworks that provide the normative basis for political action, those 'ideological' elements of culture which act as 'maps of social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience' (Geertz, 1973: 220). 'Ideology' is problematic here; as it is used in political science, the term implies coherent and systematic sets of beliefs or public policy preferences, which often co-vary along a single dimension (e.g. Jessee, 2009; Pan and Xu, 2015). In this thesis, I refer to the political elements of elite-student and bohemian cultures as political worldviews, to distinguish them from this usage of 'ideology'. I contend nonetheless that the interrelation between the social communications and cultures of the elite-student and bohemian groups is key to understanding their distinct political worldviews, and by extension their proclivities for contentious politics.

The shared symbolic systems of meaning and value that constitute the culture of a group do not only affect their receptivity towards online political contention, but also the likelihood that contentious content they themselves generate will resonate more widely, shaping the political influence of such groups' online communications on society at large. The Chinese internet, even within the constraints of its border-level firewall, contains a vast quantity of information with potential or latent political significance. Mundane events may take on symbolic importance when presented in a resonant 'frame' (Goffman, 1986; Benford and Snow, 2000). For example, the death of the migrant worker Sun Zhigang in Guangzhou

police custody in 2003, though tragic, was a mundane event insofar as comparable deaths have occurred before and since and attracted little notice. Yet the online dissemination of information concerning this event was strongly influenced by the framing, which emphasized Sun Zhigang's status as a university graduate. In this case, a resonant frame generated such widespread dissemination as to result in changes to national-level policy concerning temporary residence permits and migrant detention.

Online content may comprise a resonant frame that is straightforwardly political: provoking the recognition of shared interests between disparate individuals, the perception of events as representing a violation of those interests, and a consequent sense of outrage among its audience. But this is by no means the only framing that serves to drive the widespread dissemination of political content. Even such seemingly ephemeral aspects as entertainment value can nonetheless take on great political relevance, as it is often through such properties that, as Han Rongbin argues, 'politics can be made fun, and apolitical netizens politicized' (2018: 96). Han emphasizes the 'fusion of politics and popular culture' that characterizes much online political content in China. He argues that 'pop activism often serves the function of turning political topics into a special kind of consumer good for the purpose of entertainment'. This entertainment value is often a crucial driver for the dissemination of political content, whether deriving from regime critics or the state and its supporters, because 'not all netizens are politically motivated' and their 'attention is a scarce resource on the information-rich Internet' (2018: 82); this tendency is further magnified in China by the tendency for authoritarian systems to channel dissent into 'unobtrusive, symbolic, and peaceful forms of disruption that avoid repression while symbolizing contention' (Tarrow, 2011: 103).

As I show in later chapters, such quasi-surreptitious combinations of dissent and popular entertainment often characterized the political output of the bohemian group, enabled through the deployment of symbolic resources drawn from oppositional global subcultures such as punk and Rastafari reggae. And yet, given the small scale of such subcultures in

China, framings of this kind, though powerfully resonant for some, are likely to have limited reach. Arguably, the media-savvy elite-student group, possessed of abundant forms of distinction placing them highly in China's dominant neoliberal and Confucian hierarchies, were better placed to exert a wide influence than the subculturally deviant bohemians. This reflects the well-established claim that elite discourse exerts a disproportionately large effect on the formation of mass public opinion (Zaller 1992).

This potential for wider online influence might seem to suggest that the elite-student group are more likely to be targets of fear-based self-censorship than the bohemian group, a contention that accords with Roberts's (2018) depiction of how this communicative constraint is selectively targeted. However, the social and cultural differences between the two groups suggest otherwise. The elite-student group is closely integrated into the mainstream; their socially and culturally elite status implies an absence of non-normativity or marginalization, in the sense that 'normal culture provides them with an adequate sense of well-being and satisfaction in their everyday lives' (Williams, 2011: 11). This close integration with mainstream Chinese society and culture is likely to be reflected in extensive connections between their online information environment and wider public and mass media discourses which, in the authoritarian Chinese context, are dominated by the Party-State. The bohemians, by contrast, are members of a deviant subculture; some members of the group – though by no means all, given their heterogeneity – are also marginalized in the sense of exclusion from conventionally defined prestige (Merton, 1938). They are more distant than the elite-student group from the political elite as Zaller defines it, and yet they engage in communicative behavior – the use of VPNs – that Roberts associates with such elites. We should not necessarily expect them to be rationally ignorant about politics, but for their engagement with political information to diverge from that of mainstream elites.

Scholarship beyond the Chinese context supports the contention that the online information environments of subcultural groups are likely to diverge sharply from those of elite and culturally mainstream groups. Differences in political preferences and participation

are often associated with differences in empirical or factual belief (Reedy, Wells and Gastil, 2014; Hochschild and Einstein, 2015), at least partly due to differences in patterns of engagement with information sources such as news and social media (Stroud, 2008; Xiao, Borah and Su, 2021). For traditional news media, distinct patterns of engagement are often associated with divergent political preferences because confirmation bias leads people to seek out content that reinforces their existing beliefs (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009; Steppat, Castro Herrero and Esser, 2022). This process of reinforcement tends to encourage political polarization, as people lack exposure to information that challenges their views (Mutz and Martin, 2001). Similarly, the disproportionate exposure of social media users to the output of politically like-minded peers, and the tendency of social media platforms to filter out unappealing content, has a similar effect (Sunstein, 2017; Lee, Shin and Hong, 2018). Furthermore, those with radically divergent beliefs not reflected in the spectrum of views offered by mainstream media, such as groups opposed to existing political systems and hierarchies altogether, tend to distrust mainstream sources of news information, in favor of information gathered on social media or through alternative, internet-based news sources (Haller and Holt, 2019; Bhat and Chadha, 2020). This tendency is likely to be further accentuated in China, where the Party-State exercises extensive control over the output of news media, irrespective of their degree of commercialization (Stockmann, 2013), and where the Xi Jinping administration has seen a redoubling of efforts to 'put an end to the role of journalism as a counter-power and make it a tool at the service of state propaganda' (RSF East Asia Bureau and Alviani, 2021: 3).

These considerations suggest that differences between the degrees to which these two groups are integrated with mainstream society are likely to be reflected in the online information environments they occupy. This supports the expectation that the online information environment of the elite student group will be more closely integrated with Party-State-dominated online mass media and public discourse. On the domestic internet, they will be less likely to encounter and repost politically sensitive content; though they use VPNs to

jump the border-level firewall, they will be less likely to do so in search of politically sensitive information that clashes with the perspectives they encounter in domestic mass- and social-media, and less likely to disseminate such content domestically. Accordingly, we would expect them to be less subject to fear-based-self censorship. For the bohemian group, because of their divergence from mainstream society and culture, we should expect them to occupy an alternative online information environment in which the kind of politically sensitive content that is excluded from online mass media and public discourse is more likely to proliferate, and to use VPNs in search of information that accords with such perspectives. Accordingly, because they are more likely to encounter and disseminate such content, they are more likely to be subject to fear-based inducements to self-censorship.

These groups' distinct online information environments are likely to be interdependent with their respective integration into and divergence from mainstream Chinese culture, simultaneously produced by and reinforcing this cultural difference. And yet, such cultural differences emerged among youth groups long before the internet. A more fundamental explanation of cultural integration and divergence is offered by a theoretical tradition surrounding the ritualized dynamics of social interaction, and its implications for social organization.

2.5 Interaction Ritual in Mainstream and Subcultural Groups

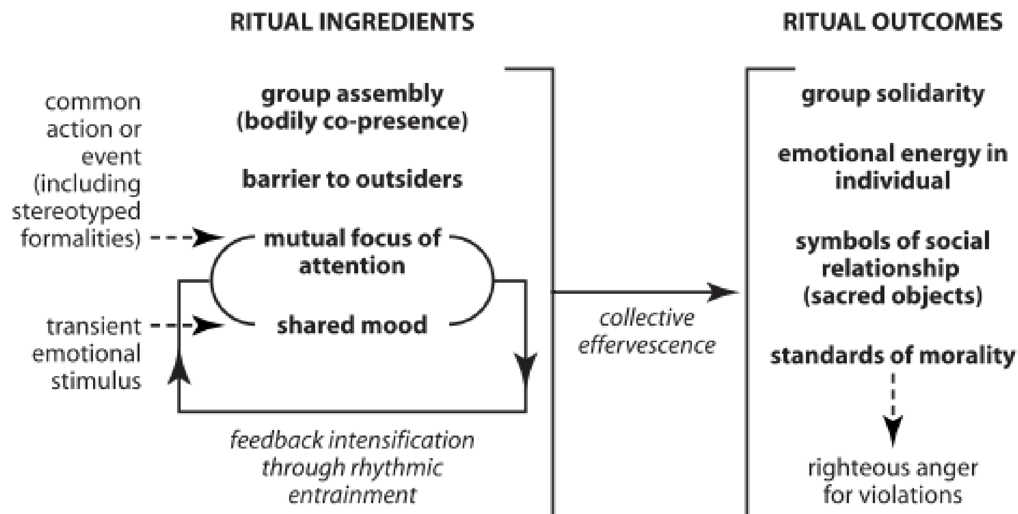
In *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004), Randall Collins seeks to connect the various levels of sociological analysis by grounding outcomes at the macro-level, including those of social stratification, in the emotional dynamics of micro-level social interaction understood through situational analysis. This theory draws heavily on Durkheim's (1995) account of how ritual generates the bonds of moral solidarity that tie together traditional and modern societies alike, and Goffman's (1967) extension of this perspective to the ritualized practices of polite or friendly interaction that surround the presentation of self in everyday conversation. Collins defines ritual broadly as 'a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a

momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership' (2004: 7). He contends, in opposition to rational choice explanations, that it is rather the emotional rewards generated through participation in successful interaction ritual that provide the fundamental underlying motivation for individual human behavior.

Under this account, all social interaction is punctuated by ritualistic elements – shared patterns of stereotyped behavior that provide moments of intersubjectivity in their enactment. These rituals vary widely in their intensity and emotional tenor, in the kinds of intersubjectivity that are generated, and in their implications for group membership and symbols. However, in simple terms, rituals have four initiating conditions, and four outcomes, summarized below in Figure 1. Two or more people must be physically co-present, with barriers to outsiders so that participants have a sense of who is taking part. If those people are focused on a common object or activity and aware of each other's focus, while also sharing a common mood, this leads to a feedback loop intensifying that shared focus and mood, especially when their focus involves rhythmic entrainment. The consequences of an intense, successful ritual include highly rewarding emotional energy, the charging up of shared symbols with potent significance, bonds of group solidarity, and moral sentiments against any violation of that solidarity.

This model is applicable to human interaction at all scales and levels of intensity, from idle chatter between co-workers to large-scale gatherings such as political rallies. Collins is keen to emphasize that each individual human life constitutes a trajectory through a chain of such ritual interactions; through repeated participation 'symbols circulate and prolong group membership beyond ephemeral situations of emotional intensity' (2004: 87). Two key properties of a given ritual interaction shape outcomes for its participants.

Figure 1: Initiating Conditions and Outcomes of Ritual Interaction, from Collins (2004: 48)



The first of these is ritual intensity – the extent to which a given interaction builds up a high level of emotional entrainment or collective effervescence. This depends not only on the kind of ritual that is enacted, but whether that ritual succeeds or fails. Rituals, be they formal or natural, can fail for a wide range of possible reasons, including forced participation, symbolic violation by participants, or perceptions of empty ceremony. When they do, the result is minimal emotional entrainment, and potentially strong negative reactions such as embarrassment, shame or abhorrence. Conversely, for successful ritual, 'the higher the ritual intensity, the more [positive] emotion is generated both in the immediate present and for long-term effects. Ritual intensity thus operates as a multiplier for the other … aspects of ritual effects' (Collins, 2004: 116).

The second variable is that of central/peripheral participation. Individuals vary in the extent of their participation in a ritual, from someone who is barely a member of the group to someone who is at its core, and the outcomes for those individuals – emotional energy, moral solidarity, attachment to group symbols – will vary greatly by this degree of centrality. The social norms of different groups will vary in the extent to which they facilitate or discourage central participation in group interactions for new entrants, perhaps through an inclusive and egalitarian ethos, or one that is hierarchical and exclusive. However, even highly egalitarian

rituals may formalize echelons of centrality, or may depend on a central figure on whom the ritual is focused, as in the call and response of a fervent religious sermon, for example. Not only do central figures of this kind derive the strongest ritual outcomes, but they may themselves attain the status of group symbols – sacred objects, or rather ‘a symbolic repository of the group’s emotional energies’ (2004: 124). It is in this way that charismatic authority, in Weberian terms, may be generated.

This micro-level perspective allows us to understand a crucial distinction between the two groups compared in this study, which stems from the far-greater ritual intensity of the bohemian group’s repeated interactions, combined with their strong facilitation of central participation, egalitarian relations, and cultural practices that produce clear symbols of group membership and demarcate the boundaries of participation. Although they were subject to a lesser degree of mutual surveillance than the elite students, the bohemian group were nonetheless bound together by powerful bonds of solidarity and commitment to group symbols, along with social networks that, despite their extensive reach, complexity and heterogeneity, were characterized by large, cohesive, densely interconnected cores. In this sense, bohemian cultural life may be thought of as a highly effective set of practices for the formation of ‘community without propinquity’ (Webber, 1963), or rather, as Calhoun writes in revisiting the concept, ‘community with at least a little propinquity’ (2001: 383). As he argues, ‘community in the sense of binding people to each other in dense, multiplex networks’ (2001: 383), though tolerant of some geographic dispersal and reinforced by electronically mediated communication, nonetheless seems to depend on face-to-face interaction. The role of physical co-presence in heightening ritual intensity offers at least a partial explanation for why this should be so.

Groups formed in this way will by no means necessarily become politicized. The dynamics of ritual interaction explain the emergence of distinctive groups, and the intensification of shared symbolic systems that causes the divergence of such groups from the surrounding society, to form subcultures – which are not necessarily countercultures. Roberts

distinguishes the broader category of subcultural groups, which may be in varying degrees of conflict with the dominant culture, from countercultural groups, which are characterized by 'a value conflict between the counter-culture and the dominant society … which is central, uncompromising and wrenching'. Further, this conflict is not purely negative, but involves a 'constructive ideology that defines the "good society"' (1978: 121-2); in this thesis, I show that the bohemian group fits both criteria. Roberts also distinguishes 'contracultures', which 'do not involve more than one generation', from countercultures, which 'make provisions for both sexes and a wide range of age groups' and involve 'institutions to sustain the group in relative self-sufficiency' (1978: 113), thereby reproducing their divergent values. Here, the countercultural status of the bohemian group is less clear, but the prominent influence of high-status older figures on younger entrants points to the scene's capacity to reproduce itself, sustained by the resources from cultural production and the associated nightlife economy.

This intergenerational influence accords with an increasing scholarly recognition that 'musically and stylistically based groupings once unproblematically referred to as youth cultures are now increasingly multigenerational' (Bennett and Hodkinson, 2012: 2). This may partly reflect the increasing malleability of 'youth' as a cultural concept in many societies, as the 'trajectory of young people towards adulthood is … prolonged and unpredictable as a result of delays in the taking on of commitments such as cohabiting, marriage, child-rearing and long-term careers' (Hodkinson, 2013: 14). And yet, it may also reflect developments within 'youth' subcultures themselves. Hodkinson's study of older members of the goth subculture indicates that 'older goths rarely found themselves isolated within their community… [and] continued to participate in high numbers'. As with their younger peers, 'goth still seemed usually to be understood as an identifiable community centred on event attendance and particular collective tastes'. (2011: 265, 267). Likewise, Bennett's study of older UK punks emphasizes their continued role within a typically youthful scene, where 'the importance of older punks as conveyors of both aesthetic and practical knowledge about the punk scene was often similarly acknowledged by younger punks themselves … [who] often

exhibited a highly reverential attitude towards them' (2006: 229). Similarly for Riot Grrrl – a feminist offshoot of the punk subculture – Schilt and Giffort depict the role of older members in 'educating new generations of girls about women's music history, feminism and DIY cultural production' (2012: 151). Accordingly, Bennett and Hodkinson suggest 'a recasting of youth culture' as no longer merely 'tied to an age-specific period of transition in the life course' (2012: 3). When such subcultural formations remain persistent over time, the importance of intergenerational influence in their ongoing reproduction suggests that understanding such subcultures requires accommodating the contribution of their older members – even in scholarship focused specifically on the culture of the young.

Irrespective of their countercultural or subcultural qualities, much scholarship supports the contention that the structural features of dense communities affect the potential for collective action. Preexisting network density and multiplexity strongly facilitate contentious political mobilization, particularly when it is risky, by generating trust among community members and facilitating connections between already politicized individuals, as well as their recruitment of further participants (McAdam, 1982; Crossley, 2007). Furthermore, because bohemian cultural scenes develop among young people who remain highly diverse, mobile and cosmopolitan despite their strongly forged bonds of solidarity, such formations have the potential to undermine one of the Party-State's overriding policy priorities in stability maintenance: preventing trans-class or trans-local interest-aggregation or mobilization (Perry, 2002). Furthermore, in the Chinese context, this process of group formation represents an especial threat because it tends to imbue certain individuals, who are beyond the direct control of the Party-State, with charismatic authority and extensive influence over local youth.

This capacity to form powerful, local-like bonds among dispersed, cosmopolitan youth is a general property of deviant subcultures in modern complex urban societies. It is perhaps a necessary property – subcultures, as Crossley (2008) notes for UK punk, typically emerge among densely interconnected networks of people. The bohemian group lacked the

high degree of stylistic unity (Hebdige, 1979) and uniformly subordinate socioeconomic class (Hall, 1980; Hall and Jefferson, 2006) with which academic use of the term 'subculture' is often associated. They were characterized rather by the local interpenetration of multiple globalized subcultural styles, and a dense, localized pattern of social connections that cut diversely across class hierarchies and other social groupings. For this reason, I chiefly refer to the wider group of which they are a part as the bohemian 'scene', drawing on post-subcultural work which emphasizes entertainment over resistance, and the importance of both locality and trans-local connections in youth cultural movements (Straw, 1991; Shank, 1994; Bennett and Peterson, 2004). I nonetheless describe my field site's bohemian scene as subcultural because this term, unlike 'scene', captures one of the defining characteristics of this community – its deviance in the Chinese context.

Here, too, Collins's ritual interaction perspective offers key insights, within a theoretical framework that applies equally to subcultural and culturally mainstream groups. Ma draws directly on Collins in his study of deviant groups within the Hong Kong hip-hop scene, where he identifies both pre-existing stigma and deliberately embraced 'self-stigmatization' as generating emotional energies, wherein 'negative emotional energies are used positively to mobilize in-group solidarity' (Ma, 2002: 190). More generally, Moran (2015) has argued that participation in deviant subcultural groups is chiefly motivated by this capacity to convert negative into positive emotions (see also Katz, 1988; Young, 2003). The emotional outputs of ritual interaction are required, in other words, to explain why members of the bohemian group embrace such flamboyant deviance in the first place, at considerable cost to their broader cultural prestige.

As an elite group, lacking equivalent social stigma, the elite students are subject to quite different socio-emotional dynamics. This is not to suggest, of course, that their interactions lack ritual qualities, or that all these rituals are unsuccessful. For the great majority of elite students, the emotional rewards of social interaction within the constrained boundaries of university life are quite sufficient. For example, many elite-student participants

reported that the weeks of arduous military training all Chinese students undergo before commencing their university studies forged strong bonds of solidarity with their new classmates. However, not only do some rituals of university life fail, but it may be that this failure is by design. To gain a university degree in China, students are not obliged to believe in Marxist theory and the CCP's interpretation of modern Chinese history, but to participate in ideology classes *as if* they believed. The ritualized quality of these mandatory public performances of doctrinal orthodoxy – which none of my participants took seriously at all, except as a procedural requirement for academic progress – echoes Weedon's interpretation of the Assad cult in Syria, which generated 'compliance through enforced participation in rituals of obeisance that are transparently phony' (Wedeen 1999: 6). In this sense, ideological instruction remains powerful *because* it is both coerced and purely formalistic, producing a cynical, alienated detachment from political ideals altogether (Lynch, 1999; Yan, 2014; Repnikova, 2017), particularly when combined with exposure to competing perspectives from Western academia and journalism.

Nonetheless, ritual interaction in elite-student life serves an integrative function, in contrast to its role in sustaining the gulf between bohemian cultural scenes and mainstream society. In Collins's terms, the integration of elite-students into mainstream Chinese society reflects their passage through a long chain of successful ritualized interactions over the course of years, chiefly with family, classmates, and teachers, that reflects their high-achieving passage through the Chinese educational system into their eventual elite status. No single interaction need be exceptionally ritually intense for their cumulative impact to generate the emotional energy that corresponds to their elite position. Such emotional rewards serve the integrative function that binds an individual to mainstream society, and disincentivizes divergence from its norms.

Elite students are not immune to the influence of ideas that conflict with the hegemony of mainstream culture but, because they do not encounter such ideas under condition of high ritual intensity such as those in bohemian scenes, counterhegemonic

perspectives are not imbued with sufficient emotional energy to overcome the conformist pressures to which they are subject, and the emotional rewards of ongoing compliance with mainstream norms. And yet, because the ritual interactions within the constraints of university life are of a relatively low order of intensity, they are unlikely to radically reconfigure patterns of affective bonds generated in previous stages of their life; their social networks are likely therefore to be more diffuse and fragmented than in the dense community of bohemian scenes.

Because elite-student experiences of the wider world beyond the walls of the university are overwhelmingly mediated through the internet, such interactions lack the ritual intensity that physical co-presence affords. This is not to suggest that online interactions lack a ritual element, or that they are incapable of generating affective bonds. Ling has persuasively extended Collins's interaction ritual perspective to mediated mobile communications; however, he does so at lower levels of intensity, 'in the smaller marginal interactions with which we patch together our daily lives' (2008: 92). Because online interaction lacks the potential for rhythmic entrainment and mutual focus in the synchronous, multi-sensory exchanges of social information that occur during physical co-presence, its consequence in terms of the structure of social relationships is chiefly to prolong and intensify affective bonds previously established face-to-face. As Ling argues, 'while co-present interaction is that realm where solidarity is quite often founded, the glow of the event and the glow of solidarity within the group can be, and indeed is in many cases kept alive via mobile communication' (2008: 51). Hampton makes a similar point in presenting 'persistent contact' as a key affordance of digitally mediated communication, which 'allow[s] people to articulate their association and maintain contact over time' (2016: 103). Accordingly, by maintaining the strength of ties initially established face-to-face, but which otherwise would have diminished over time in the absence of physical co-presence, online interaction reinforces the impact on group culture of patterns of face-to-face interaction by prolonging that impact over time. Elite students' face-to-face interactions are not merely currently constrained; they have

passed through a series of previous elite educational institutions characterized by even greater constraint (Hansen, 2015; De Kloet and Fung, 2017). The affordances of online communication for persistent contact serve to prolong their affective bonds with individuals encountered face-to-face in such institutions who, though currently dispersed around the country and even abroad, are culturally homogeneous and unlikely to constitute subversive influences. Bohemians are much less likely to maintain such former associations due to the considerably more extensive and ritually intense face-to-face interactions in their local scene, providing socio-emotive rewards that strongly motivate further interaction. Online interaction bestows a more continual quality on these interactions, which might otherwise be mere episodic highlights of their social calendars – heightening the extent to which they identify with the local bohemian scene and accept its deviant subculture. In both cases, the ritual quality of online interaction is likely to reinforce patterns of cultural integration and divergence that are rooted, fundamentally, in patterns of face-to-face interaction.

The framework of ritual interaction offers insight into why elite-student and bohemian groups are culturally different – but not how. This qualitative difference, which is of crucial importance in understanding these two groups respective political worldviews and dispositions, is partly explicable through their distinct cosmopolitanisms, drawing as they do on such different kinds of global cultural content. However, their divergence is patterned further by a divide that is inherent to Chinese culture itself.

2.6 The Orthodox Confucian Cultural Tradition

China's Confucian heritage has had lasting cultural and social consequences. In the 1940s, Fei Xiaotong argued that that Confucianism had bestowed on China a quite distinct social logic from that of Western countries in its 'differential mode of association' (1992: 70), under which the self is constituted by its embedding in an egocentric network of social connections, each of which imposes distinct moral obligations that are clear-cut, yet relationally and situationally determined. The simultaneously instrumental and sentimental

character of these relationships serves to sustain the 'reciprocal obligation and indebtedness…central to the system of *guanxi* in China' (Gold et al. 2002: 7), which underlies the Chinese gift economy, and leveraging of social capital for political or economic gain. *Guanxi* (关系), which literally means relationship or personal connection, 'typically remains untranslated' in scholarly work 'because its full meaning escapes translation' (Barbalet, 2015: 1038). While *guanxi* obligations are understood as simultaneously sentimental and instrumental, Barbalet argues that it is the instrumental function which predominates in urban society, where the capacity to 'pull *guanxi*' – a somewhat pejorative phrase for the instrumental use of social capital for personal advantage – is often an important determinant of material prosperity.

Chinese people are embedded in egocentric networks that are hierarchically structured, in part due to the importance of patriarchy and filial piety in the Confucian tradition, as well as its emphasis on exemplary moral leadership and 'the rule of man in lieu of the rule of law' (Farh & Cheng 2000: 107; see also Ho 2014). This combination of hierarchy and the relational character of moral obligation underlies the 'primary objective in Chinese society' of earning or saving public 'face' (*mianzi* – 面子) – 'an individual's social position or prestige, gained by successfully performing one or more specific social roles' (Hwang 1987: 960-1). This structure also contributes to the positive evaluation of social harmony and the avoidance of public conflict in Chinese culture, quite apart from the historical role of harmony as an ideal within Confucianism and other Chinese philosophical traditions (Bond, 1993; Chen, 2000; Li, 2016). It is also closely related to Confucian social norms against interaction with strangers, unless legitimated by mutually known intermediaries or institutional connections (King, 1991), as well as the maintenance of sharp distinctions between in-groups and out-groups, of known and unknown individuals (Yum, 1988).

The potential political implications of these social and cultural attributes were highlighted early on by Fei Xiaotong, who argued that the differential mode of association promotes 'self-restraint' and 'does not allow for individual rights', which means that

'Chinese…are unable to assert themselves against society' (1992: 70). This line of argument is followed by Lucian Pye, who has argued that the importance of 'face' results in a 'imperative of conformity' (1988: 31) in Chinese society, in which he also identifies a 'compulsive need to avoid disorder and confusion, to seek predictability and the comforts of dependency, and to accept the importance of authority' (1968: 174). In propagandistic terms also, the Party-State increasingly relies on this element of China's Confucian heritage in its claims to legitimacy (Perry, 2013).

To some degree, Confucian traditions are undermined by the ongoing process of economic modernization. Yan Yunxiang offers extensive evidence for how the reform-era withdrawal of the state and increase in geographical mobility has resulted in extensive disembedding of the individual from these structures, observable in substantial changes everywhere from intergenerational relations to conjugal practices (2003, 2009). He also emphasizes the reform-era 'emergence of new types of sociality', where 'individuals found themselves interacting in public life with other individuals who were either unrelated or total strangers' (2009: 284), as having profoundly individualizing effects. A parallel argument has been presented by Tricia Wang (2013) who, drawing on Fei Xiaotong's model of traditional Chinese society, sees the newfound access to quasi-anonymous online communication as liberating a generation of Chinese youth from its oppressive restrictions.

At a global level, Inglehart and Welzel (2005) have argued that economic development drives a general turn away from traditional values such as those of Confucianism. Their argument rests on the claim that with post-industrialization, prosperity gives a whole generation a sense of existential security at a formative stage of youth. Based on a hierarchy of needs, this security at a crucial life-stage results in a cohort-specific shift away from materialistic goals, towards self-expression values – Inglehart and Welzel's term for what other scholars refer to as individualism or individual autonomy values. One component of self-expression values are 'postmaterialist' values, on which Inglehart has published separately (1977, 2008) – these indicate the declining importance of commitment to

ever-higher, purely material living standards, and the increasing importance of non-material sources of meaning such as spirituality, within self-expression values. These values slowly grow to dominate the population through generational replacement, combined with the social and cognitive autonomy that results from the diversity of information sources and social interactions in a developed economy, familiar from classical sociological theory (Durkheim, 1984; Tönnies, 2001).

In a Chinese context, under the reasonable assumption that self-expression values encourage 'liberal' views that privilege individual autonomy, their association with economic modernization can be observed through data on ideological variation in China. Pan and Xu identify a 'strong, positive relationship between [liberal] ideology and modernization' (Pan & Xu 2015: 29), based on robust correlations at the regional level between the levels of liberalism and of urbanization, average disposable income and degree of trade openness, and at the individual level with levels of education and income. Research in other fields confirms similar trends in more intimate realms of life. Based on decades of psychological research in mainland China, Kleinman, for example, argues for a 'dramatic transformation' in the reform era in which development has caused the preoccupation with subsistence, 'the ancient emphasis on things that must be tolerated and endured', and the view of the world as dangerous and uncertain to have largely receded for all but the poorest, replaced by the 'individualistic search for happiness' (2011: 265-9). Similarly, in anthropological research, Rofel argues that the transition to capitalism in China has demanded the society-wide adoption of a 'model of human nature [that] has the desiring subject as its core: the individual who operates through sexual, material, and affective self-interest' (Rofel 2007: 3).

Inglehart and Welzel suggest that the rise of individualistic self-expression values creates ever greater pressure – probabilistic, rather than deterministic – for democratization. It is important to remember, however, that 'the individualization process in China is managed to a great extent by the Party-State' (Yan 2009: 289). Across Chinese society in the reform period, personal autonomy and opportunities for self-expression have expanded massively,

not least due to the large-scale adoption of internet use. But crucially, authoritarianism has permitted this expansion to be managed differentially, in line with the Party-State's strategic requirements and the relative levels of demand for such opportunities between social groups. 'In general', Yan writes, 'civil servants, private entrepreneurs, college students and intellectuals are granted more privileges and opportunities for self-expression and development, whereas villagers and workers receive less support and are more tightly controlled' (Yan 2009: 290). This helps to explain why, contrary to the predictions of Inglehart and Welzel's theory, support for the party and optimism about its capacity to solve China's most important problems tends to be *higher* among well-educated and high-income groups (Wike and Parker, 2015). In addition, challenging Pan and Xu's (2015) uni-dimensional model, subsequent survey-based research has suggested that variation on a left-right economic dimension and an authoritarian-democratic political dimension are largely independent, and that 'while more educated individuals are more likely to support the market economy, they are not any more supportive of democratic ideals' (Wu and Meng, 2017: 3). This may also reflect the persistent influence of Confucianism on the emergence of self-expression values in contemporary Chinese culture, as I illustrate in this study through the example of the elite-student group.

Chinese culture in the reform era is characterized by an evaluative schema that marries traditional hierarchical Confucian values with the now-dominant market logic, whereby productivity has become the primary source of prestige. Increasing economic inequality (Sicular *et al.*, 2007; Li and Sicular, 2014) in recent decades has been accompanied by the rise of 'common-sense, totalizing status ascriptions' (Kipnis, 2006: 304) that legitimize this inequality, most notably the concept of quality (*suzhi* – 素质). This discourse, along with related concepts of 'civility' and 'modernity', have been largely internalized throughout the population, including disadvantaged groups (Anagnost, 2008; Jacka, 2009; Sun, 2014). This is combined with what has been described as a 'multi-layered exploitation mechanism' of differential citizenship (Wu 2007: 8) under the *hukou* (户口) system, which limits residence

rights and entitlements such as schooling and welfare to one's matrilineally determined registration locale. While this system has its roots in migration controls established early in the Maoist period (Cheng and Selden, 1994), its persistence in the reform era, when state policy has encouraged rural residents to move to cities in massive numbers, serves to reinforce extensive discrimination by registered urbanites against the rural migrants they now live alongside, framed in local-outsider terms that border on an ethnic distinction (Solinger, 1999).

Scholars differ on whether hierarchical ideas such as *suzhi* are best interpreted as a return to Confucian ideals of cultivation (Kipnis, 2007) or as a complementary neoliberal innovation (Anagnost, 2004). In this thesis I portray them as a fusion of the two. It is undoubtedly the case, however, that they serve to support China's contemporary form of neoliberal governmentality, which has been described by Ong and Zhang as 'socialism from afar'. Individual autonomy is central to this system, under which 'state permission to pursue self-interest freely is aligned with socialist controls over designated areas of collective or state interest' (2008: 4). Under this interpretation, the discourses of modernity, civility and population quality are 'neoliberal forms of self-management [that] are not only flourishing…but also actually helping to sustain socialist rule' (2008: 7). Especially at higher levels of the social hierarchy, many Chinese people never experience the heavy hand of authoritarianism directly, feeling entirely free to pursue the fulfilment of their personal self-interest. For most people, this is enough. For example, in Rofel's study of desire under China's new neoliberal order, she interprets her young research participants' consistent and spontaneous assertions of complete indifference to politics as intended to emphasize that 'the passions of the self were not in the least bit directed toward the state' (2007: 124).

As Zhang and Ong remind us, this constitutes merely 'a limited conception of personal freedom as the actualization of self-interest … encouraged just in the realms of employment, private enterprise, and consumption' (2008: 12). However, given contemporary inequalities, much of China's population is excluded from realizing this ideal of material

success. Accordingly, this ideal leads to the ‘dissociation between culturally defined aspirations and socially structured means’ (Merton 1938: 674) which serves to explain deviant behavior in functionalist sociology. Yet data from the 1990s suggests that perceptions of increased inequality served to reduce happiness and life satisfaction across the population as a whole – even among the most affluent groups (Brockmann *et al.*, 2009). This points to a further trend, which resists explanation in structural terms of relative deprivation, stemming from the hollowness of this cultural ideal itself, in which personal fulfilment and social status are derived from an individual capacity for material accumulation and consumption. These materialistic values correspond with a moral void within society itself that, Yan has argued, has ‘led to an increasing sense of dissatisfaction and unhappiness amidst a booming economy’ (Yan 2011: 71).

Scholarship on Chinese culture has long focused on the persistent influence of Confucianism – with good reason. For some 1,300 years, command of the Confucian classics was the epitome of learning (Levenson, 1968), and the primary means of upward social mobility through success in the examinations for appointment to the Imperial bureaucracy (Zhao, 2009). And yet, Chinese culture is not monolithic. What we are talking about, in describing that culture as Confucian, is the dominant culture – one that is likely to be reflected most clearly among culturally mainstream, academically high-achieving groups such as the elite students.

The Gramscian (1971) perspective of cultural hegemony would imply that subordinate groups are likely to be incorporated into the dominant culture, especially when elites – such as the leadership of the CCP – maintain command over means of cultural reproduction such as schools and the mass media. However, Scott has presented a resounding critique of such hegemonic incorporation with his concept of the ‘hidden transcript and the public transcript’. He argues that subordinate groups only seem to internalize the dominant culture that legitimizes their subordination. In public, the dominated are obliged to ‘endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic, partners in that

subordination', even when this produces 'insults and slights to human dignity that in turn foster a hidden transcript of indignation'. However, because such resistance to the dominant elite culture occurs in private, as surreptitious 'infrapolitics', this creates an epistemological problem for social science, which is 'focused resolutely on the official or formal relations between the powerful and weak' (Scott, 1990: 4-7, 13). Scott's argument explains the considerable amount of scholarly attention that has been paid to China's orthodox Confucian tradition – rather than its popular, heterodox alternative, which the bohemian participants in this study referred to as the 'culture of the rivers and lakes' (*jianghu wenhua* – 江湖文化).

2.7 China's Heterodox Cultural Tradition

Lucian Pye has described the fundamental axis in Chinese political culture as not between different policy options, left wing and right wing, but between twin poles represented by 'an elitist high Confucian culture that glorified the established authority of the better educated and rationalized their claims of superiority on the basis of possessing specialized wisdom', and 'a passionate, populist heterodox culture', drawing on Daoism, Buddhism and miscellaneous folk religions, 'that glorified the rebel and trusted magical formulas to transform economic and social reality' (1988: 39). Heterodoxy in this sense has found repeated expression in cultural products, from the bandit heroes of the 14th century classic novel *The Water Margin* (Shi, 1986) to the rampage of murderous revenge depicted in the film *A Touch of Sin* (Jia, 2013). In pre-modern times, this impulse led marginalized, rootless elements of peasant society to variously find validation spiritually through redemptive or millenarian sects, socially through heroism and bonds of brotherhood in secret societies, materially through smuggling or banditry, and often some combination of all these elements (Unger, 1975; Naqin, 1976; Perry, 2002). The setting for such heterodox practices was often the 'imagined spatial arena' (Song, 2019: 108) of *jianghu* (rivers and lakes) – a complex term that is unpacked further in subsequent chapters.

Pye (1988) identifies traces of the heterodox impulse in Maoism, especially in decisions to launch the Great Leap Forward in 1958 and the Cultural Revolution in 1966, which involved rejections of hierarchical rationalism in favor of decentralization, social transformation, popular solidarity, and mystically heroic socialist symbolism (see also Madsen, 1990; Zuo, 1991; Chen, 2005). He further argues that in the transition from Maoism to China's reform era under Deng Xiaoping and his successors, the pendulum of China's political culture has swung back towards Confucian orthodoxy. Yet at the same time, for many Chinese people, nationalist abstractions and status validation through consumption have become increasingly unsatisfying, resulting in an increasing tendency for individuals to seek purpose, self-worth, prestige, and human connection in variously heterodox ways. Contemporary China has seen the 'fastest increase in religious populations in world history' (Vala 2013: 102), officially accommodated through the Party-State's corporatist structure of state-controlled religious organizations. However, for a significant proportion of the population, the desire for spiritual community drives participation in illegal organizations outside of state control. Yang estimates that around 100 million Chinese people participate in legal religious activity, while around 200 million participate in illegal religious groups. In addition to these populations, based on survey data concerning supernatural beliefs, he also identifies a 'huge gray market with hundreds of millions of potential religious consumers … [that is] destined to be a fertile ground for [new religious movements]' (2006: 114). The most notable of such movements, both for its scale and for the severity of its suppression, is Falun Gong.

Falun Gong arose in the early 1990s out of the post-reform boom in the practice of *qigong* (气功), a set of meditative, physical, and breathing exercises. The most prominent *qigong* grandmasters became national celebrities who succeeded in 'building the first mass, nationwide, largely independent organizations in the history of the People's Republic' (Ownby 2008: 65). Ironically, Perry (2002) argues, it was the CCP's decision to suppress Falun Gong in 1999 – designating it a heterodox religion (*xiejiao* – 邪教) – that served to

elevate the threat the organization posed and politicize its members (see also Noakes and Ford, 2015). Thornton notes that ‘the average follower was a woman over the age of 40 in the lowest income bracket within her community’ (2010: 226) – a social group that had grown up in times of great existential insecurity, and that was most vulnerable to the negative consequences of rapid socioeconomic transition. However, while of especial appeal to the socially marginalized, Falun Gong’s pre-suppression membership ‘spanned the social spectrum, including both well- and less well-educated, well- off and less well-off, [as well as] party and government cadres’ (Ownby, 2008: 97). This tendency for emergent heterodox communities to cut across the hierarchies and divisions that pattern mainstream Chinese society is also reflected in another reform-era social phenomenon that seems quite separate – the re-emergence of criminal secret societies (*heishehui* – 黑社会).

Heishehui, closely associated with the heterodox tradition, are often bound together by relations of sworn brotherhood rooted in knight-errant *jianghu* culture (Osburg, 2013). While Xia (2006) attributes their expansion, to a membership of around 30 million by 2002, to the weakening of state capacity, as well as the social dislocation and unemployment generated by rapid economic transition, Chen (2005) notes that some members abandon well-paid jobs in order to join these gangs. This points to the insufficiency of relative deprivation accounts in which criminality remains a rational though deviant means to attain material rewards (Merton, 1938); a more recent strand in criminology emphasizes the equal importance of the emotional rewards of pride, solidarity and prestige to be derived from engaging in organized transgressive behavior (Katz, 1988; Young, 2003; Moran, 2015). While parallels between *heishehui* and the Falun Gong should not be overstated, this emotional perspective brings one significant similarity into focus. Both offer powerful feelings of group solidarity and an alternate moral universe that promises self-worth greater than that available through compliance with mainstream cultural norms. Further, both do so by drawing, albeit in different ways, on the cultural repertoire of the heterodox tradition, in which sectarian religion and criminal secret societies were closely linked.

The orthodox-heterodox distinction is valuable insofar as it reminds us that Chinese culture contains resources for the creative and even subversive re-imagining of the social world. These cultural traditions therefore have direct bearing on any effort to draw out the political implications of the distinctive social and communicative environments the elite-student and bohemian groups occupied. To fully understand such implications requires consideration of China's authoritarian politics, and the distinctive forms of contention that occur within and against the Party-State's control.

2.8 Chinese Contentious Politics and Compartmentalized Control

In China, certain forms of political activity are expressly and resolutely prohibited; at the risk of oversimplification, this prohibition takes one of two main forms. Firstly, and most obviously, systemic dissent, which directly challenges the legitimacy of the CCP or single-party rule, is not tolerated. The Chinese Democracy Party, formed in 1999, was swiftly suppressed despite its explicitly 'moderate' demands and efforts to 'work within legal and institutionalized governmental frameworks' (Wright, 2002: 916). Secondly, beyond the aegis of the Party-State itself, any organization that might aggregate perceived interests between different localities or social groups, or popular protest that similarly aggregates discontents, is also consistently forbidden.

As Lee has shown, the Party-State's response to labor protest is characterized by a 'highly repressive stance toward horizontally organized dissent [that] generates self-limiting action among workers'; while 'economic and livelihood demands are recognized' in localized, single-factory mobilizations, 'cross-factory actions are relentlessly suppressed and harshly punished' (2007: 203, 65). Similarly, as Kennedy argues for the regulation of business associations, 'prohibiting national-level associations from setting up regional branches … [serves] to hinder the ability of associations to mobilize nationally' by precluding horizontal linkages between localities (2005: 41-2). Social associations are bound by regulation on the same principle, which 'makes it impossible for local groups to enroll

members from different areas, thus limiting the potential for the spread of grass-roots organizations that could develop national or horizontal representation' (Saich, 2000: 132).

Party-State efforts to divide up Chinese society for the purposes of social management are also reflected, in especially vivid and literally spatial terms, in the 'increased government intervention in urban planning and residential design' that has driven the proliferation of enclosed residential estates in urban China. These compounds are the 'key site through which the urban population is ordered and governed'; as such, they enhance 'political strategies designed to demarcate and territorialize social space so that it is rendered transparent to comprehensive and sophisticated forms of local government intervention' (Bray, 2008: 392-3, 397). Tomba (2005) argues that enclosed residential communities serve to structure the aggregation of collective interests in urban China in such a way as to render them manageable by the Party-State. The 'physical separation of classes or status groups' through residential enclosure 'contributes to the state's ability to address the demands of different social groups' in a differentiated way, by facilitating the 'classification and control of the population … by local administrations' (Tomba, 2014: 34, 43-4). In this way, residential segregation follows the same logic that Saich attributes to the oversight of social organizations – an effort to structure the myriad elements of Chinese society a way that 'mimic[s] the compartmentalization of government departments' that oversee them, and thereby to 'limit horizontal linkage' (2000: 132) between those elements. In this thesis, I employ Saich's term in a more general sense, describing the strategy of social management by which the Party-State seeks to segregate social groups, thus preventing the aggregation of their interests into broader formations, as *compartmentalization*.

Compartmentalization enhances the classificatory capacity of the state, rendering society legible in a manner that, as Scott argues, is a common aspiration of governments with 'high-modernist' aspirations for the 'rational design of social order' (Scott, 1998: 4). Furthermore, the segregation of social groups allows their claims and discontents to be dealt with in highly inconsistent terms, as short-term contingencies require. It therefore accords

with the systemic inclination to 'avoid binding constraints…so as to retain political initiative' that constitutes a key feature of the 'guerilla policy style', which Heilmann and Perry (2011: 12) have attributed to the CCP's heritage as a revolutionary insurgency.

However, this tendency towards compartmentalization also reflects the CCP's careful attention to the lessons of Chinese history. In evaluating China's history of popular revolt, often infused with the egalitarian idealism of the heterodox tradition, Perry suggests that 'a key to the success of such undertakings lay in bridging the (often state-imposed) categories that set various groups of people against one another… [and] posed serious obstacles to concerted popular imagination and action against the state.' Accordingly, the contemporary Chinese Party-State 'recognizes the dangers inherent in cross-class and cross-territorial expressions of popular protest. While geographically confined movements aimed at improving the economic lot of one social group are (and were) countenanced, movements that spill across jurisdictional and/or occupational boundaries are (and were) viewed as cause for serious central concern' (Perry, 2002: xi, xxiv).

These two prohibitions – on explicit challenges to the authoritarian status quo, and on the aggregation of interests between different social or local groups – determine the structure of political opportunities in China, strongly shaping the forms of political contention that emerge. He and Su distinguish between interest-oriented and anti-system contention in China, arguing that the great majority of protest falls into the former category, wherein 'protestors are primarily citizens whose own interests are violated by local government actions. This constrains their claims towards only a fraction of the regime apparatus, without questioning the fundamental aspects of the regime' (2018: 402). Their perspective accords with a substantial body of literature which suggests that the central state's comparatively permissive approach to localized, interest-oriented protest reinforces the stability of the regime. Compartmentalized protest of this kind can be considered as among the 'input institutions' (Nathan, 2003: 14) that support regime responsiveness; 'small-scale, narrowly economic protests can be an effective information gathering tool' that helps to correct information

asymmetries between central and local officials (Lorentzen, 2013: 127). Furthermore, because higher-level authorities constitute the only possible source of redress for grievances directed against the local state, contention is thereby channeled into forms that support the stability of the central regime (Chen, 2012).

Public online contention is more threatening than localized offline protest precisely because of its potential to generate collective action that cuts across boundaries of social group or locality. Accordingly, the censorship system is directed towards eliminating content with such boundary-spanning collective action potential (King, Pan and Roberts, 2013). However, the great majority of the protests that occur in China – 'mass incidents' (*quntixing shijian* – 群体性事件) in Party-State vernacular – are deliberately and explicitly constrained in their scope. The prominent role played by mobile internet communication in such mobilization is chiefly not on public platforms, but through strong-tie networks of prior acquaintanceship that correspond to the specific group whose material interests are affected (Liu, 2020), generating little threat of wider aggregation. Protest of this kind, even when mediated by the internet, does not challenge the Party-State or its system of compartmentalized control – because any contention pragmatically oriented towards the successful pursuit of political claims must necessarily accommodate this system and the constraints that it imposes.

In contrast, He and Su describe 'anti-system contentions' as those which 'primarily involve value-oriented social actors, that is, people who participate in actions against the state not for their own material gains'. Such contention constitutes a greater threat because 'value-oriented …. claims are very hard to be satisfied by the regime without making fundamental concessions regarding the political system'; they are thus strongly suppressed and accordingly rarer, pursued chiefly through informal channels. While an element of idealistic or moralistic dissent is implied by the lack of interest-orientation in such contention, He and Su also note the heterogeneity of their participants. Because 'participants of anti-system contentions are primarily value-oriented', this 'expands the constituents of the contentions [which] tend to

involve participants … in various professions and social status, with different social capital and networks' (2018: 403-5).

In other words, as a mobilizing frame, values or ideals cut across divisions within Chinese society in a manner that perceived material interests do not, given their compartmentalization. The same argument obtains from the opposite direction. In China's authoritarian context, uncompartmentalized contention – in Tarrow's general sense of bringing 'ordinary people into confrontation with opponents, elites, or authorities' (2011: 7) – tends to generate anti-system dissent. At sufficient scale, idealistic politics that aggregates perceived interests and discontents, between both different social groups and similar groups in different localities, unless directed externally against foreign enemies, generates opposition to the central Party-State and the authoritarian system by which its rule is sustained. From this perspective, idealism is simply a framing that permits such aggregation, following the 'logic of equivalence' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 144) through which any social coalition is formed and bound together into a cohesive political force.

It is not my intention to suggest that idealistic contention, which is irreconcilable with the authoritarian system because it aggregates the interests of diverse groups against those of the Party-State, is in some way *better* than localized, interest-oriented contention that is reconcilable with that system. Regardless of one's views about China's authoritarianism, it imposes a structure of political opportunities which typically ensures that only localized, interest-oriented contentions have any likelihood of success. If one's aim is to improve conditions for the Chinese people, then small yet incremental steps taken within the current system are likely to be considerably more effective than efforts to challenge that system altogether, while implying much less risk of widespread negative externalities. Interest-oriented contention is not selfish, but merely pragmatic; it also often reflects a more sophisticated understanding of Chinese political and social realities than utopian dreams of reconfiguring those realities altogether. While there is a certain romance to such dreams, China's 20th-century history is replete with cautionary lessons on the potentially vast cost in

human suffering of idealistic efforts to transform society, unconstrained by sufficient concern for practical matters of fact.

2.9 Research Questions

Drawing together the implications of the existing literature discussed above, the research questions that guide this study can now be elaborated. The overall aim of this thesis is to evaluate how the cosmopolitanism of two groups of young Chinese people affects their politics, and by extension the manageability of groups *like* these for the Chinese Party-State. I distinguish here between social and cultural cosmopolitanism. The former is defined in terms of diversity of communications, whether in access to diverse information or in membership of diverse social networks. The latter is defined as engagement with entertainment media and cultural practices of foreign origin. My intention is to understand how the distinct patterns of cosmopolitanism exhibited by these two groups, given the characteristic social settings they inhabit, affect their political attitudes and behavior, also drawing out how such effects are modulated by and manifested in their extensive use of information technology. Ultimately, the intention is to determine whether these consequences are in any way threatening to the political status quo.

The first two research questions set out below frame expectations about the online and offline communication of two groups. The student group might be expected to have more diverse communications because of their elite social status and extensive, complex internet-mediated interactions with geographically dispersed contacts, in comparison to bohemians who, given their greater proclivity for face-to-face interactions, have more localized social circles. Similarly, the intellectually sophisticated elite-student group might be thought to be more exposed online to high-cultural content from overseas than the bohemians, who are more tied to their local social environment and the global subcultures that are localized therein.

Q1: Are the online – and offline – communications of the elite-student group more diverse than those of the bohemian group, which are more homogeneous?

By diverse is meant here more complex communicative content, more geographically dispersed connections among distinct social groups, looser-knit and more-fragmented networks, and more private space, whereas homogeneous means more uniform communicative content, more local connections among similar social groups, denser and more-multiplex networks, and greater mutual surveillance.

Q2: Does the high-cultural content that the elite-student group engages with online integrate them into national culture, whereas the subcultural content the bohemian group engages with online generate divergence from national culture? Why?

National culture here is associated with broadly accepted cultural distinction and state-controlled information sources, and is in line with the orthodox Confucian tradition and hierarchical social norms. Subcultural content is associated with localized prestige and information sources that are autonomous from the state, and is in line with the heterodox Chinese tradition and egalitarian norms.

Q3: Do divergent patterns in the use of information technology between the two groups (elite students and bohemians) explain their support for – or opposition to – the authoritarian status quo? Why?

3 Method and Case-Study Design

My purpose in this research is to shed light on the ever-greater cosmopolitanism of young Chinese people, on how this quality is reflected in and shaped their use of ICTs, and to try to understand the political implications of these trends. Cosmopolitanism is a 'highly contested' (Tyfield and Urry, 2010: 278) concept in the social sciences, of which a definitive definition seems unlikely. I rely on two chief perspectives in this thesis: cosmopolitanism as a pattern of social communications, and as a pattern of cultural engagement; in subsequent chapters I engage in further disambiguation. Studying the outcome of interest – the politics of youth groups – is also far from straightforward in the Chinese context. While political communication in China is constrained by self-censorship, the considerable uncertainty concerning the extent of this phenomenon introduces contextual factors that complicate any effort to understand the political ramifications of Chinese social change.

In short, this study is an effort to understand the impact of one poorly understood, contextually dependent phenomenon on another. For this reason, it was conducted using a small-scale, long-term, site-intensive, case-study approach, one appropriate for a study which 'investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin 2009: 18). Initially conceived as a case study of a single elite-student group, it swiftly evolved into a comparative study because, as I familiarized myself with my field site, I encountered a local bohemian culture that was cosmopolitan, in both social and cultural terms, in a manner that was highly distinct from my elite-student contacts. Through 'theoretical replication', which 'predicts contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons' (Yin 2009: 54), I expanded my research to incorporate a group recruited from this local subculture. This study thereby became a multiple, embedded case-study of two groups of young Chinese cosmopolitans, exploring their interrelated social, informational, and cultural environments, both face-to-face and online, to understand the political implications of patterns of communication among these groups.

This case-study design employs multiple forms of data and evidence to shed light on how the context of the two groups affects, as embedded units of analysis, constituent group members, their online communications, and their political lives. I applied methods, including 'person-centered interviewing' (Levy & Hollan 1998: 333) and participant observation, that reflect the ethnographic 'principle of openness to what cannot *a priori* be pre-codified' (Baszanger & Dodier 2004: 11), and therefore suit exploratory research into poorly understood phenomena. I also drew on quantitative and computational methods, to analyze my participants' social networks, social media output, and survey responses.

Because of this small-scale, long-term, site-intensive approach, as well as the study's multiple case-study design (Yin, 2009), the value of its contribution is inextricable from the theoretical justification for the selection of the two groups. I argue that these two groups are important, embodying distinct combinations of culture and social environment that are characteristic of similar youth groups throughout China, with implications for our understanding of online communication, the interrelation of politics and sociocultural change, and China's future in the information age.

My comparison of these groups was based on 11 months of primary fieldwork, from September 2016 to August 2017; my engagement with the elite-student group occurred almost entirely during this time. But I had already spent nine months in my field site prior to this, from September 2015 to June 2016, chiefly for the purposes of Chinese language study. During this pre-fieldwork period, I also familiarized myself with the local youth culture and urban environment, gaining experience, contacts and rapport that were to prove invaluable in the subsequent primary fieldwork period.

3.1 Selection of Target Population: Elite Students

I resolved to explore the social, cultural and political life of a group of university students at the periphery of the broadly defined political elite (Zaller, 1992) – who were engaged in diverse, globalized communications largely unconstrained by such barriers as

border-level censorship. While they were likely to be exposed to sensitive political information, they were not selected based on their dissemination of such information or participation in online activism more generally. I elected to focus on a university in an inland Chinese city, and further calibrated my recruitment strategy over the pre-fieldwork period, when I developed contacts with numerous undergraduate students, studying various subjects at a range of local institutions, through language-exchange sessions. Though these sessions touched on my research interests only incidentally, it swiftly became apparent that engagement with political or current-affairs information, especially beyond the constraints of the censorship system, is rare among Chinese students. For example, none of my language-exchange partners used VPN software; one individual was entirely unaware of the existence of China's border-level firewall. This revealed a conflict in my recruitment priorities. I wanted to understand the communicative life of ordinary Chinese students, in order that this understanding might be to some degree generalizable beyond the specific group I had chosen to study. But at the same time, my interest in their potential engagement with sensitive politics demanded that I focus on a group that was not ordinary. I sought to resolve this conflict by recruiting participants from with a single academic department, whose courses of study rendered them likely to engage in cosmopolitan communications, to step outside the weakly imposed bounds of the state-sanctioned information environment, but implied no necessary engagement with critical politics.

I had developed connections within the journalism and communications department of a top local university, where I gave some guest lectures during my fieldwork preparation period. The students I had met there, chiefly studying for undergraduate degrees in network communications (one of the several degree courses offered in the department), all used VPNs. Not only were they encouraged to do so by academic staff, but some were required to do so for courses focused on foreign social media platforms that are censored in China. These students were often highly impressive – engaged, intellectually precocious, articulate and near-fluent in English. The department agreed that I might recruit participants from among

this student body. I felt that a 'long-lasting relationship of mutual obligation' (Levy & Hollan 1998: 339) was both appropriate and requisite for encouraging continued participation in an extended study. Many of these students hoped to pursue English-language postgraduate study at prominent overseas universities; I was a qualified and experienced English-language teacher, with academic training in related disciplines. I therefore elected to recruit and motivate[3] participants by offering a set of weekly conversation classes throughout the year, focusing on academic English and social-science topics. This group represented a promising focus for a study of youth culture and online communication because they seemed to epitomize, in their extensive, unconstrained engagement with foreign media, the burgeoning cosmopolitanism of highly educated Chinese youth, who might be expected to play a leading role in Chinese society.

3.2 Selection of Target Population: Bohemians

Prior to my primary fieldwork period, I had spent time exploring my field site's music scene, largely for leisure and Chinese conversational practice. As I made friends at various local music venues and bars, I encountered a very different kind of young person than the undergraduate students I had met so far. I chose to recruit a similarly sized group of young participants from within the local underground music scene, to replicate my case study approach among a group of local youth with a very different culture.

Members of this group did not describe themselves as bohemian; they would be much more likely to use a term like underground (*dixia* – 地下). I call this group bohemian partly as a matter of linguistic convenience: underground lacks an elegant equivalent to the nominalized plural, bohemians. Nonetheless, the word fits. This group had many qualities in common with the 19th and 20th century communities of bohemian artists and intellectuals in

[3] While this arrangement was not without a certain implicit sense of quid pro quo, students were free to participate in either classes or interviews as desired. On many occasions, students brought friends to the classes, who were never interviewed; some students who consistently attended classes did not complete their series of interviews, while others who completed their interviews had seldom attended classes.

Europe and America, with roots in the romantic tradition. They were hedonistic, unconventional, flamboyant, scornful of acquisitive materialism but placing a high value on friendship, creativity, self-expression, authenticity and autonomy; they also, like earlier bohemian communities, sympathized with a wide range of subordinate and subaltern groups (Brooks, 2000). On encountering members of this subculture – who were quite unlike any Chinese people I had previously known over most of a decade living in the country – I was initially struck by their cultural congruence with the hippies of the US counterculture, who themselves bore a strong mark of the older bohemian tradition (Roberts, 1978; Gair, 2007; Miller, 2011). One can indeed trace through the genealogy of popular music a direct link between the hippie movement and the bohemian group, perhaps most clearly in the psytrance subculture (St John, 2012). However, this local subculture was not a cosmopolitan import, nor indeed a stylistically unified, socioeconomic class-based grouping that academic use of the term 'subculture' conventionally denotes (Hebdige, 1979; Hall and Jefferson, 2006). Though characterized by the local interweaving of multiple globalized subcultures, I came to understand this group as rather a homegrown phenomenon with distinctively Chinese cultural roots.

Considered as a directly comparative study, differences in the composition of the elite-student and bohemian groups also serve as limitations on the validity of its findings, as discussed below. Nonetheless, I argue that comparison between these groups remains useful because of these two groups' notable similarities, particularly in their highly cosmopolitan communications. They are both distinguished from the great majority of Chinese youth by their exposure to politically sensitive information, use of VPN technology, global scope of their cultural tastes, connections with foreigners and language fluency – even if they also differed markedly in how each of these characteristics were acquired and manifested. Both groups were also influential, including numerous consummate online communicators, as well as some small-scale celebrities that were known or followed online by many thousands. As distant as they were from each other on an axis between countercultural deviance and the elite

cultural mainstream, they were nonetheless similarly distant from the wider youth public in their cosmopolitan communicative practices and degrees of influence. The wider significance of the two groups I compare in this study stems largely from the cosmopolitanism they share; my research seeks to pursue this phenomenon in its variegated manifestations, between two groups that occupy characteristic and influential positions within contemporary Chinese youth.

3.3 Composition of Elite-Student and Bohemian Groups

The distinct strategies through which the elite-student and bohemian groups were recruited shaped their composition in different ways, imposing certain limitations on these groups' comparison. I accessed my elite-student participants through a university journalism and communications department, recruiting 18 participants as well as interacting with around twice this number over the course of the year in my English conversation classes; two students did not complete the full schedule of interviews. All participants studied at the journalism and communications department, and had accordingly received a liberal-arts-focused[4] high-school education, apart from one individual studying translation and interpreting who had attended a specialist language-training high school; Figure 2 tabulates their degree subjects. Nine of these students were second-year undergraduates, eight were fourth-year, and one was a master's student. Of the eighteen, only three were male; though at around 17 percent this was broadly what one would have expected from a department at which around 80 percent of undergraduate students are reportedly female[5].

[4] Chinese high-school education typically requires students to specialize in liberal arts (*wenke* – 文科) or natural sciences (*like* – 理科).

[5] Similarly skewed gender ratios are common among communications departments throughout China, in addition to languages, humanities and many social sciences. Conversely, natural science and engineering students tend to be overwhelmingly male.

Figure 2: Academic Specialization in the Elite-Student Group

Elite-Student Academic Specialization		
Degree Subject	**Count**	**Percent**
Network Communication	8	44.44
Advertising	3	16.67
Journalism	3	16.67
Broadcasting and Presenting	2	11.11
Advertising Design	1	5.56
Translation and Interpreting	1	5.56
Total	**18**	**100**

The gender balance of my bohemian participants was almost the reverse of this ratio. Of the 16 bohemians who gave informed consent for research participation, only three were female, around 19 percent. And yet, the gender balance of many sites where I recruited these participants was often not noticeably skewed towards males; among the considerably larger number of bohemian individuals with whom I interacted during participant observation – perhaps one hundred or more – a higher proportion were female than among my sample. Key informants in this research, whose early participation was pivotal to my subsequent access to this community, were female. However, I did not attract sufficient female participants for the consequent gender ratio to be representative; this may have resulted in an overestimate of engagement with critical politics in this community, as I encountered some evidence for greater politicization among male bohemians.

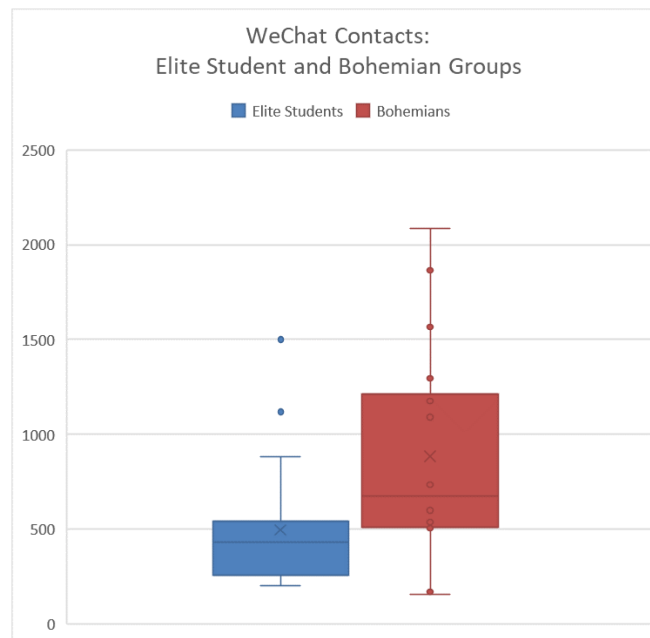
The composition of the elite-student and bohemian groups differed in other important aspects. The elite students were younger – drawn from three university-year cohorts, their age was highly uniform, with a mean of 21 years. The thirteen core participants of the bohemian group were almost five years older on average, at 26 years. While this group included six current students or recent graduates in their early twenties, I also recruited individuals with prominent positions of influence in the scene, who tended to be in their mid-twenties to early thirties. In addition to this core group, I also interviewed two individuals in their 40s – one a subcultural celebrity and locally high-status figure, the other extensively involved in sensitive political communication. One individual, approaching his 70th birthday, was interviewed both

due to his prolific online activism, but also the incongruity of his extensive interaction with young subcultural bohemians, given his advanced age.

In a study explicitly focused on youth culture, the inclusion of such older individuals might seem unwarranted. I argue rather that their inclusion reflects the sensitivity to context and privileging of 'ecological validity' in ethnographic research, wherein 'the act of researching should have relatively little impact on the setting – retaining things in their 'natural' form' (Denscombe, 2010: 90). To study social phenomena *in situ*, 'the ethnographer must graft his/her study onto pre-existing systems of activity', which requires in turn an openness to 'the unexpected elements that come to light as a study progresses' (Baszanger and Dodier, 2004: 11-12). The inclusion of older individuals among the bohemians, but not the elite-student group, is warranted because it reflects a substantive difference in their pre-existing patterns of interaction and association. While elite-student interaction with older individuals was almost universally constrained to family members, university staff or other authority figures, young bohemians' egalitarian social interactions with older bohemians, sometimes decades their senior, were routine and extensive. Indeed, this inter-generational interaction – autonomous of familial, educational, or political institutions – constitutes one of the most distinctive aspects of the bohemian social environment compared to that of the elite students.

Entirely excluding older members of a pre-existing interacting group, based on an *a priori* definition of 'youth', would have distorted rather than clarified the picture this study provides of the distinctive communicative environment to which the bohemian group's younger members have been exposed. One might argue that I should have similarly included older individuals exerting a notable influence on members of the elite-student group. However, even if this had not been highly impractical given my access to this group, while key authority figures such as parents or university lecturers may strongly influence the culture of their children or students, they are not part of that youth culture. The same argument does not hold for older members of Liangshan's bohemian scene, or other youth subcultural

Figure 3: Distribution of WeChat Contacts in Elite-Student and Bohemian Groups



formations, as discussed in chapter two.

Partly due to their greater average age, the bohemians also had a greater number of social connections than the elite students. The number of contacts on their primary social-media platform, WeChat in all cases, constitutes a reasonable proxy for the scale of these individuals' social circles; Figure 3 shows that elite students had fewer contacts (mean: 497.1) than bohemians (mean: 884.5), as well as the greater range of variation in the latter. The elite students' smaller social circles contrast with the greater sophistication of their internet use; they used a wider range of social media platforms, including more public-facing and overseas platforms, as well as using VPN software to a greater degree. However, both groups must be considered highly social and sophisticated in their internet use, in absolute terms.

Additionally, the bohemian group was more local in origins than the elite students; Figure 4 presents both groups' places of origins in de-identified summary. Compared to the elite students, the bohemian group tended to hail from less-developed, smaller towns and rural areas, and they tended also to be from less affluent backgrounds. While the bohemian group

Figure 4: Location of Participants' Hometowns:

Geographical Origin	Elite Students		Bohemians	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
From Same City	3	16.67	3	18.75
From Same Province (including same city)	9	50.00	10	62.50
From Other Province	9	50.00	6	37.50
Total	**18**		**16**	

included several individuals from wealthy families, and tended on average, like the elite students, to be middle-class, their socioeconomic range was wider, including individuals from urban working-class and rural 'peasant' (*nongmin* – 农民) backgrounds not represented among the elite-student group.

While the educational attainment of the elite students was rendered largely uniform by their manner of recruitment, the bohemian group was again characterized by wide variation, as indicated in Figure 5. Though all non-local participants initially came to the city for higher education, most bohemians had studied at universities rather less prestigious than that of the elite-student group, and four had not completed their undergraduate study, having dropped out in favor of employment within the bohemian cultural scene. Figure 6 lists the areas of study for all bohemian participants who engaged in any tertiary education; this shows both a tendency towards artistic and humanistic subjects, as well as a greater tendency towards vocational education, such as, rather incongruously, policing. These two trends correspond to higher and lower socioeconomic class backgrounds respectively. Similarly with foreign-language ability; because of the manner of recruitment, the elite students' English was almost uniformly excellent, especially in the written form. The bohemian group again demonstrated greater variation, including individuals with almost native-level English, as well as a sizeable sub-group who were conversational, and individuals with virtually no English whatsoever. Furthermore, as many bohemian individuals had acquired their English through face-to-face interaction with foreigners in informal social settings, foreign-language ability was largely independent from formal educational attainment among this group.

Figure 5: Educational Attainment in the Bohemian Group

Bohemian Participants' Highest Levels of Education	Count of Participants	Percent
Master's Degree	1	6.25
Undergraduate Degree	6	37.5
Current Undergraduate	2	12.5
Incomplete Undergraduate	4	25
High School	2	12.5
Middle School	1	6.25
Total	**16**	**100**

Figure 6: Academic Specialization in the Bohemian Group

Bohemian Participants' Area of Tertiary Education	Count of Participants
Architecture	2
Policing	2
Drama	1
Art History	1
Interior Design	1
Landscape Design	1
Marketing	1
Mechanical Engineering	1
Music	1
Nursing	1
Sport Science	1
Total	**13**

3.4 Participant Observation

My primary engagement with both groups of participants was through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, although the distinct character of these two groups and my access to them resulted in, for each group, a somewhat different balance between these two sources of data. My engagement with the bohemians allowed for a considerably greater degree of participant observation in varied informal settings, though they were often less enthusiastic about the interview process. A rather greater proportion of bohemians chose to not complete the full course of interviews, chiefly because they found them time-consuming and somewhat tedious. With the elite students, my engagement allowed

for more extended interaction in an interview setting, as well as a certain openness of response deriving from the degree of distance I maintained from their daily social environment; in contrast, my greater familiarity with bohemians' social circles sometimes imposed a certain hesitancy in their depiction of troubled relationships with other bohemians, with whom they knew I was also well-acquainted.

My agreement with the department of journalism and communications from which my participants were recruited involved requesting permission before interacting with new students, and not recruiting from within other departments. This imposed significant constraints on my efforts to immerse myself in the daily lives of these students, and essentially precluded further snowball sampling within the university. While I interacted with members of the elite-student group socially on numerous occasions, and accompanied them around campus, I seldom ended up spending time with them among their separate social groups, rather than groups of friends from among the classes I taught. My recruitment strategy of offering free language lessons had some drawbacks, such as imposing a certain distance between myself in my role as a teacher and the elite-student participants. Nonetheless, my weekly teaching had benefits; classes increasingly became unstructured group discussions on topics were often relevant to my research, granting insight into my participants' group interactions, attitudes, and differences of opinion, albeit impeded by their use of a second language. They also contributed greatly to my rapport with the students, as did my willingness to offer advice and assistance in the postgraduate application process.

There was a considerably greater degree of cultural difference between myself and many members of the bohemian group, as compared to the members of the elite-student group. Even in terms of language, the well-spoken elite students presented a considerably lesser challenge to my Chinese language abilities than the stronger regional accents and informal lexicons of the bohemian underground. My successful development of rapport and access among the bohemian community, rather than a testament to my abilities as a researcher, reflects its highly sociable and cosmopolitan nature, including a considerable

openness to difference. This fundamental property of the community, along with a considerably greater proclivity for extended face-to-face sociable interaction in public space, allowed a much fuller degree of participant observation than was available with the elite-student group. My interaction with bohemian participants began in bars, music venues and other public spaces, and extended, especially at an early stage, well into the night. As some of my bohemian participants, particularly those employed in the nightlife economy, were in the habit of going to sleep at a later hour than that at which many elite-student participants habitually got up, this sometimes taxed my capacity for wakefulness. As my access developed, I increasingly spent time in private homes, restaurants, and outdoor spaces, during the daytime as well as at larger evening social events. I began to take trips with my participants beyond my field site, including travel to other provinces. I played in bands with them, participated in street busking, and did a stint mixing cocktails at a commonly frequented bar. For the last few summer months of my primary fieldwork period, when many of my student participants were leaving the university, I moved to a 'village-in-the-city' (Chung, 2013), living with and nearby many bohemian participants, in a site with a long residential history among the wider bohemian scene. By this point, I had achieved Goffman's ideal for full immersion in observational research: 'you should feel you could settle down and forget about being a sociologist' (Goffman 1989: 129) – something that never occurred in my interactions with the elite-student group.

3.5 Semi-Structured Interviews

The typical course of interviews consisted in five sessions, generally from one to two hours each, or longer; several participants have over ten hours of interview recordings. A handful of participants, between both groups, did not complete the interview schedule, did not maintain participation after the first session or, for a high-status bohemian outlier, were interviewed only once using different questions. For elite students, interviews were conducted in cafés adjacent to the university campus, and for bohemians, in a mix of cafés and private

homes, including both participants' and my own. All interview questions were asked in Chinese, although certain elite-student participants were initially inclined to respond in English. The interviews were recorded, and I also took extensive pen-and-paper notes.

The first interview session was centered on biographical information and participants' usage of information technology, social media, and the internet. The second session focused on participants' daily lives and schedules, their movements and travel, habitual pastimes, entertainment-media habits and cultural tastes, as well as their patterns and histories of social interactions and organizational affiliations. In the third session, I further pursued my inquiry into the structure of both communities, through a pen-and-paper ego-centered social-network mapping exercise (Hogan, Carrasco and Wellman, 2007) which is discussed further below. In the fourth session, I returned to my participants' internet and media use. I explored their engagement with and trust in sources of news information, as well as in various social groups; I also sought their views on various issues related to information reliability, communicative freedom and control, as well as online anonymity and privacy, including their use of privacy features on WeChat. The fifth and final session was dedicated to politics and its intersection with my participants' social-media usage. I sought to explore their political worldviews through a range of open-ended questions, as well as their attitudes towards censorship and self-censorship; I also asked them to complete a structured quantitative survey covering opinions on political, economic, and cultural issues, while asking follow-up questions to clarify notable responses.

3.6 Qualitative Analysis of Social Media Content

Part of my engagement with my participants' social-media output took the form of digital ethnography, through participant observation focusing chiefly on the WeChat platform. Even in research as small-scale as this, prolific communicators generate sufficient content across such a wide range of platforms to render complete contemporaneous observation practically impossible. Focus is necessary, and despite the wide-ranging platform

usage of the elite-student group in particular, WeChat was primary to every participant's communication[6]. Scholars increasingly recognize the importance of this platform, given its contemporary dominance in China (e.g. Chen, Mao and Qiu, 2018). However, apart from its public-facing elements (e.g. Ng, 2015), large-scale analysis of communication on WeChat is prevented by its semi-private, symmetrical[7] conditions of access. Adding someone on WeChat generally involves prior acquaintance and face-to-face interaction. Ethical conventions imply the necessity for full individual informed consent for research access to content shared on such private platforms, unlike content that is in the public domain (Moreno *et al.*, 2013). Yet because WeChat now dominates the social lives of young Chinese people, it is an essential part of any ethnographic research into such groups. This bestows a particular utility upon research conducted at a small enough scale to gain informed consent for observational access into this realm of mediated communication that is central to Chinese social and cultural life, yet largely invisible to larger-scale inquiry.

Reading and commenting on my participants' WeChat posts, including photographic, audio, video, and textual data, was therefore among the most important elements of our interaction throughout the course of my fieldwork. And yet, this participant observation was to some extent haphazard, because it was subject to the same constraints experienced by every social-media user. I did not see every one of my participants' posts, not least because they were intermingled with posts of the considerably larger number of individuals among my WeChat contacts[8] who ultimately did not give informed consent for participation in this research. I inconsistently attended to my participants' output on more obscure platforms – just like other elements of their social circle.

During my fieldwork, digital ethnographic engagement with my participants' online output involved extensive notetaking and screenshot captures; for shared WeChat content, use

[6] Except for one individual who was banned from WeChat during my fieldwork.
[7] Both parties must agree to become WeChat contacts, unlike public platforms such as Sina Weibo.
[8] I employed a dedicated WeChat account, to ensure that my timeline was composed almost exclusively of content posted by contacts generated during my fieldwork.

of an in-app archiving function enabled web content to be saved to the Chinese version of the Evernote notetaking application. These records, reflecting my contemporaneous impressions of the two information environments under study, bear heavily on the analysis presented in subsequent chapters. However, I also relied on retrospective data-gathering, and quantitative keyword analysis, that sought to include all of participants' posts on WeChat during the primary fieldwork period that were subsequently accessible, as well as extending further into other platforms favored by a subset of participants, such as Sina Weibo, Zhihu, Douban, and QZone. This quantitative analysis enabled a considerably more complete overview of both groups' public-facing and semi-private online outputs – a perspective not practically available to members of those social circles themselves. The keyword lists generated through quantitative analysis of these groups' combined social-media corpora also served as a focus for further qualitative analysis of posts that reflected the most linguistically distinctive elements of their online output. This analysis was further supplemented by sources of data also not socially accessible, such as lists of followed public WeChat accounts and interview data concerning content shared online within different areas of participants' social networks.

3.7 Quantitative Analysis: Summary of Data Availability

In this study, while my participant-observation work disproportionately favored the bohemian group, my quantitative data gathering was less complete for that group. This was partly because of the rather onerous character of some of the data-gathering methods, such as the social-network-mapping exercise, which lessened enthusiasm for continued participation. In addition, a greater preference for non-public social media, combined with settings limiting access to historical posts, reduced the post-fieldwork availability of social-media data from the bohemian group. Figure 7 gives a summary of the participants in this study and the status of their respective contributions to its quantitative element.

Figure 7: Quantitative Data Availability Summary

Group	Pseudonym	Age	WeChat Contacts Oct' 2016	Gender	Included in Ideology Survey	Included in Social Network Mapping	Included in Social Media Corpus Analysis
Elite Student	Meng Zongying	22	1000	Female	●	●	●
	Shi Ye	22	275	Male	●	●	●
	Yi Yongrui	22	404	Male	●	●	●
	Hao Chenguang	20	259	Female	●	●	●
	Cao Qiuyue	20	370	Female	●	●	●
	Qian Xiulan	22	700	Female	●	●	●
	Yi Qi	22	455	Female	●	●	●
	Wan Shuang	24	544	Female	●	●	●
	Ren Meihui	20	309	Female	●	●	
	Song Liqin	20	229	Female	●	●	●
	Bai Lin	22	461	Female	●	●	●
	Liang Hong	23	698	Female	●	●	●
	Xia Yan	20	196	Female	●	●	●
	Chen Xiulan	20	266	Female	●	●	●
	Li Qingzhao	20	441	Female	●	●	●
	Zhu Peizhi	22	1119	Male	●	●	●
	Chen Jing	20	207	Female			●
	Yin Baozhai	20	211	Female	●		
Bohemian	Fang Xiaobo	34	171	Male	●	●	●
	Wan Xiaosheng	24	189	Male	●	●	
	Shen Yongliang	49	1175	Male	●	●	●
	Song Fa	26	600	Male	●	●	
	Cui Zhen	22	1185	Male	●	●	
	Zhou Jinhai	31	2085	Male	●	●	●
	Qin Zhengzhong	26	539	Male	●	●	
	Zhu Lanfen	27	1091	Female	●	●	●
	Han Enlai	24	157	Male	●	●	
	Wen Liqin	23	614	Male		●	
	Zhou Longwei	40	1567	Male	●		●
	Cheng An	69	734	Male			
	Zhao Yusheng	26	505	Male			●
	Tan Wen	22	512	Female	●		●
	Song Xue	32	1297	Male			●
	Yao Shan	22	545	Female	●		●

3.8 Social Network Analysis

I conducted a program of egocentric social-network mapping with 26 individuals. The pen-and-paper method, following Hogan et al. (2007), records data on relations with and among up to 44 close and somewhat close alters for each participant. Circling cliques and drawing connections between individual alters in two colors allowed participants to depict the strength of ties between them. Participants were also invited to label the origin of their connections with alters, by choosing from a set list of categories, including close family,

neighbor or roommate, classmate or colleague, former classmate or colleague, teacher or boss, organization contact, online friend, and other. They were allowed to use multiple categories for a given alter, to accommodate the complexity of their relationships. In presenting this data, I have generally reduced this complexity in favor of the more general category – an alter's status as a member of the same university, over their status as the member of the same student society, for example. I also employ alternate hierarchies to show how these categories interrelate. In interviews, I drew upon the generated maps to enquire further as to participants' history and character of association and interaction with alters within their networks, as well as the use of information technology in this interaction and the disposition of network elements to different varieties of shared content.

Social connections gathered using this method were (laboriously) tabulated, analyzed using the Python library NetworkX (Hagberg, Schult and Swart, 2008), and subsequently visualized in Gephi (Bastian, Heymann and Jacomy, 2009), using a Force Atlas projection that 'produce[s] visual densities that denote structural densities', so that 'communities appear as groups of nodes' (Jacomy *et al.*, 2014: 2). Subsequent comparison of the two groups involved both qualitative comparison of network visualizations, and quantitative comparison of the structures of their social networks, including such measures as average weighted degree, density, and transitivity. The results of this analysis are presented in chapter four.

3.9 Quantitative Analysis of Social Media Content

The textual content extracted from participants' social media output was posted (with one exception noted below) over one year from October 2016 to 2017. All textual content posted during this period was extracted for 25 participants, excluding nine whose privacy settings did not allow this retrospective access. The text was derived from three categories of sources:

1. **WeChat** - semi-private posts on WeChat 'Moments[9]' feeds, saved as phone screenshots and subsequently processed using the Python optical character recognition (OCR) package Tesseract
2. **Other Platforms** – posts on other public social media platforms, including Weibo, Zhihu, Douban and QZone, saved manually[10]
3. **WeChat Shared** - public, chiefly third-party web content, shared by participants on their semi-private WeChat 'Moments' feeds, extracted by saving to Evernote and processing using the Python package Ever2simple

Over the period on which this retrospective extraction of social-media data was focused, I had already programmatically gathered a large quantity of public posts from the Sina Weibo platform, which served as a reference corpus with which to compare the social media outputs of my participants. The Weibo public stream reportedly provides a random sample of recent posts (Zhang *et al.*, 2014), so this corpus can be considered broadly representative of language-use on that platform. Following measures to reduce the volume of mass-posted commercial content, which is widespread on the Weibo public stream (Fu et al. 2013), this dataset included some 57 million posts. Unlike English, because there are no spaces between words in written Chinese, computational analysis of Chinese text requires segmentation – dividing strings of characters into their component words – before tokenization and subsequent analysis. I segmented both my participants' social-media output

[9] A WeChat 'Moments' (*pengyouquan* – 朋友圈) post, similar to a Facebook profile post, can comprise user-generated text, images, videos, or other media, as well as embedded links to external webpages. Such posts are visible only to one's WeChat contacts; while contacts can append comments to these posts, such comments are only visible to contacts of the comment's author.

[10] One exception was a collection of posts originally published on QZone, which a bohemian participant had saved prior to their wholesale censorship and subsequently self-published in *samizdat* book form. The original publication of these posts predated the period of my fieldwork, and they would otherwise have been excluded from analysis. However, as the participant was still actively distributing this book during my fieldwork, and because of the inherent research value of the short essays and poems contained therein, I chose to extract the book's text through optical character recognition and include it in my analysis.

and the Weibo dataset using the Stanford Chinese Segmenter (Tseng *et al.*, 2005), to the Chinese Penn Treebank standard.

The sizes of the corpora generated from my participants' social media output are tabulated in Figure 8. These are combined at the group level, measured by word count after segmentation, and after removal of punctuation and stop-words, which were not subjected to analysis. While the greater availability of social media text from the student group renders their corpora larger overall, mean lengths show that on average, bohemian participants tended to share rather more public web text on WeChat, but slightly less user-generated text (WeChat and other platforms combined).

For analysis, I combined each group's WeChat and other-platforms corpora into a single user-generated corpus, analyzing the WeChat-shared corpus separately; because text on public webpages to which users share links are rarely authored by the user themselves, the insight such content offers into the individual who shares it is analytically distinct from that of text that they have personally written. My analysis of these corpora focused on the extraction of keywords. Scott and Tribble describe 'keyness' as 'a quality words may have in a given text or set of texts, suggesting that they are important, they reflect what the text is really about, avoiding trivia and insignificant detail' (2006: 55-6). The standard method by which corpus linguists identify keywords in a text is to compare the frequency of words within the target research corpus with their frequency within a larger reference corpus that is taken to be representative of the written language in question, thus enabling the identification of words in the research corpus that are highly frequent to a statistically significant degree.

As this reference corpus, I employed approximately 57 million Weibo posts, some billion words in total length, downloaded at the same time as my fieldwork. Using this corpus had two key advantages. Goh (2011) observes that diachrony, the change in language use over time, can heavily influence the results of keyword extraction if research and reference corpora are not contemporaneous. He further notes that comparison of texts between very

Figure 8: Social-Media Corpora Sizes

	Elite Student		Bohemian	
Corpus	**Word Count**	**Average Word Count**	**Word Count**	**Average Word Count**
WeChat	74,261	4,641.31	28,930	3,616.25
Other Platforms	25,702	1,606.38	17,869	2,233.63
User-Generated	99,963	6,247.69	46,799	5,849.88
WeChat Shared	514,905	32,181.56	404,612	50,576.50
Total	614,868	38,429.25	451,411	56,426.38

different genres will tend to highlight keywords based on general stylistic differences, rather than distinctive features of the research corpus. Though I also experimented with keyword extraction using two balanced corpora – the second edition of the UCLA written Chinese corpus (Tao and Xiao, 2012) and the BCC Chinese corpus (Chu and Chen, 1993) – these generated keywords that were obviously less characteristic of my participants' social media output than when using the Weibo dataset. The latter was both contemporaneous and, though non-identical in genre, much more colloquial and therefore more closely matched to my participants' social-media output. Furthermore, because it was segmented using the same method as my participants' social-media output, it generated far fewer erroneous keywords due to the application of different segmentation standards. However, this dataset was less representative of written Chinese in general than a balanced corpus; conversely, Weibo's publicness and microblog format ensure that this dataset was not representative of text posted on WeChat or the other platforms from which the research corpora were chiefly drawn. These factors may have introduced distortions into the keywords extracted.

I extracted keywords from these corpora with per-word hypothesis tests using a bag-of-words model that treats each corpus as a single text[11]. Such tests are conducted on 2 x 2 contingency tables for each word that occurs in the research corpus, as shown in Figure 9.

[11] While some scholars criticize this approach as ill-fitted to the non-random character of natural language (e.g. Kilgarriff, 2001, 2005), it remains standard in corpus linguistics (Paquot and Bestgen, 2009).

Figure 9: Contingency Table for Word Frequency Hypothesis Testing

	Research Corpus	Reference Corpus	Total
Freq. of Word	a	b	a+b
Freq. of Other Words	c-a	d-b	c+d-a-b
Total	c	d	c+d = N

Corpus linguists frequently employ Pearson's X^2 (Hofland and Johansson, 1982), or the Likelihood ratio G^2 (Dunning, 1993), in order to identify words with a statistically significant overrepresentation in the research corpus. However, these tests are not valid for any sample size; given bohemian participants' highly distinctive language and the large size of the Weibo reference corpus, applying either test would have required the exclusion of most intuitively compelling keyword candidates (Rayson, Berridge and Francis, 2004). I therefore adopted Fisher's (1935) exact (FE) test; lacking the large-sample assumptions of asymptotic tests, 'significance values obtained using Fisher's exact test are reliable regardless of the distributional characteristics of the data sample' (Pedersen, 1996: 4). The basic p-value cut-off used to extract keywords was alpha = 0.000001 (Scott, 2004); as this process involved many thousands of simultaneous significance tests, I also applied the conservative Bonferroni (1936) correction to minimize the possibility of type-1 error (Gries, 2005). I ranked the lists of overrepresented keywords with p-values below this cut-off by a measure of effect size (Gabrielatos and Marchi, 2012), the FE odds ratio, resulting in user-generated and WeChat-shared keyword lists for both groups; their lengths are tabulated in Figure 10.

Some words on these lists were incorrectly identified as keywords, due to errors in segmenting the corpora, OCR errors in gathering the WeChat text, or imperfect removal in post-processing of trivial textual features such as participants' own usernames. However, the great majority of keywords captured distinctive features of these two groups' social-media output. Corpus linguists typically base comparative textual analysis on the 100 statistically significant keywords with the greatest effect size (Gabrielatos and Marchi, 2012). In chapter five I do so for the user-generated corpora, with identifying details redacted and processing artefacts removed. However, for the larger WeChat-shared corpora, because of the

Figure 10: Lengths of Extracted Keyword Lists

Corpus	Elite Student	Bohemian
User-Generated	395	533
WeChat Shared	2,615	4,105

considerable number of keywords that do not occur in the Weibo dataset, I present both the top 50 words by effect size which do not occur, as well as the top 50 which do. While those words which do not occur at all in the reference corpus are more linguistically distinctive, those words which do occur but are greatly overrepresented in my participants' social media output are more general or abstract and, in some respects, more interesting.

In short, these methods allow the identification of key terms in the social-media output of the two groups, by merit of which their communication differs from the general pattern of language-use on Sina Weibo and arguably, despite issues of representativeness, from the language use of Chinese internet-users in general. Comparing these top-100 keyword lists therefore offers insight into differences between the distinctive languages that characterize the social-media outputs of both groups.

3.10 Ideology Survey

I conducted a 50-question ideology survey with 29 participants, which covered attitudes towards political, economic, and cultural issues. Participants were invited to select from a four-point scale of 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. This survey was designed for the Chinese Political Compass, a web survey set up by individuals affiliated with Peking University which operated in China until it was blocked in 2015. The advantage of using this instrument was that it allowed comparison with the responses of 171,830 individuals who completed the survey in 2014, which remain publicly available[12].

[12] Data available at https://zuobiao.me/

Pan and Xu (2015) drew on this data to argue that ideology in China varies along a dominant right-liberal and left-conservative dimension across political, economic and cultural issues. In this thesis I follow their analytical methods by, having combined my participants' responses with the 2014 sample, applying principal component analysis (PCA) to reduce the dimensionality of the combined survey responses by creating composite variables, which can be thought of as latent traits that explain the values that a set of variables take on. As the surveys completed by my participants (N=29) constitute such a small proportion of the whole once combined with the 2014 sample (N=171,830), this PCA generated a dominant principal component (PC1) that explained an almost identical proportion of the variability in all responses as in Pan & Xu's paper – around 17 percent, with the second-largest principal component (PC2) explaining only around 5 percent. Following this method allowed the distributions of ideological views within both groups in my study, as well as the much larger 2014 sample, to be compared.

The 2014 sample was non-random, and certainly not representative of China's overall population. Participants required internet access, as well as the inclination and patience to complete an online poll; university students, especially from Beijing, were strongly overrepresented. However, this sample is likely to be a closer match to my own population of interest in this study, which is specifically concerned with the politics of online cosmopolitan youth groups. Moreover, Pan and Xu address the problem of representativeness by applying Monte Carlo methods, repeatedly dropping observations from the data, both on the basis of respondents' locations and on the dates of their survey responses, and conducting PCAs on the remaining responses to show that the first principal components remained correlated with that of the whole sample. This supports the robustness of their conclusions, showing that because the 'dominant uni-dimensional factor … estimated from vastly different samples remains extremely stable', this dimension 'would likely remain the same if we had a scientifically designed representative sample based on the same set of questions' (2015: 14, 3). Though the elite-student and bohemian groups cannot be considered representative of

broader populations, Pan and Xu's effort to establish robustness also apply to the combination of my participants' responses with the 2014 sample, as their inclusion makes such a fractional difference to this sample's composition.

Pan & Xu's paper also showed a high degree of correlation between liberal and conservative views on each of the three sections of the survey. By conducting PCAs for the political, economic, and cultural sections separately, liberal-conservative scores are derived from the first principal component of each analysis, which account for 24, 17 and 25 percent of the variation in each of these three areas respectively. This allows the comparison of the groups' ideological positions in these three areas.

3.11 Positionality: Analytical and Ethical Implications

As with all social-scientific research, positionality – by which I mean the 'positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study - the community … or the participant group' (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014: 627) – will inevitably have shaped this study's findings. On a practical level, my own identity – English, male, middle-class, white, heterosexual and cis-gendered – undoubtedly influenced my recruitment and development of rapport with participants. These elements of identity also represent the foundation for a framework of unavoidable preconceptions and assumptions that will have colored the research analytically. However, limitations on the reliability of my research findings imposed by my inherent positionality were perhaps secondary to those imposed by differences in my relative positionality vis-à-vis the two groups. While contributing to asymmetries in the availability of various categories of data, the markedly distinct social roles and contexts in which I engaged with the two groups had further and more fundamental implications.

Though my relations with many of the elite students were highly cordial, I suspect that I remained a teacher to almost all of them, even in informal contexts, as well as a researcher from a prestigious institution. Both roles have status implications. Of course, my

bohemian participants were equally aware that I was conducting research, and I did in fact teach English to some of them; this was an important development in my relationships with those individuals, and knowledge of my institutional affiliation cannot have hurt in this regard. And yet, the considerably lesser degree of importance attached to formal academic credentials in this community ensured that my local social status was initially low; this allowed me to make judicious use of deference as a currency of social interaction, in a manner that would have been inauthentic for a higher status individual. Ultimately this resulted in achieving some approximation of an insider's position among the bohemians; by contrast, in my teacher role among elite students, although always very friendly, I felt much more constrained in developing close personal bonds that would sustain rewarding interaction outside the context of classes, interviews, and occasional social gatherings.

This difference in relative positionality had especial ethical implications for my relationship with the elite-student group. Although my language classes were highly informal and took place outside the university campus, they were nonetheless implicitly sanctioned by the member of academic staff who facilitated my recruitment of this group and, by association, participants' academic department. Accordingly, in my dual role as researcher and teacher, I was unavoidably associated with participants' university, and the power relationships tied up with that institution, compounded by the high degree of deference accorded to teachers in Confucian cultures (Tran, 2013; Fernández-Álvarez, Li and Chen, 2022). It is possible that certain students may have felt that they were expected to avail themselves of the language classes I provided. Though I did not get this impression at the time, such students may consequently have felt a sense of obligation to participate in my research, despite my repeated insistence that participants should not participate or answer specific questions if they felt uncomfortable doing so.

Quite apart from its ethical implications, the possible existence of a perceived status or power differential between myself and elite-student participants raises the possibility of desirability bias in their interview responses, shaped either by their perceptions of my own

preferences, particularly as a foreigner, or social desirability more generally. The potential impact of such bias on the reliability of my comparative findings is compounded by the comparative absence of status/power differentials in my relationships with bohemian participants. Given my greater social distance from their day-to-day lives of the elite students, my insight into that group will inevitably have tended towards a more etic perspective. In comparison, attaining the position of a relative insider among the bohemians allowed me a more emic perspective on that group. Neither perspective is necessarily unreliable, but the difference between these perspectives potentially imposes limitations on the validity of comparisons between the two groups.

3.12 Ethics of Informed Consent and De-identification

This research raises two further sets of ethical issues: firstly, the character of my access to both groups, especially as they pertain to informed consent. Secondly, issues of data protection and de-identification. While areas of legal and political sensitivity heightened the need to maintain research participants' anonymity, this imperative was complicated by certain participants' celebrity.

Though partly motivated by my provision of free English conversation classes, members of the elite-student group proactively volunteered for research participation, and each formally gave their full informed consent early in our engagement. The process of gaining informed consent involved their reading a Chinese-language document and agreeing on audio recording to its stipulations. This document summarized my research interests, the scope of the data on which I intended to draw (including from interactions outside of formal interviews, as well as from social media), and the data protection and de-identification measures that I would follow. Subsequently several elite-student participants, when touching upon topics in their personal lives or aspects of their online output that they considered to be sensitive, felt free to request that I not include such data in my research, requests with which I

naturally complied. Accordingly, these individuals' participation quite unambiguously occurred under full informed consent.

My engagement with and access to the bohemian group was rather more complex. All members of this group gave informed consent based on the same research summary document, adjusted slightly for relevance. However, persuading members of the bohemian group to participate in this research was an extended process, which depended on rapport developed in social settings to a considerably greater extent than with the elite-students. Consequently, a greater proportion of my non-interview interactions with bohemian participants occurred prior to formally gaining their informed consent, although the research statement used in this process retrospectively covered our prior interactions. In addition, unlike the elite-students, engagement with my field site's bohemian scene involved interaction with a considerably greater number of individuals than the 16 members of the bohemian group who ultimately gave formal informed consent for research participation. Given the ethnographic nature of this research, it is not possible to simply exclude from analysis data generated through interactions with such peripheral figures. My approach to this problem was to be clear in any extended interactions within the scene that I was a researcher, and to explicitly state that my research focused in part on the relationship between global culture, local subculture, and politics. I believe that this approach conformed to the 'spirit of informed consent, rather than the mechanistic application of a form' (Fluehr-Lobban, 1998: 185), which has been advocated in anthropological research.

The overriding imperative that guided my conduct of this research was to 'do no harm' to those I encountered within my field site, which constitutes 'a basic principle in many professional codes' (Fluehr-Lobban, 1998: 179) of research ethics. The chief ramifications of this were, firstly, the obligation to protect personal information provided to me during data-gathering, and secondly, to ensure the de-identification of research participants in any subsequent presentation of my findings. While the necessity for careful data protection was heightened by the sensitivity of certain practices prevalent among my field site's bohemian

group, the process of de-identification was substantially complicated by the relative celebrity of members of both groups.

While I adopted strict data-security measures in my efforts to protect the personal information of my research participants, I also made clear to them that these measures could not be deemed infallible. I also employed a system of dual pseudonyms for each participant. In all notes and records, participants were referred to by one pseudonym; in this thesis, and in any subsequent publication, a second set of pseudonyms is used. The intent of these measures was to complicate, in the event of the failure of data-protection measures, any efforts to connect my field notes or other records with specific individuals. However, the limitations of relying on pseudonymization alone as a means of protecting participants from harmful consequences of research publication, especially by 'making public that which our informants would prefer to keep secret' (Barnes, 1963: 130), have long been noted.

Both groups under comparison in this project contained individuals followed or otherwise known by hundreds of thousands of internet users. The de-identification of other participants was rendered problematic by a combination of their distinctive attributes, and their association with sites, organizations or institutions that are themselves well-known. Anyone familiar with my field site's music scene, or potentially China's underground music scene in general, would have been easily able to identify several bohemian participants from the most superficial personal information, in combination with the name of sites and venues with which they are associated. Nor could such venues themselves be easily de-identified, as my field site's music scene was small enough that such venues were highly distinctive. Similarly, the institution from which the elite students were recruited is highly distinctive in local context; armed with such information, in combination with their academic department and minimal personal detail, identifying many of those students would have been simple.

For these reasons, my efforts to preserve my participants' anonymity required the de-identification of sites and institutions with which they were associated, and thus necessarily the location of my field site itself. Accordingly, in this thesis I employ a pseudonym for the

city where my research was based: Liangshan. Sites within my field site also receive pseudonyms, and in cases of especial sensitivity significant personal detail has been altered, including in some cases the presentation of composite individuals using details conflated from multiple participants.

These various ethical issues were addressed in applications, prior to the commencement of each stage of research, through the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) process at Oxford University. Approval was granted for the initial pre-fieldwork period under reference OII_C1A_15_038, and for the primary fieldwork period under reference SSH_OII_C1A_16_068.

4 The Social Organization of Elite-Student and Bohemian Groups

In this chapter, I depict the social environments of the elite-student and bohemian groups, while highlighting several interrelated attributes which contribute to these groups' distinct patterns of social organization. The two groups were cosmopolitan, in Collins's sense of 'diversity of communications' (2009: 35), but this diversity was manifested differently among each group. For elite-students, it was their mediated communications that were especially diverse. In their social communications, on which I focus in this chapter, this diversity was manifested in their extensive use of various social-media platforms, and their geographically dispersed connections with other elite students who shared their sophisticated intellectual proclivities. The communicative diversity of bohemians, by contrast, was rooted chiefly in their free-wheeling face-to-face social interactions, in public settings characterized by vastly greater socioeconomic and cultural variation than that encountered by a typical elite student. Collins argues that, for cultural outcomes such as a tendency towards 'abstract, relativistic ideas' (2009: 35), it does not matter whether communicative diversity derives from interacting in heterogeneous networks, or from encountering diverse information in small or homogeneous networks. Both groups did exhibit this relativistic tendency, despite the stark cultural differences between them. One reason for these differences is that, as I argue in this chapter, the source of cosmopolitan communicative diversity does make a great deal of difference to social organization, in four main ways.

Firstly, groups such as the elite students, whose diversity of mediated communication is high yet whose face-to-face interactions are constrained, spend a great deal of time in the physical presence of classmates and roommates; this makes them subject to extensive 'mutual surveillance' in their daily lives. This leads them, as Collins argues, to 'accept the culture of the group and … expect precise conformity in others' (2009: 34). By contrast, the public face-to-face sociality of the bohemians, though extensive, is episodic – it is composed of frontstage

performances, in Goffman's (1956) terms, which imply and require a degree of physical backstage privacy that elite students lack. This privacy diminishes mutual surveillance, supporting a more 'explicitly individualistic' (Collins, 2009: 34) bohemian culture which, in turn, both permits and generates greater diversity in bohemian networks. Many scholars, though often using different terminology, have pointed to the effects of electronic and social media in heightening mutual surveillance (Meyrowitz, 1985; Wesch, 2009; Marwick and Boyd, 2011; Hampton *et al.*, 2014; Hampton, 2016). Elite-student privacy-oriented practices show a capacity to carve out online spaces that counter these conformist pressures. However, such practices affect the online communicative environment; the underlying physical environment continues to shape the situational structures of face-to-face interactions, considered as 'patterns of access to [social] information'. While 'electronic media override the boundaries and definitions of situations supported by physical settings' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 37-8), this effect is chiefly in one direction – increasing access to social information that might otherwise have been constrained by physical boundaries. Online privacy practices lessen online mutual surveillance; they do little to override the offline flow of social information between backstage and frontstage areas that are shared by members of the same group, in the absence of physical boundaries. In other words, access to the internet does little to diminish the conformity induced by the absence of physical privacy.

Secondly, the affordances of online interaction, especially on the privacy-focused WeChat that is now the dominant social-media platform in China (Chen, Mao and Qiu, 2018), and of face-to-face interaction, especially in public settings where distinctions between in-groups and out-groups are diminished, differ greatly in their impact on the formation of new social bonds. As Wellman (2001) argues, though group interaction is perfectly feasible in online spaces, it requires deliberate choices by those involved, unlike in face-to-face settings where this often occurs by happenstance, generating a tendency towards random encounters.

Thirdly, while such random encounters do not necessarily generate affective bonds, they are much more likely to do so when they occur in the context of physically co-present

group interactions with a high degree of ritual intensity. The ritual perspective on social interaction (Goffman, 1967; Durkheim, 1995; Collins, 2004; Ling, 2008), suggests that the affordances of face-to-face interaction offer the potential for considerably greater intensity and collective effervescence than is commonly experienced through mediated communications – especially the kind of episodic, larger-scale gatherings that characterize bohemian cultural production. The affordances of public face-to-face interaction do not only lend themselves to interactions with a greater diversity of individuals than online interactions, but also offer a greater potential for the formation of affective bonds across the socioeconomic and cultural barriers that constitute this diversity.

A fourth aspect of the social affordances of online communication affects both groups equally, though in markedly different ways. Online interaction, while often of a lower order of ritual intensity than physically co-present interaction, nonetheless affects social relationships by prolonging affective bonds previously established face-to-face, but which otherwise would have diminished over time (Ling, 2008; Hampton, 2016). Online interaction thus changes the structure of social relationships, but in a manner that affects the elite-student and bohemian groups quite differently. For elite students, it reinforces the institutional shaping of their social relationships by maintaining their close bonds with former classmates, increasing the fragmentation and geographical dispersal of their social networks while maintaining their homogeneity. For bohemians, the ritual intensity of their episodic face-to-face interactions in the local bohemian cultural scene tends to override such former associations. However, online interaction transforms bohemian participation from episodic to continual – reinforcing the strength of dense and multiplex bonds that characterize these scenes, without diminishing their heterogeneity.

The greater propensity of bohemians for face-to-face interaction, and of elite-students for online interaction, contributes to a divergence in their patterns of social organization. However, the relationships between the affordances of communication technologies and social organization are mediated by cultural factors that are distinctively Chinese. As

discussed in chapter two, Lucian Pye (1988) has described the fundamental axis within Chinese culture as between twin poles represented by the dominant hierarchical Confucian tradition, and an egalitarian heterodox tradition that has periodically, throughout Chinese history, generated opposition to that dominant social order.

In this chapter, I contend that the orthodox and heterodox traditions should be understood as not only cultural, in the sense of symbolic value systems, but also as social, constituting modes of interpersonal association with highly distinct affordances. The orthodox mode – the conventional prism through which Chinese society is understood – is characterized by differentiated structures of clearly defined and often hierarchical relationships (Fei, 1992), sharp distinctions between in-groups and out-groups, and between known and unknown individuals (Yum, 1988), and the need for newly formed social bonds to be legitimized by introduction through an intermediary known to both parties (King, 1991). This mode serves Chinese people well in more formal situations, allowing effective coordinated action when relationships are institutionally or organizationally structured. By contrast, the heterodox mode permits egalitarian interactions that do not depend on clear relationships of this kind; as such, it lends itself to the formation of affective bonds with unconnected strangers, while also supporting social organization and coordination under cosmopolitan conditions of social diversity and cultural disjuncture. While differences between elite-student and bohemian social organization stem partly from how the diversity of their social interactions are weighted towards online and face-to-face communications respectively, the effects of these differences are reinforced by the greater influence of the orthodox Confucian mode on elite students, and of the heterodox mode on bohemians.

In the rest of this chapter, I firstly offer background context on the city in which my field site was located. I then describe the face-to-face and online social communications of the elite-student and bohemian groups in turn, placing emphasis on the relationships between these groups' social communications and organization, as well as the mediation of these relationships by their distinct cultures. I conclude the chapter by presenting evidence of the

ramifications of these factors on the structure of egocentric social networks that characterize the two groups: elite-student networks are looser-knit and fragmented, geographically dispersed yet homogeneous; bohemian networks are bound together through stronger bonds of local solidarity in dense, multiplex connections, yet are considerably more heterogenous in their composition.

4.1 Liangshan: Economy and Local Culture

This research is focused on a mid-sized, sub-provincial city in inland China. Like many Chinese cities, Liangshan has seen a huge expansion in its population through inward migration, especially in the post-reform period with the rapid, successive development of heavy industry, high-tech manufacturing and the service economy. Today, the economy is mixed, and though largely differentiated between different zones, the city nonetheless exemplifies the combination of 'premodern, modern and postmodern conditions' by which Yan (2011: 72) characterizes China more generally. Economic development and urban change are palpable in Liangshan, where the sights and sounds of construction, refurbishment, demolition and reconstruction are virtually omnipresent. The state is extensively involved in this redevelopment; since the fiscal decentralization of the late 1990s, a significant proportion of local-state revenues have derived from control over land use (Hsing, 2010; Tang, Mason and Sun, 2012; Sargeson, 2013).

These revenues, as well as opportunities for graft among local officials, often depend on forcible eviction-and-demolition (*chaiqian* – 拆迁), providing property owners with compensation below market rates. Redevelopment therefore serves as the primary driver of localized contention in my field site, while also leading to a close relationship between the local state and criminal secret societies (*heishehui* – 黑社会), whose members typically provide the intimidation and violence that ensures the swift eviction of residents. Several of my participants reported similar relationships in their own hometowns; Osburg points to the wider influence of *heishehui*, which 'exert an increasing influence over local state organs in

China, play a key role in real estate development, and control much of China's vast "underground" economy' (2013: 30).

Historically, the city relied heavily on riverine trade, positioned as it is on a navigable tributary of a major Chinese watercourse. Though modern transport infrastructure has largely eliminated this area of traditional economic activity, in which self-organized groups of stevedores played an important role, locals will point to the distinctive traces of 'wharf culture' (*matou wenhua* – 码头文化) that remain. This complex term can imply such characteristics as self-reliance, astute entrepreneurialism, fractiousness, tolerance for diversity, an informal, non-legalistic approach to problem solving and an inclination towards independent social organization. Bohemian participants also employed the term '*jianghu*' (江湖) to characterize local culture, sometimes drawing an explicit connection between this term and local wharf culture; both attributes are associated with China's popular heterodox tradition.

Literally meaning 'rivers and lakes', *jianghu* is a complex term and hard to define; Song has it as 'the imagined spatial arena in Chinese literature and culture that is parallel to, or sometimes in a tangential relationship with, mainstream society … inhabited by merchants, craftsmen, beggars and vagabonds, and later bandits, outlaws and gangsters' (2019: 108). Closely associated with the knight-errant culture depicted in classic 14th century novels such as *The Water Margin* (Shi 1986), it evokes the bonds of sworn brotherhood common to contemporary criminal organizations and the knight-errant ideals on which they draw. *Jianghu* denotes a view of the world as pervaded by corruption and injustice, a moral ambiguity that nonetheless creates the conditions of possibility for righteous honor through acts of self-sacrifice and heroism. This was an important cultural reference point for the bohemian group's view of local society, and while none would have gone so far as to explicitly state such a view, they tended to see high-status figures in the bohemian scene, and even themselves, as heroic in these terms: as knights of *jianghu.*

By contrast, this perspective was quite alien to the outlook of the elite-student group, who were oblivious to the local crime and corruption it implies, and much more wedded to the elite Confucian ideal of the scholar. However, it is important to note that the heterodox *jianghu* tradition is not merely a culture of an itinerant underclass; Song emphasizes that historically there was also a '*jianghu* for the gentry class', and that 'contemporary China has witnessed a proliferation of *jianghu* forms and ideologies among virtually all social classes'. (Song, 2019: 110, 123; see also Osburg, 2016) This tradition remains 'a vital constituent of modern Chinese culture and society' that 'for most Chinese outside of official and intellectual circles … appears as an unavoidable, if not exactly "normal," social fact' (Boretz, 2011: 16, 34). Incorporating both an alternate system of values and an egalitarian mode of association that is inherently cosmopolitan, the heterodox *jianghu* tradition is a cultural resource that, while manifested chiefly among specific non-elite groups, is available to all culturally Chinese people. Accordingly, it supports the development of community bonds in liminal social environments characterized by a high degree of diversity.

The relationship between Liangshan's local wharf culture and the *jianghu* tradition, as well as its function as a mode of social association, is evident in an explanation of these concepts offered in interview by Zhou Longwei, an older, high-status bohemian participant and Liangshan native:

Thomas Flavel: *"People have told me Liangshan has a wharf culture. What does that mean to you?"*

Zhou Longwei: *"Yes, I agree with that, because I grew up in that environment, by the old docks … Historically, Liangshan always had the river, so for hundreds, thousands of years … people would come on the river to trade … So, you had all these outsiders and locals all mixing together in the same place with different dialects, customs and habits, it created contradictions and conflict. So, they found their own ways to solve their troubles and hassle.*

So, it's a jianghu – do you know jianghu? … If you want to live here, do business here, you have to find a way to solve all kinds of difficulties. Including everything from communicating with other people, buying things, to sometimes solving problems with violence. So, they had their own mode of interaction. Where you get wharf culture, it's more inclusive, because you have this long history of outsiders coming in and becoming local."

Thomas Flavel: *"So jianghu culture and wharf culture are the same?"*

Zhou Longwei: *"In other cities, cities without wharf culture, they still have jianghu. Jianghu is … at the margins of the law. They have their own society, system, mode of behavior. It's got*

nothing to do with the government. It's unconnected from the laws of the city, of the country ... Jianghu has jianghu rules ... Jianghu rules of jianghu places."

Zhou Longwei's account highlights how China's heterodox cultural tradition has served since time immemorial as a blueprint for social organization, in environments of sociocultural diversity where orthodox Confucian roles and hierarchies are unclear. The importance of *jianghu* as a cultural reference point among the bohemian group reflects, in part, the extent to which bohemian cultural scenes are precisely the kind of heterogeneous environments where the social affordances of heterodox culture are most practically useful.

4.2 Social Interaction in University Life: Face-to-Face

Liangshan is home to many universities and vocational colleges, some of which are among the best in the province and highly ranked at the national level. Institutions with especially good reputations – such as Liangshan University, where this research was partly based – attract students with a much higher degree of academic attainment than Liangshan's status as a comparative backwater would suggest. This is partly due to the 'regional discrimination' that characterizes the Chinese university admissions system; while the most prestigious universities are located in eastern metropolises such as Beijing, 'students from outside Beijing … need a significantly higher exam score to enter a university or college located in Beijing compared to [local] students' (Zhang, 2009: 5).

Students begin their career in higher education with weeks of arduous military training, in units that conform to their academic departments and classes. Students are allocated to a 4-bed dormitory, in which they typically reside for their whole time as an undergraduate; living off-campus is rare, and not permitted by most parents. These dormitories are assigned by their department; they live with their classmates, who are likely to share cultural, socioeconomic, and often regional backgrounds. All power to the rooms (including WiFi routers) is turned off at 11pm, and dormitory buildings are locked, preventing students from returning to their rooms after this time. This curfew represents a powerful

limitation on the social lives of students, effectively precluding participation in much of the nighttime cultural life with which members of the bohemian group were extensively engaged. Students are not subject to formal punishment for breaching this curfew and staying in hotel rooms – comparatively inexpensive in China – remains an option. However, overnight absences from dormitory rooms are inevitably noted by one's roommates and, especially for female students, perceived as improper.

Students eat, study and sleep in the physical presence of their classmates. Each class of around 30-40, fixed from their second year onwards and with whom students share the great majority of their teaching contact, is overseen by an appointed student *banzhang* (班长 – class president). Their year is overseen by quasi-academic political counsellors (*zhengzhi fudaoyuan* – 政治辅导员), who often reside within student dormitories and have pastoral, disciplinary and political responsibilities, as well as contributing to decisions over the awarding of academic scholarships. A state policy document describes political counsellors as the 'primary working force for the moral and ideological education of university students' (Ministry of Education, 2006); Yan offers evidence from Peking University that their constraining influence on student conduct is both political and social, arbitrarily withholding academic rewards not only from students who hold 'radical ideas', but also on those who lead 'independent lifestyles' (2014: 503).

While students do interact in ways that cross-cut departmental structures, this interaction is almost always within official university organizations. Students spend a considerable proportion of their free time on engagement with such university societies (*shetuan* – 社团), as well as student unions (*xueshenghui* – 学生会). However, the cross-cutting effects of student organizations are reduced by the tendency for departments themselves to maintain a system of student societies in parallel to central university organizations – these include sports teams, a departmental student union that focuses more on pastoral functions than its administrative/bureaucratic university-wide equivalent, as well as societies focusing on areas of practice that complement the department's academic field.

Among the elite-student group, participation in department-based organizations, including the departmental student union, was much higher than university-wide societies. Even for the latter, their typically instrumental, career-oriented nature diminished the socially cross-cutting effects of participation, because students tend to meet people with similar educational backgrounds and interests.

Most participants reported spending 15-25 hours a week on such activities in their first year at university, declining to some degree in subsequent years. This degree of involvement was especially remarkable because this time was generally not recreational, enjoyable, or meaningfully autonomous – particularly in the first year, when one is at the bottom of seniority-based hierarchies between student members, and thus assigned the most menial tasks. Participation in the student union, motivated by perceived career benefits, typically involved duties that would be the responsibility of paid support staff in a western university, such as conducting room inspections or assisting with administrative tasks. Participation in student societies was similarly oriented towards subsequent career aspirations; student journalism was particularly common among my participants. Membership of the Chinese Communist Party, or participation in the program of classes that prepares students for the highly competitive entrance process, was another prominent career-focused activity. Student organizations based around cultural interests, leisure or recreational pursuits do exist; one participant was a member of a society that performed English-language musical theatre, while another was a member of a traditional Chinese opera society.

However, because students receive course credits for participating in bureaucratic, party-based, or career-oriented organizations, but not for such recreational societies, participation in the latter was rare. These course-credit incentives are not so indispensable as to compel participation, and some students do not engage in student organizations at all. Nonetheless, the great majority of students are keen to do so – so much so that these organizations subject applicants to a competitive interview process, frequently rejecting those deemed unsuitable. This acceptance of institutionally structured voluntary activity stems, at

least in part, from students' prior educational experiences. The highly competitive nature of China's high-school *gaokao* examinations ensures that most students gaining a place at top-level university such as Liangshan University have attended extremely intensive exam-focused (*yingshi jiaoyu* – 应试教育) boarding schools. Such schools are characterized by highly constraining 'spatial arrangements and control of student movements' (De Kloet & Fung 2017: 51), as well as scheduled activity that ensures 'students are kept busy in a controlled way throughout most days and evenings' (Hansen 2015: 181). Accustomed to such 'total institutions' (Goffman 1961: 4), Chinese students typically do not feel constrained by the lesser degree of control within the university environment, accepting institutional practices that would be deemed quite unacceptable in other national contexts. For example, students did not object to the mandatory installation on their smartphones of a geolocation app, ostensibly intended to ensure compliance with exercise requirements of their physical education program, but which allowed the university to monitor their movements at all times.

Bureaucratic controls over student organizations represents a powerful direct and indirect constraint on students' social lives. Independent organization is forbidden, and all proposed societies are subject to approval by university administrators. Any organization that touches upon religion or politics (except, for the latter, those directly connected to the Party), is expressly forbidden. This prohibition extends to identity politics in a broader sense; official societies related to minority ethnicities, feminism, or lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues are not permitted. Existing societies are closely monitored by university authorities and the Communist Youth League (Tsimonis, 2018) to ensure that they do not stray into such sensitive areas. For example, my participants involved in student journalism reported close engagement with censorship administrators, who approve all published content. The publication of news from outside the university campus, as well as stories presenting events within campus in a negative light, was generally forbidden.

In a pattern common to Chinese student societies in general, hierarchical structures result in the internalization of this control by students in senior positions, who assume

responsibility for the conduct of younger subordinates. While direct regulation precludes many forms of communication that are commonplace in a western university setting, this organizational structure has powerful indirect effects on students' social interactions. Membership of student societies is restricted, and they do not hold events that are open to non-members or the public, except for occasional formal performances by performing-arts societies, where boundaries between members and audience are maintained. Societies' social events are held in settings, typically private apartments or villas (*bieshu* – 别墅) rented for the evening, that preclude contact with non-members. Society membership expands students' social circles beyond their primary dormitory and department-based groupings – but only into other groups that are similarly circumscribed, and remain under the watchful eyes of administrators.

The limiting effects of these organizational structures on students' face-to-face interactions are enhanced by both campus design and deeper cultural factors. The Chinese university campus, following the social-management logic of urban planning in China more generally (Tomba, 2014), is physically enclosed; the provision of all required amenities within its gates serves to minimize contact between students and wider society. Such amenities, however, do not generally include indoor spaces that facilitate the meeting of new people. Dormitory buildings lack kitchens or other shared spaces, and there are no campus bars in Liangshan University, only restaurants and cafes with table service. Areas with the potential to facilitate autonomous socializing do exist: outdoor spaces and sports facilities, the canteens where students routinely eat, and even classrooms and study areas. Zhao has argued that such areas, given the compressed spatial layout of Beijing universities, made an important contribution to student mobilization in the run-up to the 1989 protests by 'creating a few places that most students had to pass or stay daily' (1998: 1495). However, Liangshan University is considerably more spread out than the typical campus in China. This makes the formation of random connections through physical encounters less likely, while the physical enclosure of this campus still inhibits such encounters beyond the student population. Indeed,

scholars have noted the absence of connections between students and disaffected groups in wider society as a key reason underlying the failure of the 1989 protest movement (Kelliher, 1993; Perry, 2002), to which the physical enclosure of their university campuses may have contributed.

Furthermore, the socializing that does occur on campus remains constrained by the orthodox Confucian norms of propriety that govern social interaction in student society, such as sharp in-group and out-group distinctions, and the need to legitimize the formation of new social bonds through introduction by intermediaries. For academically high-attaining students such as my participants, the intellectual elitism of the Confucian tradition (Pye, 1988) also discourages them from mixing socially among member of Liangshan's wider student population at less-prestigious institutions; this serves to support strict prohibitions on student organizations recruiting members from other universities. The controlled social environment of the university shapes students' social interactions so effectively precisely because of these cultural constraints, which lessen the appeal for students arriving at university of alternative avenues for expanding their social circles than those provided by dormitories, classes, departments, and student societies.

The constraint on students' social lives was similarly demonstrated in the elite-student group's characteristic patterns of mobility and leisure activities. On a day-to-day basis, students moved in a triangle between their dormitories, their department's teaching facilities, and the canteen most conveniently situated between the two. Less frequently, they visited sites associated with student-organization membership, and exercise facilities – although the latter was much less common for students in later years of their degrees, who are not required to participate in physical education. A minority of students reported studying in libraries, study-rooms, or on-campus cafés, but this was rare; they generally worked at desks in their dormitory rooms. Movements outside these sites, which encompassed a small sub-section of the campus, were much less frequent.

The main form of social activity that drew students outside the campus was visiting the cinema; the frequency of such visits varied between students, from several times a week to every fortnight, also depending on the quality of recent movie releases. Many students also reported trips to restaurants, on roughly a weekly basis. The cinema and restaurant visits that dominated the elite-student group's social lives occurred invariably in the company of small groups of close friends, who were generally classmates or roommates. Furthermore, these trips almost always took them to the same location – a high-end commercial complex immediately adjacent to the campus gates. Trips further afield were rare, usually no more than monthly, and were generally to visit similar high-end commercial complexes in the same small groups – for cinemas and restaurants, but also for shopping and walking around (*guangjie* – 逛街). While some also reported occasional trips to private-room karaoke venues, classical music concerts, art galleries and museums, their only participation in large-scale social events were the private parties arranged by student societies. Almost without exception, these students did not visit bars, nightclubs, music venues, or other sites where interactions with strangers are likely.

Students fitting these characteristic patterns of face-to-face social interaction live within a social environment characterized by homogeneous networks and high mutual surveillance. Their residential environments, and the degree to which department-based organizations claim their spare time, ensured that a large proportion of their term-time life is spent in the physical presence of other students in their department, who also know each other for the same reasons. Non-departmental societies can expand students' social horizons, allowing them to interact outside department-centered networks, but ultimately introduce them only to other elite students from similar backgrounds, who are embedded in similarly homogeneous residential and departmental networks. Mutual surveillance remains high, and can exert powerful social control on those who do not fit with dominant values. One participant whose lifestyle diverged from the typical student pattern reported very poor

relations with her roommates, who disapproved of her active social life that included interaction with non-students.

In this way, the conformity produced by high mutual surveillance serves to reinforce the homogeneity of student networks. However, the social constraints of the university environment, for the great majority of the elite-student group, were not experienced as such. Herein lies their effectiveness – because the university shapes students' social lives indirectly, the consequent patterns of social interaction are seen simply as normal. However, because students are not compelled to adhere to such patterns, for individuals with interests that outweigh their concern for the approval of their immediate peers, interacting in different ways is entirely possible.

Within the elite-student group, a small minority of individuals exhibited patterns of sociality that diverged from the majority, interacting with heterogeneous contacts from outside the university. These individuals often reported no engagement whatsoever with the student societies that loom so large in the social lives of the majority group, disliking their bureaucratic and hierarchical character. As one participant said:

"University societies are basically all about training to be a government official, and I'm not interested in that kind of work".

These students' extensive social lives meant that they had either gained permission from their parents to live outside university accommodation, had found some method of getting around the dormitory curfew rules, or regularly stayed in hotels. What is more, these individuals were universally engaged in some form of non-university-based social activity, such as participation in the local LGBT scene, that cut across boundaries of department, university, student/non-student status, age and sometimes nationality. Their socializing took them into spaces where they encountered and formed affective bonds with individuals outside the pre-existing connections through mutually known intermediaries or shared organizational membership that so pervasively shaped the social networks of most of the elite-student group.

Compared to these individuals, the social lives of most of the elite-student group were far more institutionally constrained – occurring in groups determined by their membership of a student society, their academic department, their group of classmates, or their dormitory roommates. Accordingly, the affective bonds formed during such interactions were homogeneous and predictably structured. And beyond the closed, compartmentalized structure of the patterns of association generated by this constrained face-to-face interaction, it also fell considerably short, both in its ritual intensity and its absolute extent, of the face-to-face sociality observed among the bohemian group. Simply put, these students spent a great deal of time in their dormitory rooms. And yet they were not necessarily unsociable – much of this time was spent on the internet, including on online social interaction. However, this online communication, though expansive and wide-ranging, was nonetheless still shaped by their constrained face-to-face interactions.

4.3 Social Interaction in University Life: Online

A complete survey of the internet use of the elite-student group is beyond the scope of this chapter; I will address their online communications from a cultural perspective in chapter five, and from a political perspective in chapter six, where I also discuss their engagement with and attitude towards news sources. Here I will provide a brief overview of their internet use, before focusing on aspects of the usage of the dominant social-media platform in China – WeChat – which pertain specifically to their patterns of social interaction.

Members of the elite-student group were sophisticated users of ICTs. All possessed at least two internet-connected devices – a laptop and a smartphone – while some also possessed tablets and e-readers. Their laptops were generally used for study – research, writing, transferring files and graphic design – as well as sometimes for audiovisual entertainment. However, the great majority of their internet usage relied on the smartphone. Among this group, usage of VPN technology to circumvent border-level censorship was universal, with obvious implications for online communicative diversity. Compared with the overall

frequency of VPN use in China, this is unusual even for such a cosmopolitan group. Personal usage of VPNs is a legal gray area in China, and the scale of the practice is difficult to estimate; research suggests that around 5 percent of urban residents have ever used a VPN (Roberts, 2018), which likely implies a considerably smaller proportion of regular users over China's population as a whole. However, VPN usage was encouraged by some Liangshan University academic staff for coursework purposes, and at the beginning of my fieldwork posters advertising VPN services were to be seen around the campus. While my fieldwork coincided with an unprecedented crackdown on VPN usage in China (Solon, 2017), my elite-student participants were able to transition to lesser-known unblocked services with minimal disruption. Some were unaffected by these developments, as they employed private proxy arrangements using the Shadowsocks[13] obfuscation protocol – a faster and more reliable alternative to VPNs for the evasion of border-level censorship.

Access to Google search was the primary reason that my participants considered VPNs indispensable; they felt that the domestic search equivalent, Baidu, was far inferior. Other reasons included access to censored social-media sites, especially Instagram, and news sites such as the New York Times, Bloomberg and the Wall Street Journal, facilitated by their fluency in English. Access to entertainment content was generally not a consideration because of its extensive availability within the Chinese internet ecosystem. Popular sources of streamed content among this group included Youku, iQiyi and Sohu, as well as sites known at the time of my fieldwork for hosting an extensive range of foreign shows without the permission of copyright holders such as AcFun or Bilili. Though the foreign content on these latter sites was drastically curtailed during my fieldwork, this represented only a minor inconvenience for the elite-students, who generally turned to pirate downloads through torrent files or directly from cloud providers such as Baidu Wangpan.

[13] www.shadowsocks.org

Figure 11: Primary Domestic Social Media Applications Used by the Elite-Student Group

Social Media Service	Description
WeChat (*Weixin* – 微信)	Facebook-like social media and instant messaging smartphone application with symmetrical friending structure, emphasis on privacy and mobile payments as well as other commercial functions
Sina Weibo (*Xinlang Weibo* – 新浪微博)	Twitter-like social media application and website with asymmetrical following structure, threaded comments and multimedia functionality
QQ	Instant messaging service with extensive desktop functionality, facilitating contact with strangers to a greater extent than WeChat, which is also owned by Tencent; particularly popular with younger and rural users
QZone (QQ *Kongjian* – QQ 空间)	Social media service for status updates connected to, but separate from QQ
Zhihu (知乎)	Quora-like question and answers site, known for expertise of contributors and upper-middle class user base
Lofter	Instagram-like, photography-focused social media smartphone application
Douban (豆瓣)	Social media and forum application and website, focused on cultural content and reviews: music, movies, literature etc.
Baidu Tieba (百度贴吧)	Forum-based website

The elite-student group's engagement with social media applications on their smartphone was varied and extensive. In Figure 11, I present a list of the main domestic services they used, in approximate order of popularity among this group, and a brief description of each. Among this group, usage of WeChat, Weibo and QQ was universal. Most used Zhihu, a question-and-answer site similar to Quora, as an information source, but only a minority contributed to the site. Similarly, for Douban, the popularity of which has waned since its heyday – some referred to the site, typically for movie reviews and recommendations, but only a few actively contributed. Lofter, a relatively new site, was popular only among participants with an interest in photography, while an even smaller minority used Baidu Tieba, typically for specialized interests such as fan discussion of a Korean TV drama. This finding suggests Han's claim that such forum sites account for 'more than 80 percent of social media content' (2018: 10) in China may, at the very least, poorly represent the habits of younger internet users. Some participants also reported using live

video streaming applications (*zhibo* – 直播) with social functionality, such as Getfun (*gaifan* - 盖范). Notably, none of the elite-student group admitted to using popular location-based social-media applications Tantan or Momo. These applications, broadly similar to Tinder in functionality, facilitate contact with strangers – participants, male and female alike, responded with particular embarrassment to questions concerning Momo, a platform that, despite a less explicit emphasis on dating, is known for a relatively lower-class user base. One participant however, who was 'half out of the closet' (*banchugui* – 半出柜), happily brought up his use of Aloha – a gay dating app that resembled a more genteel version of Grindr.

The elite-student groups' use of censored overseas social-media and messaging applications was less extensive. By far the most frequently used was Instagram, followed by Facebook; some also used Twitter, Reddit, and WhatsApp, and two participants used Snapchat, largely for its photo-editing functions. Some participants also reported use of Tumblr and Pinterest, although purely to source images for design work. The main limiting factor on their use of foreign social media was their lack of contacts on those sites. Instagram was often used to follow celebrities, though some participants also published their own photographic content on that platform and followed friends. Regular use of other sites was common only among the minority of students who had become acquainted with foreigners or non-mainland Chinese, generally through overseas travel or third-year exchange programs to Hong Kong or Taiwan. However, such contacts were limited even for these students, and their usage of these sites remained low. Some students studying network communications reported having registered on and briefly used platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, for research purposes related to their course, but having not used them subsequently. Most participants felt that these foreign social media services were inferior to their Chinese equivalents, except for Instagram due to its celebrity user-base.

The elite-student group shared a characteristic history of social media usage. Each reported their main platform as having previously been QQ, but as having transitioned to WeChat, usually when they came to university. The two platforms are similar in many ways,

both offering mobile applications with instant messaging and status-update functions. One reason for the shift was environmental; while QQ is more popular among younger users and in the smaller cities from which many participants hailed, on arrival at Liangshan University, students found WeChat to be the norm and transitioned for this reason. Students continued to use QQ messaging after this point, typically for work-related reasons. The chat groups for their academic classes used this platform; with a fully functional desktop client, QQ is a much more convenient way to transfer electronic files and was the standard way for documents to be exchanged between students as well as to and from teachers.

Many participants found their university-age transition from QQ to WeChat as their primary social application to be liberating. QQ facilitates contact with strangers in a manner WeChat does not, and extensive use of this platform over these student’s pre-adult years typically resulted in the accumulation of online-only (*wangyou* – 网友) and ‘low quality’ (*suzhidi* – 素质低) contacts. Shifting to WeChat allowed personal reinvention and upward social mobility; several participants noted that it had allowed them to avoid undesirable former contacts and start afresh with a new online network, while preventing exposure of that new network to potentially embarrassing shared QZone content from their pre-adult years. However, this transition also generated feelings of liberation in the opposite direction. Despite WeChat’s status as their primary messaging and online sharing application for their immediate, university-based social circle, some participants continued to also post content on QZone. This tendency to utilize different platforms has been described as ‘scalable sociality’, which is commonly ‘employed to differentiate platforms as more private or more public sites for socialising’ (Miller *et al.*, 2016: xvii). For elite students, the function of maintaining an alternate space for online sharing, insulated from university friends by privacy settings or the use of secondary QQ accounts, was to share content privately that conflicted with the prevailing norms of university life – particularly content that was highly personal, conflictual, or involved strong negative emotions. In other words, the use of multiple social media services was one way that members of the elite-student group segregated the audiences of

their online self-presentations, lessening the tendency for social media to increase online mutual surveillance through 'context collapse' (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). Their capacity and desire to segregate their online output in this way, quite unlike the more public output of bohemians, reflects the considerably more fragmented nature of their social networks.

Despite this varied social-media usage, WeChat was by far the dominant platform among the elite-student group, typically accounting – between its varied functions – for around 80% of their reported daily social-media usage. With 902 million daily users at the time of my fieldwork, the platform was generally dominant in China (WeChat, 2017). Within almost all the elite-student group's social networks, every alter was also connected on WeChat; elderly relatives sometimes did not use social media at all, but most did. Furthermore, very few of the elite-student group reported online-only contacts on WeChat, or offline friends whose acquaintance stemmed from initial online contact on this platform. No participant reported using the location-based functionality, like that of Tantan and Momo, which is built into WeChat and QQ, and facilitates contact with nearby strangers. Virtually every contact in these students' online social networks was a product of prior face-to-face interaction.

This partly stems from the affordances of the WeChat platform itself which, compared to the broadly equivalent Facebook, places a much stronger emphasis on preserving users' privacy – from other users, rather than from its parent company Tencent or state surveillance. It is not possible to search for WeChat users based on their real names. Friends of friends are invisible: user profiles contain no information concerning their contacts and, on viewing a user's shared content, appended comments by other users who are not also one's own contacts do not appear. Unlike QQ, chat groups are not publicly searchable, and becoming a member of such a group requires an invitation from an existing member. WeChat also allows contacts to be grouped into tags (*biaoqian* – 标签), and either through these tags or by excluding or including specific users, the audience of ones' shared content can be restricted to certain elements of one's contact list in a highly fine-grained manner. By far, the

most common way to add a new WeChat contact is to scan a QR code they bring up on their phone with one's own, requiring face-to-face interaction. These various affordances contribute to the semi-private character of this social networking service (SNS), networks on which are characterized by 'a higher portion of strong-tie connections than conventional SNSs' (Wu and Wall, 2019: 1718). A further implication of this, as Wu and Wall argue, is that the strong-tie connections that WeChat facilitates very often also reflect extensive offline interaction. The contemporary dominance of WeChat significantly limits the tendency for users' online social networks to expand unpredictably and independently of their offline networks.

The platform's emphasis on smaller, closed social circles can be seen to serve the interests of the Party-State, by constraining the flow of sensitive information between different social groups (McLauchlin, 2017). Indeed, the Party-State has indirectly promoted a shift in user engagement from the more open Weibo platform, facilitating communication with strangers and large-scale public debate, by targeted intimidation of influential users on the latter since 2013 (Custer, 2014). However, it would be quite wrong to interpret the privacy-maximizing affordances of WeChat as having been imposed in a top-down manner; rather, these affordances meet user demands, particularly prominent in China due the previously mentioned compunction in the orthodox Confucian tradition against interaction with strangers. Moreover, WeChat does also offer limited opportunities for public-facing communication; subject to platform approval, users can open 'official accounts', which allow them to post content once daily to a page that can be searched for and followed by non-contacts. At the time of my fieldwork, only a small proportion of WeChat users did so; the 3.5 million monthly active official accounts represent only around 0.4% of the total user base, and only two of the 18 members of the elite-student group had their own official accounts. However, around 89% of all WeChat users follow official accounts (WeChat, 2017); this represents a key avenue of online information-seeking, and a prominent source of content that users subsequently share as 'Moments' status updates (*pengyouquan* – 朋友圈).

The elite-student group engaged in extensive and wide-ranging forms of online communication, well beyond the WeChat platform. However, this platform dominated their online communications and, further, the way that they used it was representative of this wider internet use, offering insight into the character of their online interactions in general. Moreover, because WeChat was used so extensively among both elite-student and bohemian groups, focus on this platform allows the online communications of the two groups to be directly compared. Here I will highlight three aspects of this usage: engagement with official accounts, group chat and privacy settings related to online sharing.

The following of WeChat official accounts was extensive and wide-ranging among the elite-student group. Participants followed, on average, around 184 different accounts, with one individual following 446. This content was highly varied, including much lifestyle and commercial material, and personal blogs that were often operated by personally known individuals, but also a significant proportion of news, both from student journalism on the Liangshan University campus and national news sources. These account lists also included substantial academic or intellectual content – often related to topics associated with their current degrees or future postgraduate study intentions, such as communications theory, but also abstract or in-depth textual content related to personal interests, such as diverse social-scientific content, philosophy, technology, cultural enthusiasms, world history and travel. The information-seeking that these account lists represented was generally highly active and purposeful – participants typically reported spending more time reading textual content from accounts they already followed than content shared by their other existing WeChat contacts, and frequently following accounts discovered through search, rather than through their contacts' output. This extensive engagement with official accounts reflects a wider pattern of high diversity in their mediated communications, in contrast to the rather lesser diversity of the bohemian group's online communications, outlined below.

The elite-student group's use of group chat followed the structure of social networks heavily shaped by institutionally constrained patterns of face-to-face interaction. The largest

chat groups with which most participants reported engagement was that of their class; this was distinct from a parallel QQ group for the same unit, of which academic staff were also members, allowing a less-formal tone of interaction. Some also engaged with groups corresponding to their student societies, although conversation here was generally related to society affairs. This online communication therefore contributed to the mutual surveillance generated by extensive physical co-presence within class and student-organization-based units. Moreover, most of this group's online group interaction took place in smaller chat groups associated with even higher degrees of current or prior physical co-presence. All participants were members of a group with their roommates, in which they discussed practical issues and engaged in idle chat (*xianliao* – 闲聊), as well as a group of family members. However, more time was spent in small chat groups made up of close friends from other elements of their social networks, particularly high-school and middle-school classmates. The nature of these individuals' educational backgrounds meant that the members of these groups were also university students, generally at other top universities, but were widely dispersed around the country, and in a few cases overseas.

Participants' extensive engagement with these groups reflects the tendency for online interaction to facilitate persistent contact, maintaining the strength of ties established through prior face-to-face interaction, but which otherwise would have diminished in its absence. The overall impact of this affordance of social media on elite-student networks was to expand their geographical scope, while reinforcing their homogeneity. The widely dispersed friends with whom they maintained persistent contact were acquaintances from previous schools, who by merit of the social sorting implicit in China's highly competitive education system were similar in background to themselves – in age, interests, socioeconomic background, level of educational attainment and, consequently, elite social position. Because the other group members were so geographically dispersed, and sometimes engaged with dissimilar courses of study, these group chats served to increase communicative diversity among the elite-student group, particularly because other group members were also high-achieving

students, and often happy to discuss news and complex or abstract topics. This effect should not be overstated; their basic similarity of background renders it likely that however complex such discussions were, they remained rooted nonetheless in elite-students' concerns and broadly consistent worldviews.

Online interaction in these widely dispersed networks of prior classmates was extremely rewarding for many elite students. Because these friends were unconnected from their immediate face-to-face social environment, they could express themselves more freely than within the university-based groups that encompassed their local contacts. To some extent this lessened the mutual surveillance to which elite students were subject in their online communications, reducing the pressures of conformity implied by the constraints of the university environment. But the overarching impact of this capacity to engage in emotionally rewarding interactions from their smartphone was to lessen their subjective sense of the university environment as constraining, diminishing the impetus that they might otherwise have felt to pursue a social life involving face-to-face interactions outside the campus walls. As liberating as it may have felt to escape online from the constraints of their immediate face-to-face social environment, the affordances of this form of online communication did little to increase the heterogeneity of student networks.

Some exceptions were observed to this tendency to interact online among geographically dispersed friendship groups forged during passage through a series of prior elite educational institutions. For example, one participant reported membership, having been invited by a former classmate, of a particularly large group with 188 members, devoted to the discussion of politics, including sensitive news censored from official media. However, he also noted that he never contributed to this group himself, nor shared content encountered there on his own WeChat profile – not due to any concern over censorship or sanction, but because 'it's not my style'; he felt that such content would be seen as either disturbingly radical or boring by the great majority of his online contacts. In other words, while this engagement may have lessened the pressures of conformity on this individual by exposing

him to a diversity of perspectives not typically encountered in elite-student society, the prevailing social control of university life precluded wider effects on the communicative life of the group.

Finally, members of the elite-student group made extensive use of WeChat privacy settings to segregate the audiences of their online shared content. Some patterns of segregation were universal. All participants maintained tags for family members and teachers, which they used to prevent access of these older individuals to various kinds of content, such as any post indicating that they engaged in nightlife entertainment or partying – however innocuous compared to the conduct of the bohemian group – or merely being awake late at night. They also prevented access to complaints or worries concerning their academic courses and expressions of negative feelings in general; anything that might make parents worry, or undermine their image as highly studious and well-behaved. Most participants also routinely blocked WeChat contacts who were not well known to them from all shared content. However, many participants engaged in far more elaborate, fine-grained distinctions between elements of their social circles, essentially maintaining multiple parallel streams of online output fitted to each of these elements. One participant who employed more than 30 tags, some of which were subsets of each other, and some of which contained only one contact, reported precisely tailoring the audience of every post she sent. This capacity to segregate one's various online self-presentations on WeChat reduces the mutual surveillance of online interactions between various elements of the elite-student group, particularly when contrasted with their constrained face-to-face interactions.

Even though it did not serve to expand their social circles beyond offline networks, these students found the internet to be profoundly liberating. The freedom to use the internet as they wished was, after all, fairly new to them – prior to university, it had been strongly curtailed by parents who felt it to be a bad influence, and within schools that imposed similar constraints (Hansen, 2015). This freedom – to interact on social media, but also to consume entertainment content at will – was what left the great majority content to spend so much time

in their dormitory rooms, and to interact face-to-face entirely within groups shaped and overseen by university administration. It is this factor that most fundamentally distinguishes the contemporary Chinese university from the physically determined 'campus ecology' of such institutions in 1989, which Zhao (1998: 1495) depicts as generating the unconstrained formation of dense yet widely interconnected networks that facilitated student mobilization.

4.4 Liangshan's Bohemian Cultural Scene

Liangshan's large student population supports a vibrant entertainment economy, of which live musical performance, both instrumental and digital, represents one highly visible and distinctive sector. Around the infrastructure of this commercially driven core is a penumbra of more-or-less underground, highly participatory cultural production and consumption. This cultural activity, in turn, fosters a bohemian scene – a large social network that is highly diverse along various criteria, inclusive and egalitarian in its ethos though exhibiting a hierarchy of localized 'subcultural capital' (Thornton, 1995) that is quite distinct from the hierarchies of mainstream society. Characterized by dense and multiplex interconnections at a local level, it is also integrated with various other networks – cultural, intellectual, entrepreneurial, criminal, politically dissident – which have a global scope. This is the social milieu in which the bohemian group was based.

It is important to note that nightlife and live music do not appeal to the great majority of university students, including almost all of the elite-student group. For Chinese undergraduate-age students, participating in nightlife leisure, including such activities as alcohol consumption (Nelson, Badger and Wu, 2004) or even just staying up late, are perceived as far more deviant than would be the case in many western countries. This is particularly the case for such activities as attending a rock concert, because of a persistent association in the cultural imagination between rock music and rebellion (De Kloet, 2010). Basic features of many music venues, such as audience areas with standing room only, are disconcerting to many young Chinese people who tend, due to the importance of in-group and

out-group distinctions in traditional Confucian culture (Yum, 1988), to much prefer socializing in small, controlled groups. The performance venues that host those acts with the greatest popular appeal tend to be expensive, relative to many students' constrained budgets. While free or inexpensive performances do occur, these tend to be much more underground. They involve musical genres that clash sharply with mainstream tastes, attract individuals with attributes, such as extensive tattooing, that remain stigmatized in Chinese culture (Chiu *et al.*, 2014), and may occur in venues that permit the similarly stigmatized (Nelson, Badger and Wu, 2004) consumption of illegal drugs – all factors that would be highly disconcerting to many undergraduate students.

Nonetheless, a sufficient minority of students overcome these cultural barriers to provide a constant stream of new entrants to Liangshan's bohemian scene. This was the trajectory shared by most of the members of the bohemian group; many of these were former students who had found bohemian life to be incompatible with and more attractive than higher education, abandoning the latter in favor of the former. The relationship between music and youth culture is contested in cultural studies – attempts to derive definitive formulations have been accused of either overly narrow scope or conceptual ambiguity. The term 'music scene', a colloquial term also employed in an academic sense (Straw, 1991, 2001; Shank, 1994; Bennett, 2000; Bennett and Peterson, 2004), is itself contested; Hesmondhalgh has argued that it is a 'a confusing term' which 'suggests a bounded place but has also been used to refer to more complex spatial flows of musical affiliation; the two major ways in which the term is used are incompatible with each other' (2005: 23). I use the term here because, unlike Hesmondhalgh, I see the tension in the term between the local and trans-local as useful, and particularly so in the case of Liangshan's music scene, which is characterized simultaneously by high degrees of local cohesion *across* lines of genre and global interconnectedness along genre and associated subcultural lines.

The bohemian group was subcultural – most of its members were instantly recognizable in appearance and demeanor as deviant from the standpoint of the average

Chinese person, and they shared norms and cultural ideals that differed considerably from those of mainstream society. But it was not precisely a subculture as the term is academically used (Hebdige, 1979; Hall and Jefferson, 2006). Though it was characterized by difference from mainstream youth culture, and the Chinese term 'subculture' (*yawenhua* – 亚文化) was used by group members to characterize this difference, the scene was also characterized by stark internal cultural differences, even within tight-knit groups of friends. In this thesis, I employ the term subculture in two distinct senses. Firstly, to capture those elements of the bohemian cultural scene that, despite its internal diversity, distinguish it from mainstream Chinese youth culture. Secondly, to identify specific subcultural styles within the scene, such as punk, psytrance and reggae. Each of these subcultures is global in scope, and this shared quality of cosmopolitanism grants their local manifestations a certain collective unity, when considered from the external perspective of mainstream Chinese youth.

Music and musical performance were central to the social and cultural life of this community, and it was on sites associated with this element that much of my fieldwork was focused. Several of my participants were amateur or professional musicians, and others were ancillary members of the 'cooperative networks through which art happens' (Becker 2008: 1). This scene incorporates a section of the local entertainment economy (in addition to extensive non-economic activity), based around the consumption and performance of live or recorded music, both vocal-instrumental and electronic, as well as a set of sites connected to that economy, including performance venues, bars, cafés, popular busking spots, restaurants, rehearsal spaces, teaching and recording facilities, all of which operated in the intervals between the live musical performances that were at the heart of the social and cultural life of the scene. However, I employ the term bohemian cultural 'scene', rather than the more narrowly focused 'music scene', because this community was engaged in a much wider range of activities, each of which potentially serves to draw individuals into the scene. Some of these, like dance, are closely connected with music, but many others have no such necessary relationship, including tattooing, promotional graphic design, graffiti art, fashion,

hairdressing, psychedelic décor, the production, distribution and consumption of craft ale or illegal drugs, skateboarding, *poi*[14], *kendama*[15] and other performance arts. Because many of these musical and non-musical practices are associated with legal commercial activity, the scene is only partly underground, although this relationship is complex – commercial activity provides necessary resources that support underground culture.

At the most basic level, Liangshan's bohemian cultural scene comprises a single, large social network, within which all prominent individuals, regardless of the source of their cultural prestige, are known to each other, and are also known to lower-status, younger members of the scene at least by reputation, often evoking sentiments of reverence and awe. The scene was coherent at the local level – though by no means homogeneous – as a subcultural social group with clear markers of status and prestige. In part, this coherence was rooted in the small scale of the scene, whether considered relative to the total population of the city in which it was situated, or to the scenes that may be found in cultural centers such as Beijing. Estimates of scale are problematized by widely varying degrees of participation in bohemian life: one or two thousand core members, perhaps, but with a much larger periphery. A further characteristic of scenes at this small scale is the wide range of musical genres and associated forms of cultural activity that coexist within the same social spaces, partly driven by economic factors. As there is only a limited customer base for live-music performances at dedicated venues, or for underground bars where performances are held less frequently but where the typical music performed consists of alternative genres clearly distinct from the Chinese cultural mainstream, such sites are comparatively few. Accordingly, to attract enough custom for these sites to remain economically viable, they need to cater to as eclectic a mix of genres as possible.

[14] *Poi* is a performance art, originating among the Maori people, that involves swinging a pair of tethered weights through a variety of rhythmical and geometric patterns; the weights are frequently lit electronically or ignited using flammable liquid.
[15] *Kendama* is a Japanese toy, similar to the ball-and-cup game, that is used in performance and competition.

This eclecticism has characterized Liangshan's music scene since the initial establishment of dedicated venues for live music in the early 2000s, before which the scene lacked spatial focus, moving across the city in response to the generally short-lived availability of venues for performance, and was characterized by small, dense networks of musicians and fans, and a degree of stylistic homogeneity that closely matches conventional academic conceptions of subculture. Crossley has argued that just such a network structure contributed greatly to the emergence of early punk in Britain as a 'coherent scene or movement' (2008: 113). Technology also contributed to the former homogeneity of the scene; access to new foreign music was predicated on the supply of *dakou*[16] CDs, 'dumped by the West, intended to be recycled, but instead…smuggled into China' (De Kloet 2010: 20). This technology not only imposed physical limitations on the supply of new music, but rendered the propagation of this content more dependent on existing social networks which were, in turn, more closely tied to genre affiliation. By contrast, current technology lessens this homogeneity, as music has been rendered superabundant through smartphones and free streaming apps, such as those operated by Tencent and NetEase (as well as the Alibaba-owned Xiami, popular among my participants but since shuttered). The musical tastes of the current generation of youth thus are much more diverse, which in turn affects the incentives to which cultural producers are subject – one is more likely to succeed in carving out a new niche, performing within a locally unavailable genre or sub-genre, than by competing directly with currently prominent performers. In musicological terms, this eclecticism promotes hybridity and genre 'cross-fertilization' (Straw 1991: 373), in a manner that is further encouraged by the influence of China's heterodox tradition.

[16] *Dakou* (打口), meaning 'cut-out', refers to the practice of cutting a notch into the rim of a CD to prevent resale. However, because CDs play from the centre, this usually only renders the last part of the CD unplayable, allowing resale rather than recycling. This practice, in addition to direct piracy, dominated Chinese musical culture in the 1990s, prior to widely available broadband, to the extent that *dakou* is used much more widely, including as a generational term – de Kloet's work on popular Chinese music 'focuses on the dakou generation and its aftermath' (2010: 16).

One reason that heterodox culture is useful within bohemian cultural scenes is because it is accommodative of incommensurable heterogeneity; as such, it facilitates the co-existence and syncretic intermingling of global subcultures at the local level. Heterodox culture has long served this role, as in the 'explicitly and radically syncretic' sects that have periodically sparked rebellion throughout Chinese history (Harrell and Perry, 1982: 287). At the same time, because the great majority of available resources for establishing a distinctive local musical identity are global, and by no means restricted to the Western core of commercial music production, it also results in cultural diversification, as individuals who extensively engage with a given musical genre also seek to understand its original cultural context. For example, those who localize reggae music are also influenced by Jamaican and Rastafari culture more generally; as the local scene becomes more eclectic, such lines of cultural influence also multiply. And yet, the shared framework of the heterodox cultural tradition limits the extent to which this ongoing process of diversification undermines the cohesiveness of the overall scene, by facilitating close cooperation between those involved in production of highly distinct forms of cultural content.

4.5 Social Interaction in Bohemian Life: Face-to-Face

Heterogeneity defines Liangshan's bohemian cultural scene, no less so in the backgrounds of its members than in their varied cultural influences. My participants in the bohemian group included individuals from impoverished rural families as well as highly affluent urbanites. Parental occupations included senior positions in the police force, and in *heishehui* gangs. Educational attainment ranged from postgraduate to middle-school levels, and English abilities from complete to negligible fluency. Some participants were current students at prestigious local universities, while others had been incarcerated. This diversity in backgrounds and prior life experiences makes the group hard to characterize, but it also illustrates the incongruity of the extensive interaction between these individuals, the great majority of whom were close friends.

All members of the bohemian group had access to private residential space. Most who were also students lived in private rented accommodation, whether with other students or, in one case, a non-student boyfriend. Another participant – a recent graduate currently working in a bar central to the scene – reported that during his studies, he worked without pay in a music venue near to his campus, because the owner allowed him to sleep in a back room, allowing him the possibility of a much more active social life. Non-student members of the group generally worked within the scene – as tattoo artists, bar staff, sound engineers, musicians, drug dealers or in various other entrepreneurial capacities. Many such occupations offered little remuneration, and those engaged in potentially more profitable fields generally chose to minimize work commitments in favor of cultural pursuits and socializing. This was often possible because of the location of the scene, and the sites of these individuals' employment, at the margins of the city – several resided in a nearby village where accommodation was extremely inexpensive.

Access to their own private residential spaces implies a substantially lesser degree of face-to-face mutual surveillance among the bohemian group, as compared to the elite-student group. This contrast is particularly clear for bohemian participants who were also students; even those living in shared accommodation with other students had their own rooms and, furthermore, had chosen their flatmates, rather than being assigned to a dormitory room with other members of their class. This residential independence was almost a pre-requisite for students participating in the bohemian scene, for practical reasons of dormitory curfews, as well as avoiding conflicts with and social control by classmates. Residential privacy also has implications for communicative diversity, providing space for a more wide-ranging, independent social (not to mention sexual) interaction, as well as practices such as alcohol or drug consumption, than could ever be possible in university dormitories. Such opportunities were greater for those living in outlying villages, where large spaces can be inexpensively rented, allowing large-scale gatherings and other disruptive activities such as the rehearsal or performance of live music. Just as important for communicative diversity was that residing in

these villages brought bohemians into contact with older rural residents, developing a sympathy with and understanding of their very different life experiences and concerns that was quite absent among the elite-student group.

Finally, in a more general and abstract sense, access to private residential spaces heightened communicative diversity among the bohemian group by facilitating highly diverse and stylized self-presentations in their shared public life. The argument that Meyrowitz makes concerning performances of authority roles is equally relevant to the particular forms of cultural status that bohemians project, in which 'shielding … backstage rehearsals, practice and relaxations', allow for the 'mystery and mystification' (1985: 64-5) that such self-presentations involve. While this is the case for musicians and other performers in a literal sense, it is equally relevant to the everyday self-presentations of elaborate cultural distinctiveness that pervade bohemian social life. Without equivalent backstage areas, socializing chiefly in department-based groups directly connected with their dormitory roommates, the elite-student group lack the capacity to put on such public performances without having them regarded as artificial and inauthentic, quite apart from the disapproval with which such deviant self-presentations would be met in student society.

The bohemian group's public performances of cultural distinctiveness occurred in front-stage areas: physical spaces, quite unlike any frequented by the elite-student group, around which their collective social lives were focused. They spent much more of their lives in public – not merely in the physical presence of strangers, but in social situations that encouraged interaction with strangers. The bohemian group, including its student members, were much more mobile than the elite-student group, their busy social calendars taking them around the city to private homes, outdoor spaces, and venues of various kinds. In addition to planned social events, they spent a great deal of time merely hanging out in public, typically spending as little money as possible.

One such popular site, Cash Bar, was located close to several universities and a prominent music venue. It had no cover charge, depending entirely on alcohol sales for

income, yet kept drinks prices deliberately low. It hosted regular events and performances from bands and DJs (disk jockeys) in a wide range of genres; the day-to-day musical soundtrack was even more eclectic. This variation was not always welcome, and yet many people attended events despite disliking the musical style on which they were focused. The centrality of the Cash Bar in the social lives of the bohemian group brought together genre-audiences who would be unlikely to mix in a larger scene.

Cash Bar's physical configuration contrasted sharply with bars frequented by culturally mainstream youth, which are typically well-lit, playing a soundtrack of Chinese or international commercial pop music, with customers seated at physically segregated, pre-bookable booths and provided with table service. Both drinks and a limited menu of food are available in such mainstream bars, usually ordered at the time of seating by filling out a tick-sheet menu. This restaurant-like configuration, by design, does not readily facilitate encounters with strangers at different tables. Groups of friends typically arrive, interact within their groups, and leave together without any inter-group interaction. Serving staff regulate the intake of customers, assigning groups to tables and preventing non-seated overflow; an area is often set aside for customers to wait until a table is ready. Tables are not shared between groups, and there is no seating at the counter itself. This configuration – common both to bars and mainstream nightclubs in China – is a response to customers' own social proclivities, shaped by Confucian norms concerning ingroup and outgroup distinctions and interaction with strangers.

Cash Bar, by contrast, was a dive, with a physical configuration that facilitated fluid, informal social interaction. All drinks were purchased over the counter, and it was around that counter that social interaction was focused at quiet times. Distinctions between staff and customers were blurred – regulars frequently headed behind the counter to select music or help themselves to drinks when servers were occupied, and happily served other customers when mistaken for bar staff. Generally opening in the early evening, closing times were highly flexible and sometimes extended well into daylight hours. Seating was also flexible,

around tables that were easily rearranged to create a dance floor for big events, when it often became so full that customers made extensive use of spaces outside the establishment itself. This informality and physical configuration do not compel diversity of interaction and random encounters, but certainly facilitate it.

Cash Bar's clientele was extremely diverse. On one level, this reflected the intrinsic diversity of the local bohemian cultural scene, and the further tendency of these bohemians to project highly individualistic, stylized cultural identities that were often novel and experimental. One of my participants said he went there because it gave him the opportunity to "*zhuangbi*" (装屄), a mildly obscene term that, bowdlerized in translation, means 'to show off in an affected manner'. Furthermore, because of its prominence in the local scene, touring musicians and other visitors of various bohemian proclivities would often attend, introducing an even greater degree of diversity. On any given evening, one was likely to encounter individuals of highly varied ages, socioeconomic and regional backgrounds, and wide-ranging cultural tastes, worldviews, and occupations: students, artists, photographers, academics, internet celebrities, businesspeople, ex-convict manual workers, political activists, ethnic minorities, converts to Islam, Catholicism and Rastafarianism, self-described anarchists, drug dealers, *heishehui* members and off-duty policemen. Adding even greater diversity still, Cash Bar also attracted foreigners from a wide range of countries – typically students or teachers at nearby universities, many of whom spoke Chinese.

In order to sustain such diversity in such a constrained space, Cash Bar must necessarily be cosmopolitan in the cultural sense of 'openness, interest and ease of engagement with the Other' (Maxwell & Aggleton 2015: 782). Many of the factors that distinguished Cash Bar from other mainstream venues can be seen as the product of globalization: patrons listened to foreign music, mingled with foreigners, drank India pale ale, perhaps stepped outside to smoke high-quality imported cannabis – rare and widely stigmatized in China, while also distinct from the hashish favored by the country's Uyghur minority (Tanner, 2011; Dikötter, Zhou and Laamann, 2016). However, while Cash Bar was

indeed a cosmopolitan space, at a more fundamental level this cosmopolitanism was sustained by its cultural framing as part of the imagined social arena of the *jianghu*. Its most distinctive qualities, particularly the notable absence of the Confucian compunction against interaction with strangers, were not foreign innovations, but may be attributed to the influence of China's heterodox tradition.

The two key attributes of the heterodox tradition that shape the social organization of Liangshan's bohemian cultural scene are its generation of powerful affective bonds and group solidarity, and its egalitarian disregard for the hierarchies of mainstream Chinese society. Friendship, understood through the fictive kinship relationship of brotherhood, is central to this tradition. A key cultural reference point is the peach garden pledge in the fourteenth-century Chinese novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, in which the three main characters swear their loyalty to each other, and which still forms the basis for the initiation rites of many *heishehui* to this day (Osburg, 2016). Ownby presents heterodox brotherhood as serving an important social function over the course of Chinese history: 'in contexts where the Confucian state and Confucian local elite were either weak or absent… brotherhoods provided a [non-elite] form of social organization and a language of social identity that facilitated the cooperation of unrelated individuals in achieving mutual goals' (2015: 16). Liangshan bohemians do not swear oaths of loyalty, nor do they typically invoke fictive fraternal relationships. Yet the weight attached to friendship relations in Liangshan's bohemian scene carries a strong trace of heterodox brotherhood – not only the strength of these bonds, but in the independence of their formation from the kinds of formal relationships and legitimation typically required within the orthodox Confucian mode.

To become part of the friendship network that makes up Liangshan's bohemian scene, one must simply participate in that scene. Of more importance still for the formation of affective bonds are active, selflessly non-instrumental contributions to the group as a whole; in a bohemian context, chiefly through contributing to the cultural production that is central to bohemian scenes. This reflects the importance of reputation in such scenes, which implicitly

mirrors the role of honor (*yiqi* – 义气) in *jianghu* society more generally. As Boretz argues, honorable acts are those to which 'there is no ulterior motive or expectation attached. It is not the repayment of a favor, nor is it intended to incur an obligation or counter-favor'. Accordingly, while honor constitutes a 'form of exchangeable symbolic capital' (2011: 35), such exchanges operate on a markedly different logic to the instrumental *guanxi* connections that pervade China's dominant orthodox Confucian social order.

Obligations incurred through the reciprocal 'gift economy' (Yang, 1994: 8) of instrumental *guanxi* are relationship-specific. In formal network terms, Barbalet highlights the 'nontransitivity of guanxi relations', which 'arises from the particular nature of each person's relationship with another, including the fact that the provision of a favor and the obligations that arise from it are exclusive to the persons within their dyadic relationship' (2015: 1045). By contrast, the symbolic capital accrued through honorable acts is transitive, generating positive affective dispositions which extend throughout the group in which one's honorable reputation is known. 'The spirit of honor', as Boretz argues, is manifested in 'selfless identification with the group' (2011: 205); Liangshan's bohemians do not employ this terminology, but bohemian reputations and the close affective bonds they generate nonetheless follow the same *jianghu* cultural logic. This generates group solidarity, binding bohemians together through dense and multiplex connections, while strongly encouraging collaborative cultural production. The inclusive and participatory nature of this cultural production, in turn, provides a route for new bohemian entrants to demonstrate their commitment to the group, and become part of the dense network of close affective bonds that pervades it.

The second aspect of the heterodox tradition that affects the social organization of bohemian scenes is its egalitarian tendency (Pye, 1988). This is partly derived from how the 'idea of brotherhood can and frequently does suggest egalitarianism, which clearly clashes with the hierarchical orientation of Confucianism' (Ownby, 2015: 15). Fictive kinship relations can cut across social divides and supersede loyalties and identifications patterned by

them. Consider this condemnation of such bonds from Ji Qiguang, a Qing-dynasty county magistrate in the 1680s: ‘In recent years it has become an evil custom for … young no-goods, looking for trouble and striving to stand out, to burn incense and pour out libations, and call one another "brother," seeking to forget differences of nobility and baseness’ (Taiwan xianzhi, 1780, quoted in Ownby, 2015: 17). Centuries later, as Carstens observes, bonds of brotherhood were similarly disruptive of Confucian hierarchies, as in ‘nineteenth-century secret society organizations’, which ‘often recruited members from a diversity of kinship and social backgrounds’ (2015: 138). This egalitarian, cross-cutting tendency also characterized heterodox religious sects which, as Perry notes, tended to ‘attract itinerants and merchants as well as settled peasants, to encourage intermingling of the sexes, and to uproot people from their assigned places in the social hierarchy’ (2002: xxiv). This diversity reflects the impact on patterns of social association of heterodox egalitarianism, which lacks the Confucian tradition’s emphasis on distinctions of hierarchy, as well as strictures against interactions with unconnected strangers.

More fundamentally, heterodox egalitarianism is rooted in that tradition’s capacity to sustain and legitimize alternative systems of meaning and value to the dominant Confucian order as well as, in a contemporary context, the concept of *suzhi* that fuses its intellectually elitist hierarchy with a neoliberal emphasis on individual economic productivity (Kipnis, 2007). As Osburg argues, for those ‘marginalized by mainstream social norms and values, which (ideally) placed law-abiding scholar-officials at the top, *jianghu* mythology and ideology offered an alternative framework for generating self-worth’ (2016: 160). This represents a culturally specific example of a functional process common to all deviant subcultures: the transmutation of shame and stigma into pride and group solidarity (Ma, 2002; Moran, 2015). Similarly, the localized prestige of bohemian reputations that manifest and sustain this pride, though following the group-directed logic of heterodox honor, can also be understood in general terms as a form of the ‘subcultural capital’ that Thornton identifies, in musical subcultures of a quite distinct national context, as the ‘linchpin of an alternative

hierarchy … employed in order to keep the [mainstream] determinations of class, income and occupation at bay' (1995: 164). Such general factors help explain the appeal of bohemian cultural scenes to their socially marginalized members.

However, the culturally specific framing of the heterodox tradition contributes to the diversity of bohemian scenes by rendering them similarly accessible to privileged youth whose social positions are anything but marginalized, but to whom the emotional rewards of group interaction and membership are nonetheless appealing. The heterodox tradition is not merely a culture of the underclass but also provides a common framework within which individuals drawn from every stratum of China's dominant hierarchical order can interact on broadly egalitarian terms. This is not to suggest that hierarchy is absent from bohemian scenes influenced by this tradition. Rather, because those scenes are structured hierarchically by the localized symbolic capital of bohemian reputations, which depend more on conduct and commitment to the group than fixed attributes, an individual's capacity to acquire such symbolic capital is largely independent of their position in the wider hierarchies that pattern China's dominant social order. This capacity for individuals from marginalized communities to acquire considerable prestige in bohemian scenes contributes to their diversity.

China's heterodox tradition strongly supports the cosmopolitanism of bohemian sites such as Cash Bar. The juxtaposition of social heterogeneity with free-wheeling norms of interaction also means that sites such as this are characterized by high communicative diversity. Participants in the bohemian scene discuss a wide range of topics, because they inevitably encounter and interact with individuals whose backgrounds, interests, and beliefs stand in contrast to their own. Cash Bar and sites like it therefore connect young entrants to bohemian scenes with elements of Chinese society to which they would not have otherwise been exposed – constituting crucibles for the formation of strong yet diverse social bonds.

In this way, the inherent tendency for face-to-face interactions in public spaces to promote the formation of diverse social bonds is magnified by the heterodox tradition's facilitation of sociable interactions with strangers and legitimation of bonds of friendship that

cut across dominant social hierarchies and divisions. Similarly, just as physical co-presence tends to generate solidarity and dense, multiplex connections among group members by heightening the ritual intensity of social interactions, this effect is further magnified by the heterodox tradition. In particular, the group-directed logic of honor that informs bohemian prestige strongly motivates participation in and active contribution to the collective rituals of the group, such as the episodic public performances that are at the core of bohemian cultural production. By enhancing and legitimizing the emotional rewards of this group interaction, the heterodox tradition helps to sustain bohemian cultural life against the stigma of its deviance from mainstream society and the dominant Confucian social order.

At the same time, the bohemian scene remained diverse and individualistic. The residential privacy the bohemian group enjoyed, as well as their highly active and mobile social lives, involving extensive interaction in diverse settings and groups, resulted in far less face-to-face mutual surveillance than among the elite-student group. Accordingly, expectations of conformity were much less pronounced in their group culture. The powerful solidarity and dense, multiplex bonds of friendship among this group were generated in sites of public, unconstrained social interaction, and therefore bound together individuals who were highly diverse along multiple dimensions. Because of this intrinsic diversity, because these individuals have access to private back-stage spaces that facilitate highly idiosyncratic front-stage performances of cultural identity, and because of the comparative absence of conformity-inducing social control, the face-to-face communications in the public sites where the bohemian group spent much of their time were themselves highly diverse, involving exposure to radical ideas and perspectives that are excluded from the university environment.

4.6 Social Interaction in Bohemian Life: Online

Compared to the elite-student group, the online communications of the bohemian group were generally less complex, though their ICT usage was subject to more individual

variation. Here I outline some aspects of their ICT use in general, before addressing the structure of their online social interactions and the ramifications of this pattern.

Members of the bohemian group possessed fewer internet-connected devices than elite students. While all participants possessed a smartphone, several participants relied solely on this device, either not owning a laptop or seldom using one that they did own. One individual – articulate, intelligent, and well-informed – reported choosing to go for three years without a smartphone, after losing the device he formerly owned. His eventual decision to buy another smartphone, once WeChat and mobile payments had become indispensable for his business, reflects the contemporary 'taken-for-grantedness' (Ling, 2012) of this platform in China. There was a general sense among the bohemian group that use of the internet could have negative consequences, particularly in a social setting when it served to constrain face-to-face interaction. Some older bohemians felt that the internet had impinged negatively on the live-music scene, both by lessening the enthusiasm of the new generation of students for live music by providing them with alternative forms of sedentary entertainment, and by shifting the focus of some bands to their online presence, rather than their live performances.

Use of VPN technology among the bohemian group was common, but not universal. Those with VPNs used them less often than the elite-student group, and for fewer purposes. Some individuals accessed censored news using VPNs, often sites connected to dissident Chinese diaspora groups and the Falun Gong sect; few participants reported extensive engagement with English-language news media. Accessing YouTube – seldom mentioned among the elite-student group – was by far the most common reason for using VPNs, largely for entertainment content but also sometimes for Chinese-language news. The bohemian group was much less engaged with news information in general, more likely to watch news video than read news-related text, to rely on domestic news aggregators rather than specific trusted sources, and to engage with news passively through content shared by friends on WeChat, or on wider Weibo networks. Some participants also used VPNs to access Instagram and Facebook, particularly those with significant numbers of foreign friends, but this was also

less common than among the elite-student group. VPNs were generally considered less indispensable than among the elite-student group, and certain bohemian participants, on encountering disruptions to their VPN services due to the state crackdown, did not make the effort to find alternatives.

The bohemian group's use of social media applications was less varied than that of the elite-student group. All participants used WeChat and Weibo, although many reported using the latter much less frequently and extensively than the elite-student group. Most used QQ rarely, and none actively used QZone, though had used both much more frequently in the past. No participant used Lofter or Zhihu, which were much more common among the elite-student group. However, unlike the elite students, some participants did use location-based social media applications such as Tantan and, in one case, Momo, mostly for dating purposes. This was rare, however; while members of this group lacked the sense of disapproval concerning connecting with strangers in this way that was common among the elite-student group, most participants were either already in relationships, or felt that they already met enough people in an offline context for these apps to be unnecessary. The only other social media application that was used by members of the bohemian group and not by the elite-student group was Beebee – an explicitly subculture-oriented app focusing on lifestyle content, with social functionality. However, while a greater number followed the same company's official account on WeChat, use of this app was not widespread, and it was generally felt that the content was overly commercialized and poor quality.

To an even greater extent than the elite-student group, the bohemian group's use of social media was heavily dominated by WeChat, although their pattern of usage was substantially different. Participants followed significantly fewer official accounts – an average of around 71, compared to 186 for the elite-student group. They accessed these information sources more passively, seldom searching for official accounts, but rather following the sources of interesting content shared by their contacts. One participant, who had followed a comparatively high 121 accounts, reported seldom actually reading subsequent posts from

accounts she had already followed. In general, the bohemian group were much more likely to read content shared by their friends than to actively seek it out. Moreover, the official accounts they did follow offered a generally less-diverse range of content than those followed by the elite student group. Many accounts were those connected with specific bars, venues, and other businesses within the bohemian scene, while cultural topics were very often connected to music; in-depth textual content concerning news or more abstract or intellectual issues was, with some exceptions, rare. This pattern of WeChat usage reflected a wider pattern of relatively limited diversity in mediated communications. For example, the bohemian group reported reading relatively fewer books; even excluding the elite-student group's reading for their academic courses, they also reported reading for entertainment, both novels and non-fiction, to a much greater extent.

However, compared to the elite-student group, the bohemian group were much more likely to engage with large-scale group chats. Participants were typically members of multiple groups with several hundred members; some moderated groups they had established themselves, some of which had membership numbers on this scale. Elite students' engagement with group chat – particularly small groups with friends at other universities – served to expand the geographical scope of their social networks, without increasing their heterogeneity, by reinforcing patterns of association forged through prior face-to-face interaction in their passage through a series of elite educational institutions. The same effect had very different consequences for the bohemian group. Some members of this group did also engage in small group chats with friends from outside the scene, often former classmates or family members. However, bohemians favored group chats that were part of the local bohemian scene, largely made up of individuals they were likely to encounter offline with some regularity. Because their interactions in these groups resulted in additional exchange of social information among individuals who were also part of their offline networks, this further reinforced a pattern of dense, multiplex connections between members of the scene established through extensive face-to-face interaction in public spaces. Furthermore, because

those face-to-face interactions occurred among individuals from highly diverse backgrounds, online interaction served to bind the bohemian scene closer together despite this diversity.

Finally, unlike the elite-student group, members of the bohemian group made significantly less use of WeChat's privacy settings to segregate the audiences of their online shared content. The only reported use of such settings among this group were to shield parents from shared content of which they would disapprove, which was often applied universally, to all shared content rather than a subset. This reflects the lesser degree of conformity that characterizes the culture of the bohemian group – individuals were generally not concerned to shield elements of their social circles from aspects of their online self-presentations, because group norms accepted a high degree of individualistic diversity. And because they had much more privacy in the offline sphere, the bohemian group were less motivated to carve out privacy and to segregate their communications in online spaces. Moreover, the dense and multiplex connections of bohemians' core social networks overlapped to a great extent. Accordingly, there was little incentive to segregate their self-presentations between different sub-groups, because given the extent to which almost everybody in the bohemian cultural scene knows almost everybody else, such efforts would likely seem inauthentic.

Bohemians' lack of interest in segregating their online self-presentations through such platform features reflects the coherence of the whole bohemian scene. It is also indicative of the closer relationship between individual bohemian identities and the scene of which they were a part. Their frontstage role performances were stylized and, in some cases, rather extravagant public identities that they had crafted specifically to move within this social world. Partly, the consistency of this stylization stems from how bohemians tended to be public figures – albeit in a subcultural and often localized sense – to a greater extent than most elite students; the group included some minor celebrities, who have an inherent interest in presenting a consistent public persona. However, the consistency of their self-presentations also indicates an interdependence between their public identities and the social world in

which they were deployed, which was also reflected in other areas. For example, most members of the bohemian group had nicknames that they had been given by other scene members, by which they were universally referred within the scene. Through embrace of these nicknames, their membership of the scene was inscribed on their very self.

4.7 Elite-Student and Bohemian Social Networks

Differences in environment, culture, and social interaction, both face-to-face and online, generated markedly different patterns in the characteristic egocentric social networks of the elite-student and bohemian groups. As described in chapter three, I conducted an egocentric social-network mapping exercise with 26 individuals, following Hogan, Carrasco and Wellman (2007). In the resulting visualizations, line-thickness indicates the strength of ties, the color of alters indicates the original nature of their connection (see legend), and 'WX' indicates the ego's number of contacts on WeChat, a useful proxy for the size of their social networks. Figure 12, Figure 13 and Figure 14 show the social networks of year-two students, year-four students (also including one postgraduate), and bohemians respectively.

Comparison of the two groups' visualizations immediately reveals two characteristic differences. Excluding certain outliers, members of the student and bohemian groups differ both in the kinds of relationships that predominate in their social networks, and in the structure of those networks. The difference in network composition is illustrated by Figure 15 and Figure 16, which show for each group the mean proportion of alters that belong to one of the nine categories from which participants were asked to choose when describing how they know each alter. These charts illustrate that current and former classmates dominate the elite-student group's social networks, whereas organization contacts and other types of friends are far more prevalent among the bohemian group. These two latter categories were used interchangeably; the organization in question was almost invariably these participants' own sub-group of the local bohemian scene. This tendency for networks to be dominated by large groups of bohemians, rather than groups of current or recent classmates, was also observed

Figure 12: Egocentric Social Networks of the Elite-Student Group (2nd Year)

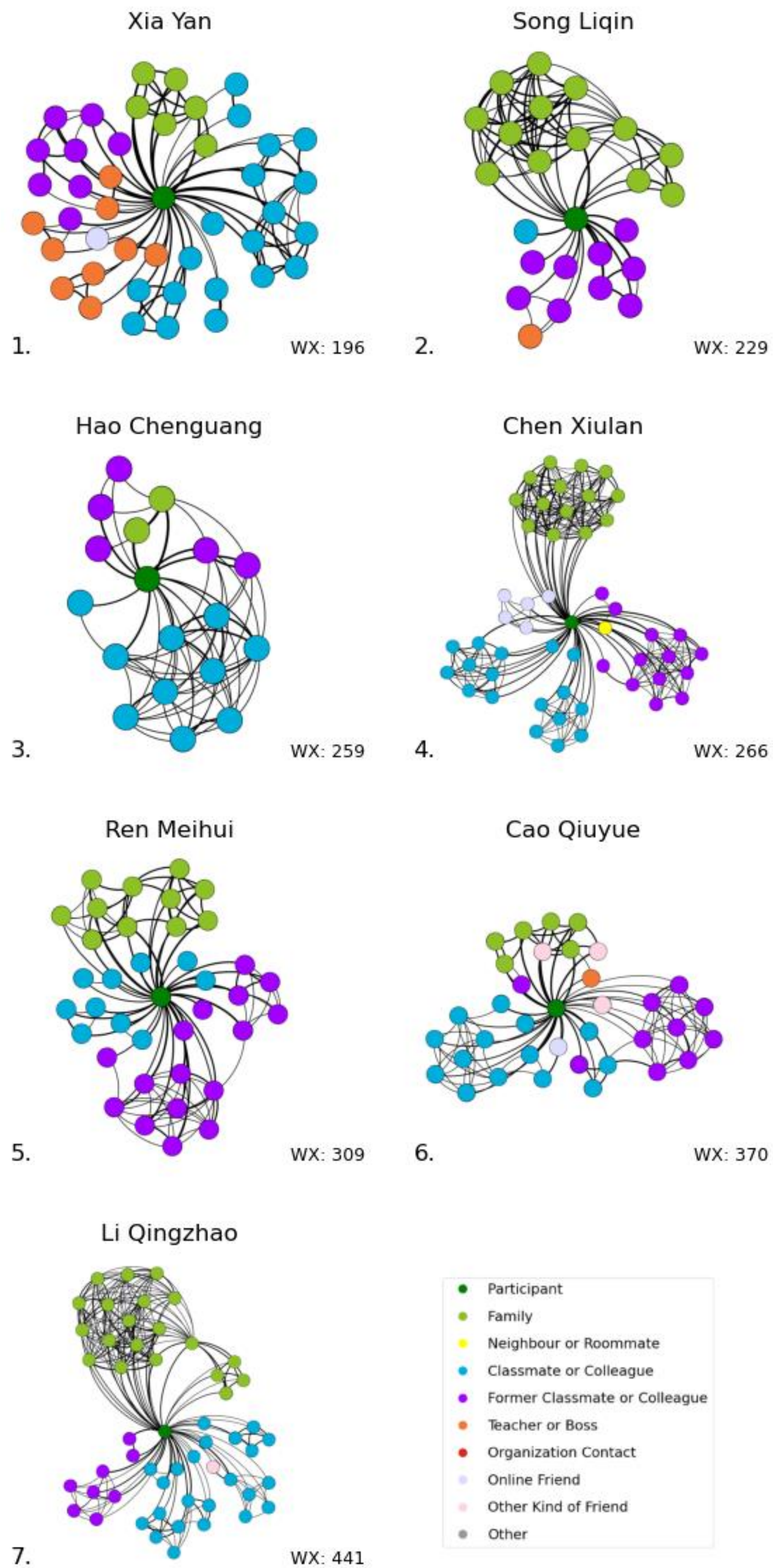
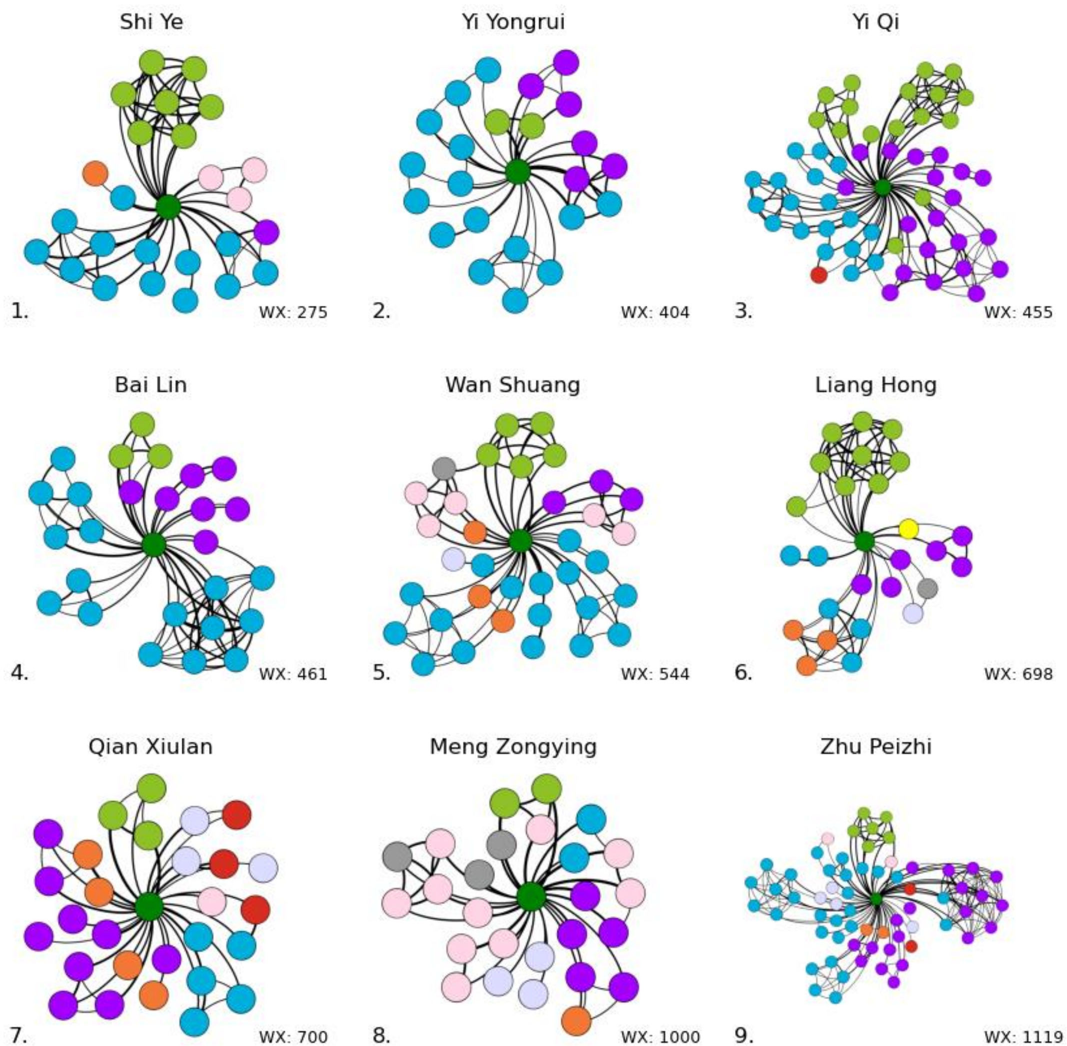


Figure 13: Egocentric Social Networks of the Elite-Student Group (4th Year)



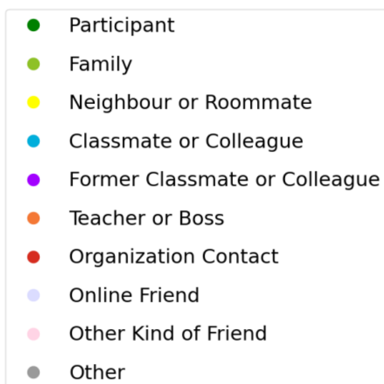


Figure 14: Egocentric Social Networks of the Bohemian Group

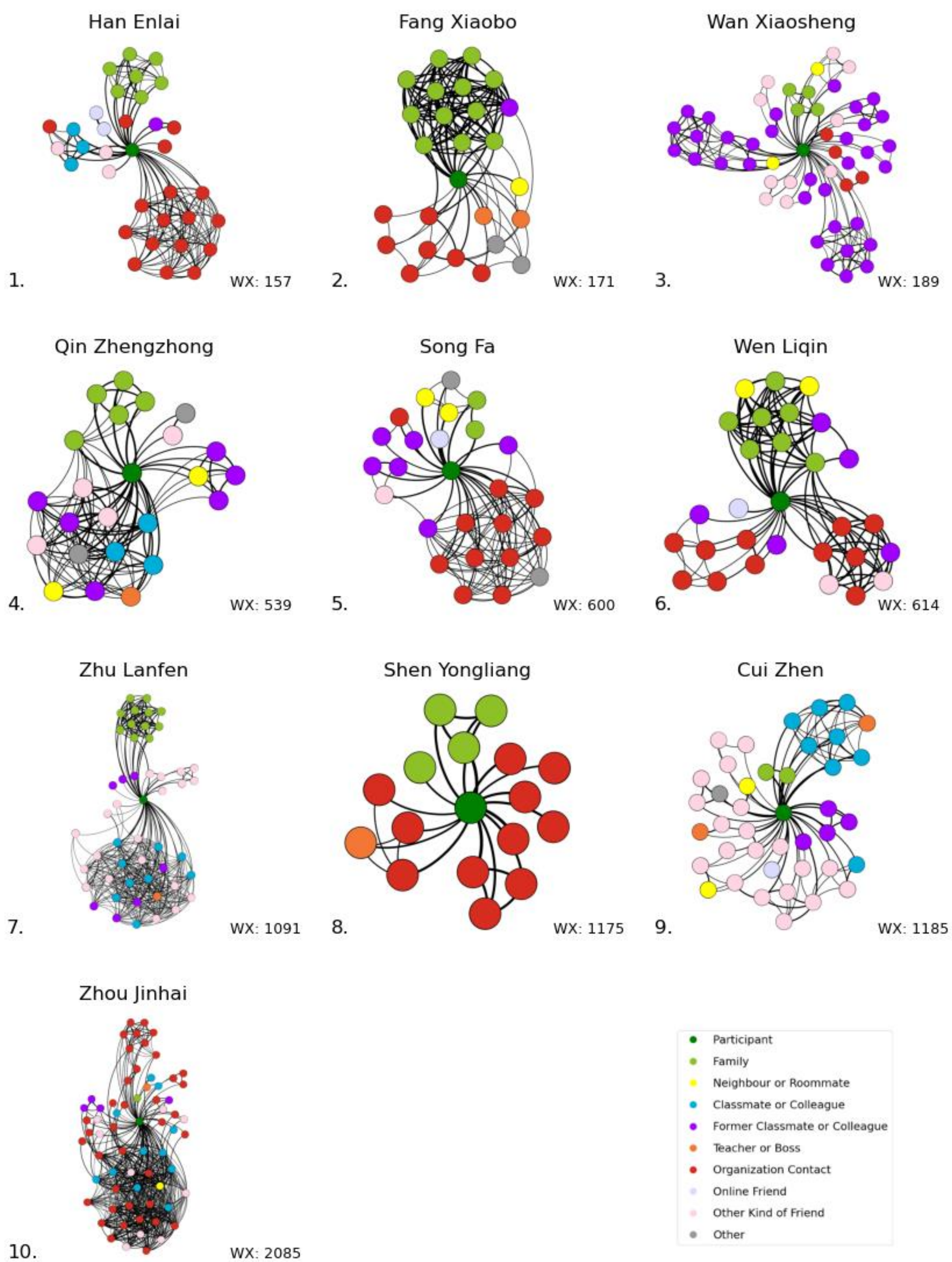


Figure 15: Mean Proportions of Alter Categories among the Elite-Student Group

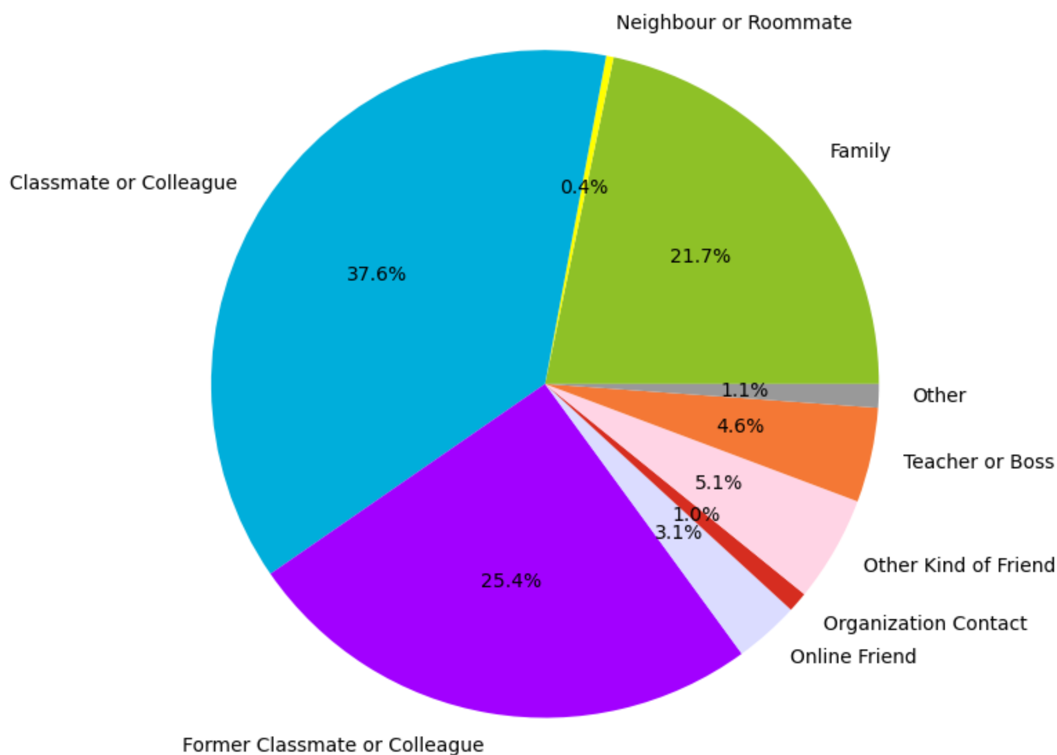


Figure 16: Mean Proportions of Alter Categories among the Bohemian Group

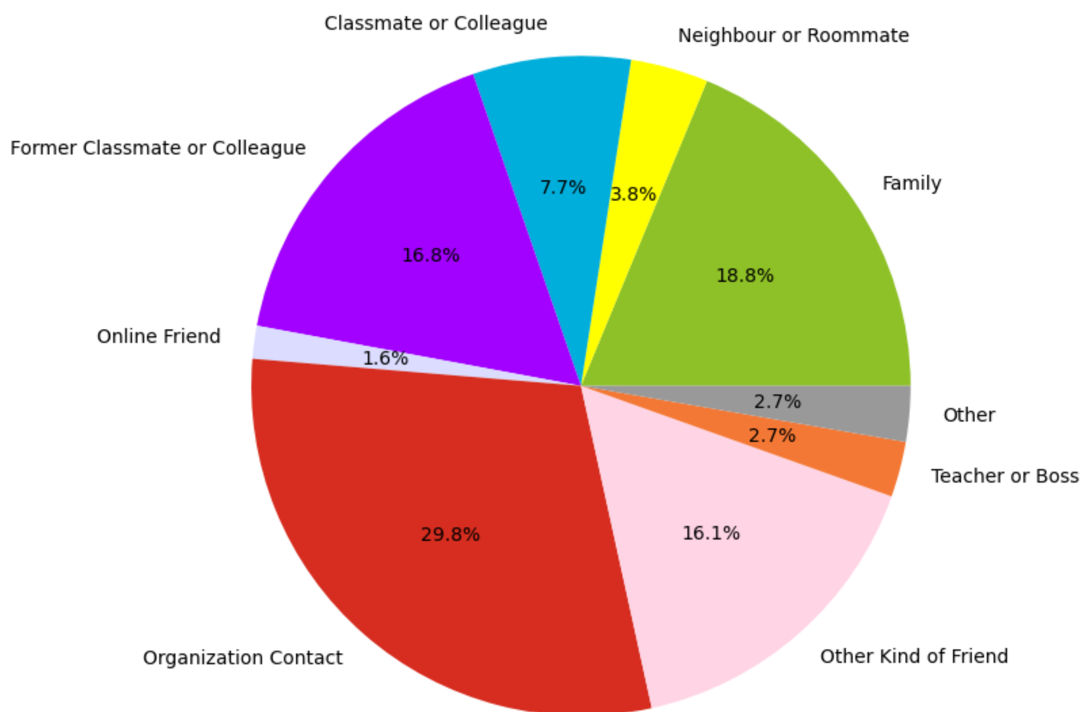
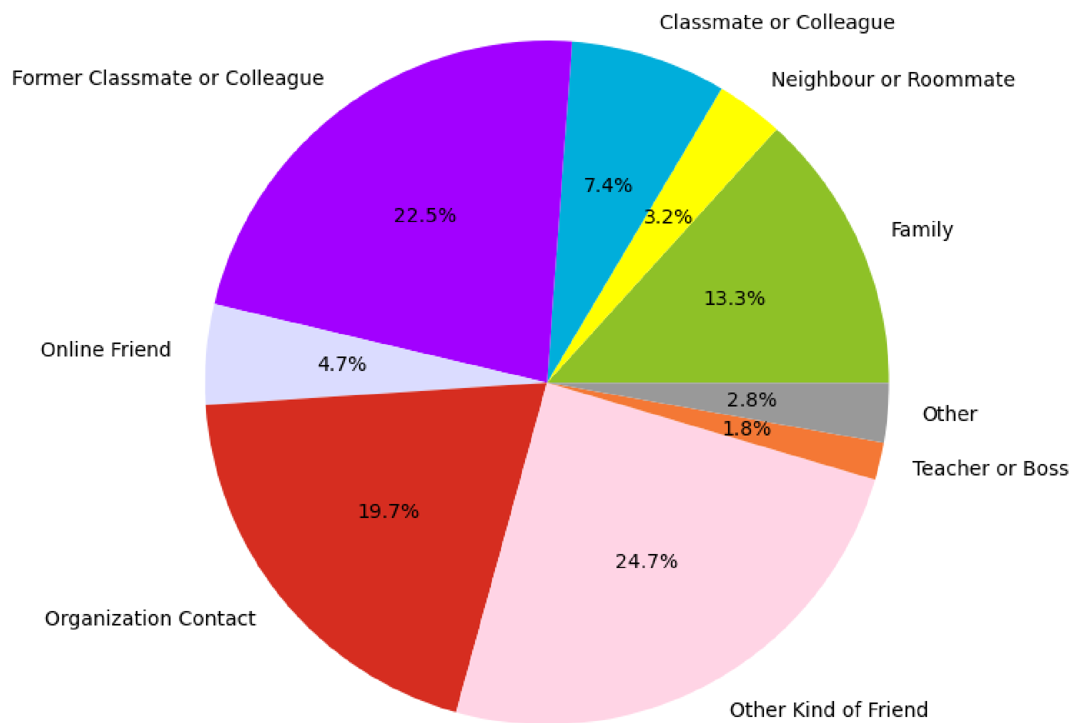


Figure 17: Mean Proportions of Alter Categories among Bohemian Students



among bohemians who were also students. Figure 17 shows the network compositions of current students or recent graduates who were connected to the bohemian scene (one from the student group, four from the bohemian group) – the relevant proportions closely resembled the overall mean proportions for the bohemian group, rather than those of students unconnected with the scene.

This should not be taken to imply that organizations are insignificant in elite-student networks. Participants were invited to label their alters with multiple categories, to accommodate the complexity of their relationships; I have here reduced this complexity in favor of the more general category – an alter's status as a member of the same university, over their status as the member of the same student society, for example. Figure 18 reverses this ordering for the student group; here we see that a significant proportion of their contacts are known through organizations, but that almost all of these alters are also current

Figure 18: Alter Category Proportions among Elite-Students (Organization Priority)

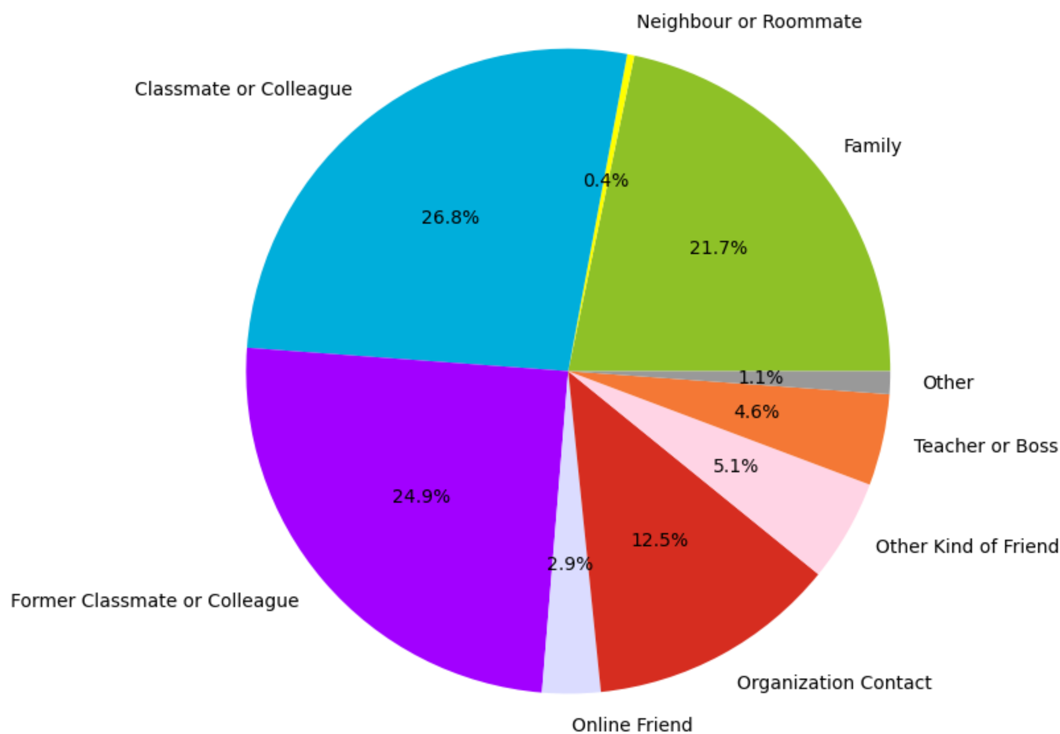
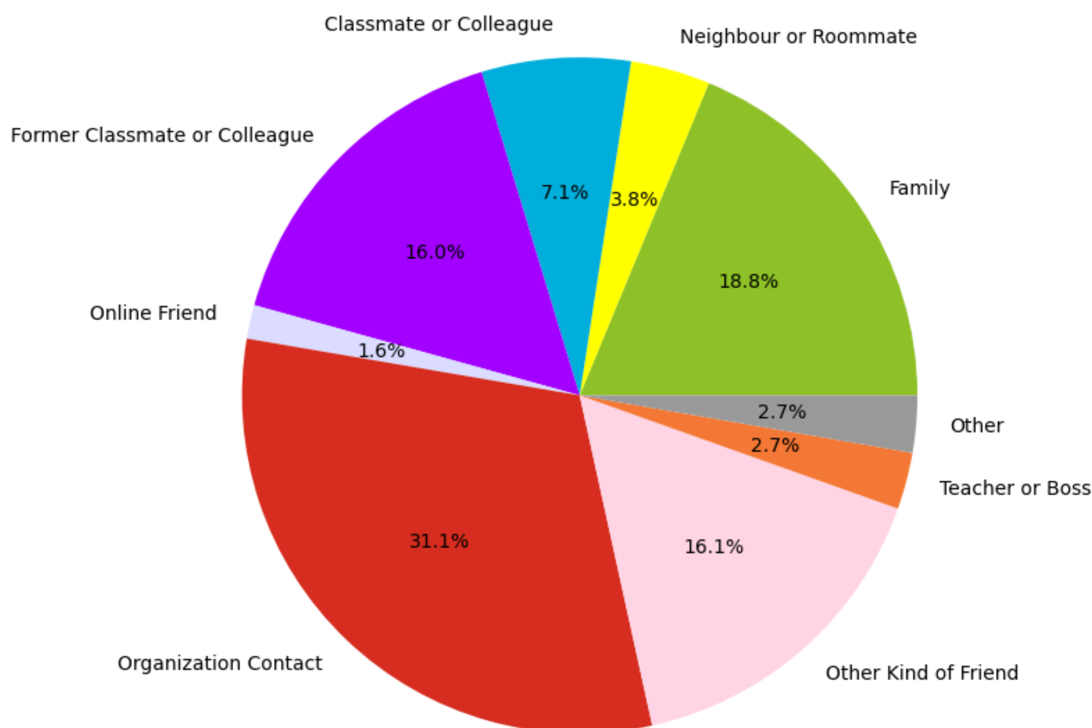


Figure 19: Alter Category Proportions among Bohemians (Organization Priority)

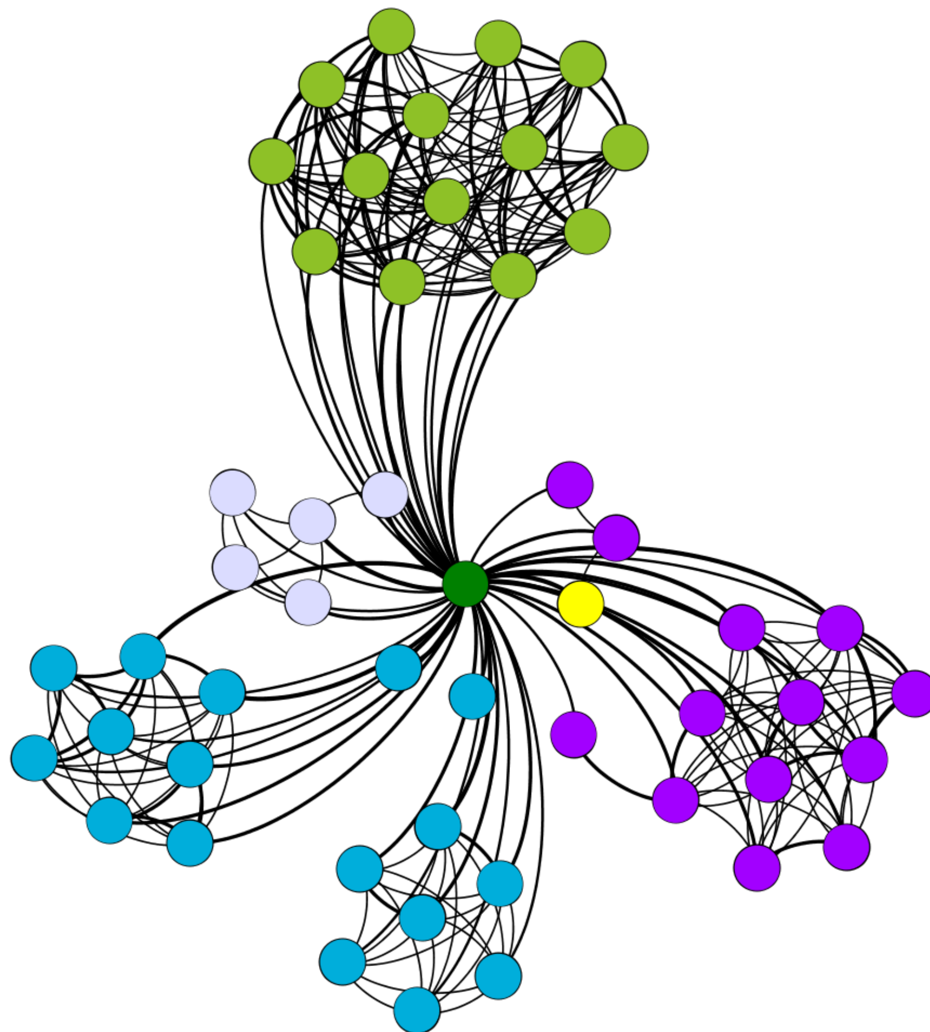


classmates. The same reordering, depicted in Figure 19, makes virtually no difference to the bohemian group's network composition proportions.

In addition to their composition, the structure of elite-student networks clearly differs from those of the bohemians. This effect is visually stark in extreme examples of the two tendencies. Figure 20 shows Chen Xiulan's social network in greater detail – a 2nd-year student who exemplifies the typical elite-student pattern clearly, though she is also an outlier as one of the only participants in this study to report a group of online-only friends, developed through online interactions as a football fan. Here we see social ties structured with a loose, fragmented pattern, involving several small groups that are not themselves interconnected. These groups are institutionally determined: family, middle-school classmates, high-school classmates, and university classmates (almost always members of the same department or student association). By contrast, in Figure 21 we see that the network of Zhu Lanfen, a moderately high-status member of the underground group, is dominated by only two groupings: the family, and a larger though no less densely interconnected grouping of close contacts within the bohemian scene.

This contrast with elite-student networks is also clearly revealed among the several members of the bohemian group who were also students. Figure 22 presents the sociogram of Cui Zhen, a bohemian participant who also attended Liangshan University; Figure 23 presents the sociogram of Han Enlai, a recent graduate from a less-prestigious institution. Such individuals reported no engagement whatsoever with student organizations, of which they were highly dismissive. Close relations with students in the same university were minimal – typically only a small group of classmates. Like other members of the bohemian group, they maintained close connections with groups of friends from middle-school and high-school, although these were smaller and less prominent than among typical elite students. Their sociograms were dominated by one or more large groups of densely interconnected friends generated through chance encounters in sites of face-to-face public interaction such as skateparks, bars and performance venues, in which they had spent much time. These groups

Figure 20: Chen Xiulan's Egocentric Social Network (Elite-Student Group)



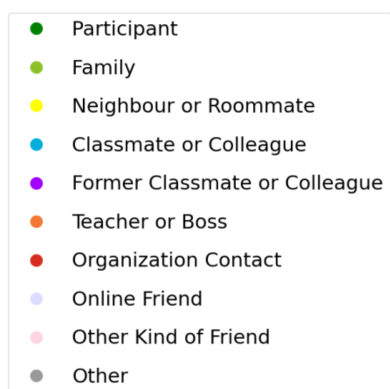
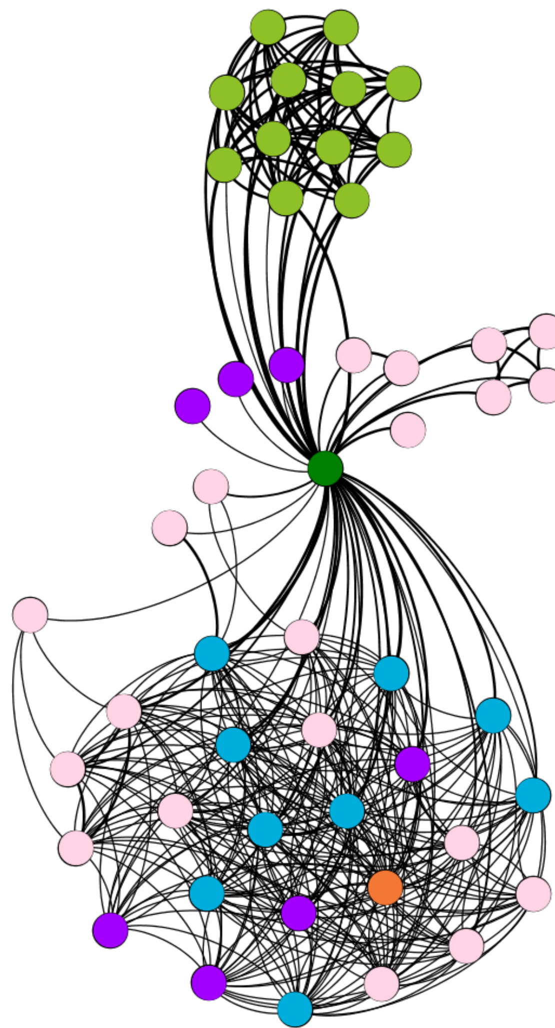


Figure 21: Zhu Lanfen's Egocentric Social Network (Bohemian Group)



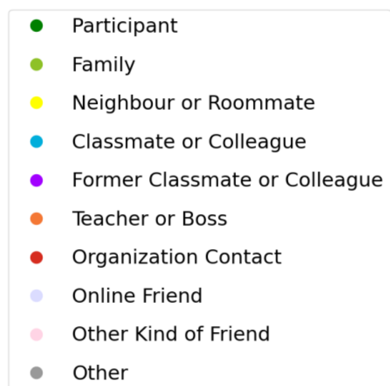
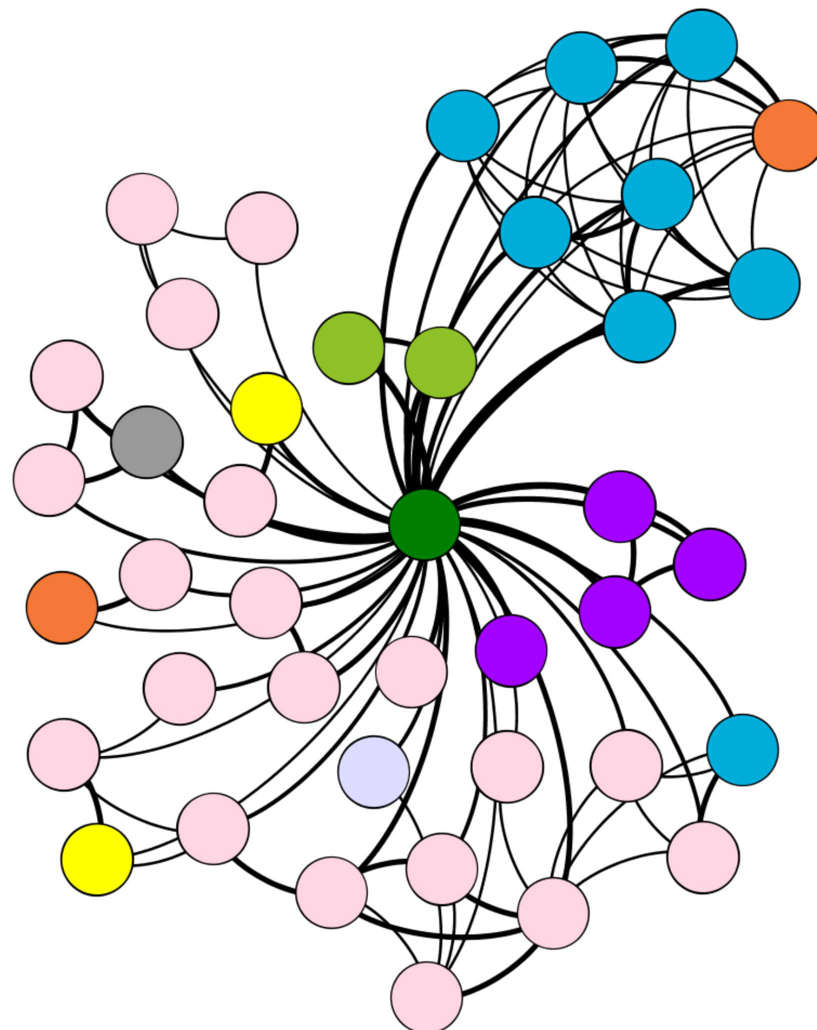


Figure 22: Cui Zhen's Egocentric Social Network (Bohemian Student)



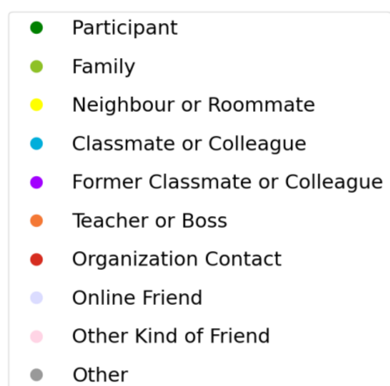
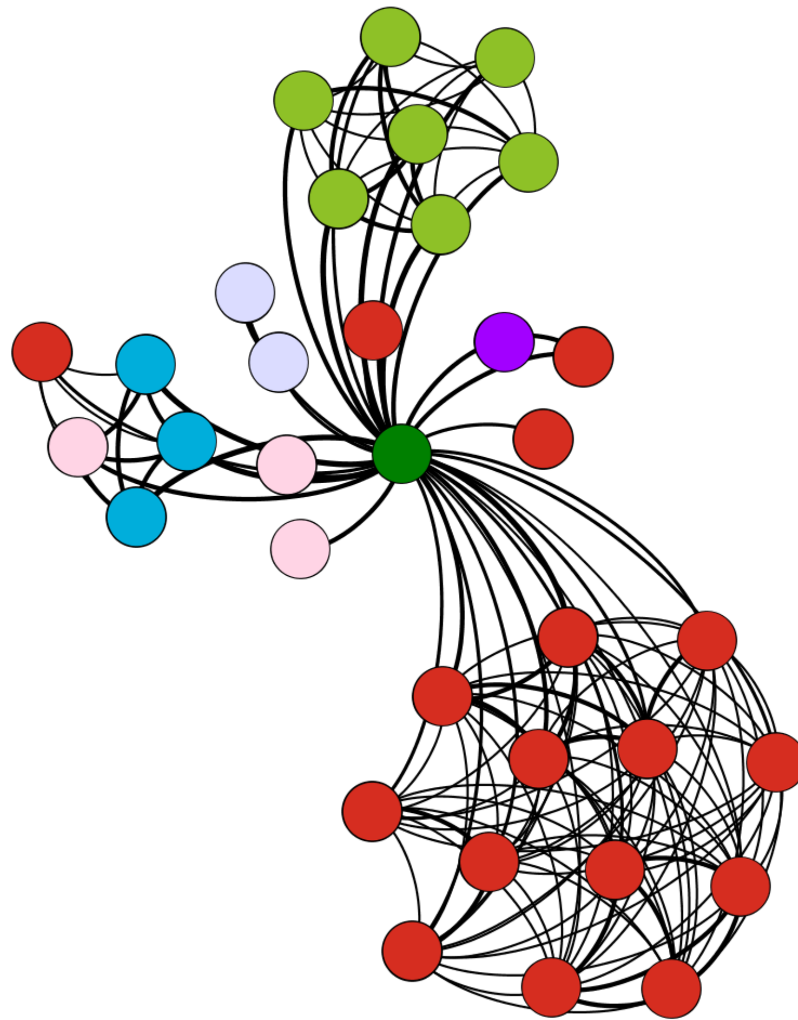
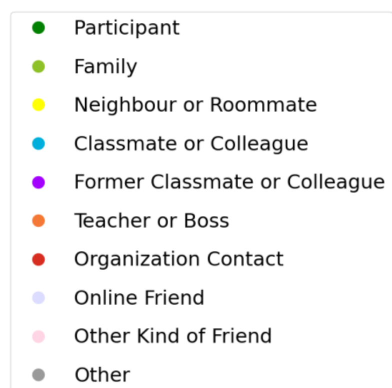


Figure 23: Han Enlai's Egocentric Social Network (Bohemian Student)





of friends were, moreover, highly diverse, including some students from different universities, but also non-students of a wide range of ages, occupations, and backgrounds. For Cui Zhen, these contacts are colored pink, indicating ‘other kind of friend’, while for Han Enlai they are red for ‘organization contact’ – this being a music venue.

One notable aspect of the diversity of these social networks was in connections with foreigners – entirely absent among almost all the elite-student group, but present among many of the bohemian group, including individuals with poor English skills. Except in occasional cases of Chinese individuals with foreign partners, relationships with foreigners were generally not very close, and accounted for a small proportion of close and very close bonds. Nonetheless, members of the bohemian group were invariably acquainted with many foreigners – Zhu Lanfen, with a total of 1,091 contacts on WeChat, estimated that around 200 of these were foreign nationals.

The differences between the two groups’ network structures can also be conveyed quantitatively, as tabulated in Figure 24 and Figure 25. The bohemian networks demonstrate substantially greater density (the proportion of potential connections between alters that are actual connections), average degree (the number of connections each node in the network has with other nodes) and average weighted degree (the same, weighted to incorporate the closeness of those connections) than the student group. Furthermore, while the two groups exhibit highly similar average clustering coefficients (a measure of interconnectedness among proximate local nodes), networks among the bohemian group show substantially higher transitivity (a measure of the interconnectedness of all possible triads across the entire network). Figure 26, Figure 27 and Figure 28 compare the distributions of density, average weighted degree and transitivity respectively between the two groups as boxplots.

These quantitative differences capture the distinct patterns of social organization that characterize the two groups – elite-student networks are looser-knit and more fragmented, while bohemian networks are stronger (i.e. higher weighted degree) and bound together with denser connections (i.e. both higher density and transitivity). Because elite-student networks

Figure 24: Elite-Student Network Statistics

Pseudonym	WeChat Contacts	Alters	Edges	Average Degree	Average Weighted Degree	Network Density	Average Clustering	Transitivity
Xia Yan	196	43	101	4.59	18.91	0.11	0.86	0.26
Song Liqin	229	24	84	6.72	27.36	0.28	0.74	0.69
Hao Chenguang	259	17	70	7.78	26	0.46	0.86	0.75
Chen Xiulan	266	50	245	9.61	35.49	0.19	0.93	0.69
Shi Ye	275	25	65	5	21.15	0.2	0.85	0.51
Ren Meihui	309	37	111	5.84	22.63	0.16	0.79	0.45
Cao Qiuyue	370	35	110	6.11	21.78	0.17	0.78	0.48
Yi Yongrui	404	23	46	3.83	13.58	0.17	0.91	0.29
Li Qingzhao	441	52	235	8.87	30.91	0.17	0.9	0.66
Yi Qi	455	55	141	5.04	21.21	0.09	0.83	0.25
Bai Lin	461	26	71	5.26	20.44	0.2	0.87	0.53
Wan Shuang	544	35	76	4.22	16.28	0.12	0.71	0.28
Liang Hong	698	26	76	5.63	22.74	0.22	0.81	0.57
Qian Xiulan	700	28	43	2.97	10.55	0.11	0.62	0.14
Meng Zongying	1000	26	42	3.11	12.67	0.12	0.57	0.18
Zhu Peizhi	1119	64	178	5.48	19.69	0.09	0.69	0.35
Mean	**482.88**	**35.38**	**105.88**	**5.63**	**21.34**	**0.18**	**0.80**	**0.44**

Figure 25: Bohemian Network Statistics

Pseudonym	WeChat Contacts	Alters	Edges	Average Degree	Average Weighted Degree	Network Density	Average Clustering	Transitivity
Han Enlai	157	33	144	8.47	30.24	0.26	0.86	0.76
Fang Xiaobo	171	25	127	9.77	43.54	0.39	0.78	0.78
Wan Xiaosheng	189	53	140	5.19	18.48	0.1	0.79	0.33
Qin Zhengzhong	539	23	118	9.83	38.5	0.43	0.93	0.8
Song Fa	600	25	106	8.15	27.38	0.33	0.88	0.78
Wen Liqin	614	28	115	7.93	36.21	0.28	0.86	0.7
Zhu Lanfen	1091	49	375	15	51.88	0.31	0.87	0.82
Shen Yongliang	1175	16	26	3.06	12.24	0.19	0.57	0.26
Cui Zhen	1185	40	99	4.83	17.51	0.12	0.88	0.34
Zhou Jinhai	2085	65	530	16.06	62.45	0.25	0.92	0.82
Mean	**800.61**	**37.11**	**161.99**	**7.89**	**30.16**	**0.23**	**0.80**	**0.57**

Figure 26: Network Density Compared by Group

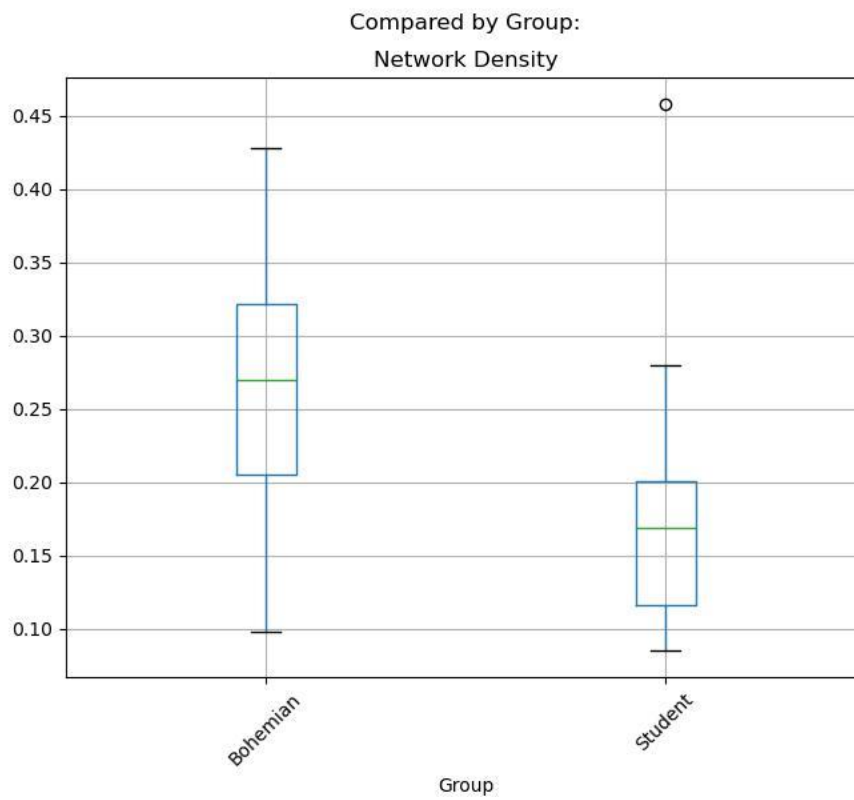


Figure 27: Average Weighted Degree Compared by Group

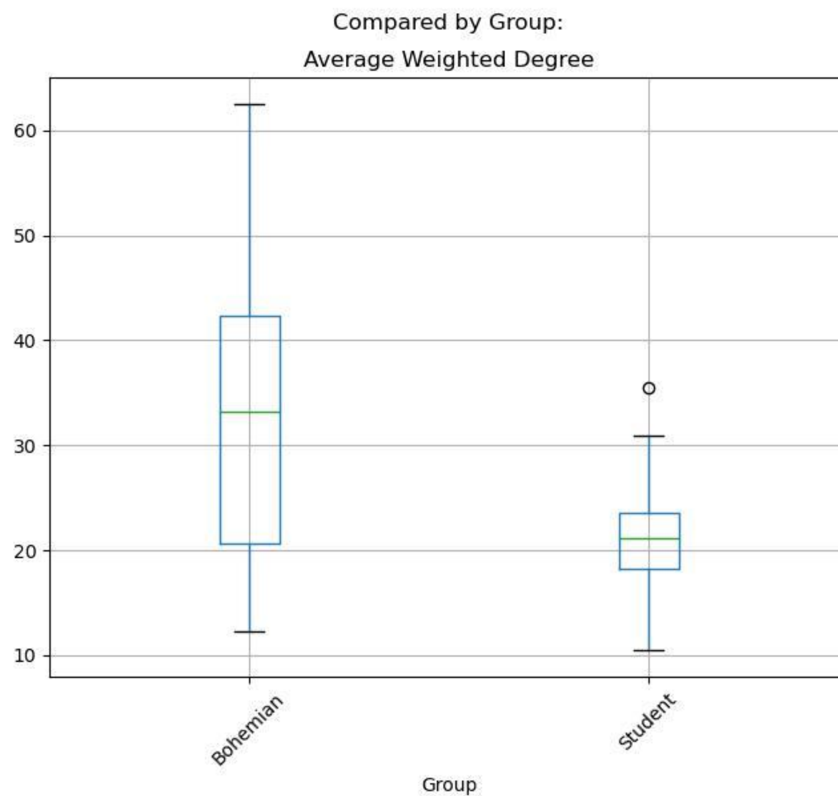
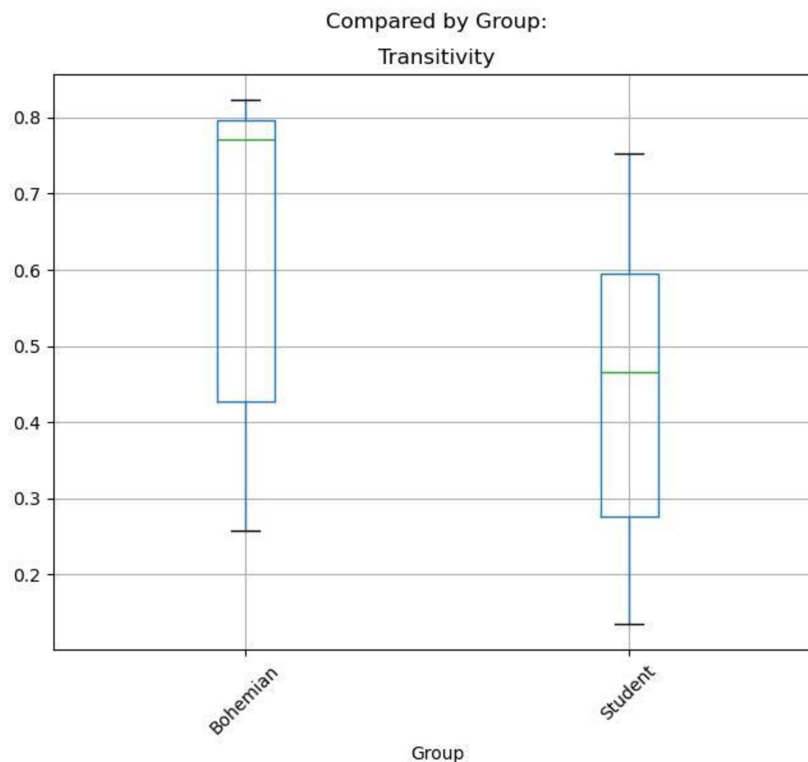


Figure 28: Transitivity Compared by Group



overwhelmingly connect them with other elite students, whether current or former classmates, their networks are homogeneous in their composition, despite their fragmentation and geographic dispersal. And because bohemian networks connect them with other bohemians, of widely varying ages and socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, their networks remain highly heterogeneous despite their dense, localized community ties. The combined heterogeneity and density of bohemian networks suggests greater multiplexity, whereby a single tie between two alters reflects multiple forms of relationship – the wide diversity of role-relations in heterogeneous bohemian networks (e.g. colleagues, patron-client, teacher-student, employee-employer, creative collaborator, romantic partner, commercial relations) is overlaid by the egalitarian friendship relations that bind the whole scene together densely. However, multiplexity is not represented here quantitatively, as the method of data collection allowed for a maximum of two categories under which participants could characterize their relationship with a given alter.

4.8 Conclusion: Elite-Student and Bohemian Social Organization

Collins's stratification framework, in which variation in the degrees of communicative diversity between groups contributes to differences in their cultures, supports the expectation that the elite-student group would be more cosmopolitan in this social sense than the bohemians. However, the divergent patterns of social interaction and organization elaborated in this chapter show that the differences between the elite-student and bohemian groups do not fit neatly along this dimension of variation. As we have seen, elite-student networks are loose-knit, fragmented, and geographically dispersed, yet highly homogeneous – constrained to their own elite social echelon. By contrast, though bohemian networks are characterized by locally dense and multiplex networks of strong bonds, they are also highly heterogeneous, encompassing individuals of widely varying ages, occupations, as well as socioeconomic, educational, geographical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

The heterogeneity of bohemian networks implies high communicative diversity in the face-to-face interactions on which their social lives are focused, just as the complex, internet-mediated interactions of the elite-students implies high communicative diversity, albeit within homogeneous networks; the aggregate extent of social cosmopolitanism between these two groups, focused as they are on different forms of communication, cannot be easily compared. This divergence from theoretical expectations suggests that while the source of communicative diversity may not affect its aggregate impact on group culture, whether these communications are internet-mediated or face-to-face has independent effects on patterns of social interaction and organization which, in turn, feed back into communicative diversity. These effects, mediated by the distinct social affordances of the orthodox Confucian and heterodox modes of associations, serve to lessen the social cosmopolitanism of the elite-student group, and heighten that of the bohemian group, relative to theoretically grounded expectations.

For both groups, we see that it is patterns of face-to-face interaction that determine the structure and heterogeneity of their social networks. For elite-students, under the influence of a Confucian tradition and a university environment that both discourage out-group relations, these face-to-face interactions are shaped by their passage through a series of educational institutions and organizations, encouraging a high degree of network homogeneity. Online interaction sustains these bonds over time, while simultaneously lessening the incentive to pursue new social relationships outside their current institution, expanding the geographical scope while maintaining the homogeneity of their networks. Moreover, because it is chiefly the mediated communications of this group that are diverse, while their face-to-face interactions are constrained and characterized by extensive physical co-presence, they are subject to a high degree of mutual surveillance that supports conformity-inducing social control.

Bohemians, by contrast, under the influence of the heterodox tradition, are far less constrained in their face-to-face interactions which, given the greater affordances of physical co-presence for the chaotic formation of new social bonds, and for greater ritual intensity in interactions, generates networks that are heterogenous, yet patterned by dense, local connections. The strength of these bonds, and the solidarity of the whole community, is reinforced by online interactions in the intervals between their episodic gatherings. However, partly because those gatherings are episodic, bohemians have greater access to private, backstage spaces, lessening conformist pressures and permitting highly individualistic self-presentations that further heighten communicative diversity.

In very different ways, the communications of both groups translate into high degrees of social cosmopolitanism; this is as expected for the elite-student group, but seemingly incongruous in the case of the bohemians, whose pattern of locally dense and multiplex social connections resemble those of much less heterogeneous communities. Both groups exhibit the relativistic tendency that Collins associates with cosmopolitanism; however, as I argue in

subsequent chapters, the highly distinct patterns of social interaction and organization through which this cosmopolitanism is manifested have powerful cultural and political implications.

5 The Mediated Communications and Cultures of Elite-Student and Bohemian Groups

Comparing the cultures of the elite-student and bohemian groups demands a tight focus of inquiry. All local groups, however distinctive, reflect the culture of the wider society in which they are embedded – a symbolic structure so complex as to defy comprehensive description. 'Sociologists and anthropologists', Fine writes, 'who have examined culture have found specifying the cultural patterns of an entire society to be an insurmountable task' (1979: 733). This chapter is especially focused on highlighting differences in the cosmopolitanism of the groups' cultures, while drawing out the implications for distinct hierarchies of value, social status and prestige.

Because this chapter is focused on cosmopolitanism in the two cultures, it draws heavily on evidence concerning their mediated communications. For any group embedded in a particular national culture, mediated and especially online communications are where we might expect to find evidence of cultural cosmopolitanism. In this chapter I focus on two forms of mediated communication – the social-media output of both groups, and their consumption of cultural content, including films, episodic audiovisual content (referred to here as TV shows), music, and books. I then turn to consideration of both these groups' cultures in the round, introducing also their embodied, face-to-face cultural practices with data drawn from semi-structured interviews and participant observation. In so doing, I show how the two groups' characteristic hierarchies of value and prestige are highly cosmopolitan yet diverge in a manner that is shaped by the influence of China's orthodox Confucian and heterodox cultural traditions. I also shed light on the structure of these two groups' information environments, showing that their cosmopolitan cultural proclivities also reflect highly distinct structures of articulation between local and global. I conclude by drawing out the implications of their cultural differences. While it is not possible to describe the culture and mediated communications of these two groups without touching on politics, discussion of

explicitly political aspects, particularly in their online communications, is reserved for the next chapter.

5.1 Online Shared Content: Quantitative Results

The importance of the smartphone to many young people, as a device for consuming but also reproducing and disseminating cultural content in the broadest sense, means that the digital traces generated through this process offer great insight into their culture. Online posting, even when highly varied within a group, is nonetheless subject to an evaluative framework that is known to and shared among group members: a set of hierarchies of varying degrees of stability covering a wide range of ways that one can present oneself online, which form a significant element of that group's broader culture.

I generated textual corpora from the content posted by members of both groups, chiefly on WeChat but also on other platforms including QZone, Sina Weibo, Zhihu and Douban. These corpora are divided, for each group, into textual content posted directly by participants (user-generated, hereafter UG), and third-party website text to which participants posted links on their WeChat timelines (WeChat-shared, hereafter WC). Keywords were extracted from these four corpora to highlight the most distinctive textual elements of each; following general practice in corpus linguistics (Gabrielatos and Marchi, 2012), I focus here on the top 100 statistically significant keywords for each corpus, in declining order of effect size, having removed artifacts generated by segmentation or text-processing errors.

In appendix A, Figure 80 and Figure 81 present this list for the elite-student (N=16) UG corpus, while Figure 82 and Figure 83 do so for the bohemian (N=9) UG corpus. For the larger WC corpora, I present slightly different keyword lists, because of the considerable number of keywords that do not occur in the Weibo reference corpus, and the greater generality and research interest of keywords that do so occur. Figure 84 presents the top 50 elite-student WeChat shared keywords that do not occur in the reference corpus, and Figure 85 the top 50 elite-student WC keywords that occur at least once. Similarly, Figure 86

presents the top 50 bohemian WC keywords that do not occur in the reference corpus, and Figure 87 the top 50 bohemian WC keywords that occur at least once. In each list, I have redacted all keywords that could identify my participants, substituting pseudonyms in their place which are identified through angle brackets.

A high proportion of each keyword list is made up of proper nouns, as the specificity of such terms lends itself to extraction through a keyword detection method based on textual distinctiveness. In the following section, I examine how the use of terms in these noun categories differs between the two groups, especially in the balance of local, trans-local and global referents; these patterns reveal much about the information environments and prestige hierarchies of the two groups. After turning to patterns of cultural consumption, I return to the more abstract terms occurring in these social media keyword lists in subsequent general discussion of the two groups' divergent cultures.

5.2 Named Entities Analysis – Local

Among the elite-student group – who never stray far from their self-contained campus – the use of local location terms was both scant and geographically constrained. By contrast, the extensive use of local location terms among the bohemians reflects their considerably greater mobility, and the sheer amount of time they spend in face-to-face social interaction at such sites, as well as attending or actively participating in musical events. Locally, apart from several general terms for the area surrounding my field site, almost every other location referred to a music venue, or locations affiliated with and directly adjacent to music venues while chiefly serving another purpose, including a restaurant and a skate-shop. Other locations relate to non-musical activities popular within the bohemian cultural scene, such as two tattoo studios. For some participants, the extensive use of location terms related to cultural production may partly be explained through entrepreneurial motivation. However, it also reflects the fundamental basis of group membership on protracted and repeated physical co-presence in certain semi-public places, and the prestige value of participating in

the musical events that frequently occur in such sites. One further non-musical site, <liangshan scenic area>, is especially significant in indicating the attachment to natural environments among this group. It refers to an area of outstanding natural beauty within my field site, often frequented by bohemian participants for small to medium-scale social events, but seldom frequented by elite students, despite its proximity to their campus. This site is also of political significance, as planned development at this site previously served as the catalyst for contention involving members of the bohemian group.

Within the bohemian group's online output, the majority of named individuals and groups are associated with the local music scene, often directly as performers, typically in locally favored underground genres such as psytrance, reggae, punk or hip-hop, but also more commercially mainstream styles such as rock. Several others, though often also playing music, are chiefly connected to the local music scene either in an ancillary role, such as a psychedelic décor designer and a sound engineer, or work within the associated nightlife economy, including a barman and a restauranteur. Others are respected for accomplishments in fields quite unconnected from music but nonetheless prominent within the broader bohemian cultural scene, such as skateboarding, visual arts, tattooing, craft brewing and political activism. Furthermore, several older members of the bohemian scene are named who, despite lacking formal positions of authority, nonetheless possess extremely high social status at the local level. These individuals have no direct equivalent in the elite-student keyword lists.

Local persons named by the elite-students tended overwhelmingly to be affiliated with their own university, and often their department: a missing student, two crowdfunding appeals for former students, a departmental data scientist, a campus police officer and a senior administrator in the Marxism department, which is also responsible for students' mandatory ideological instruction. All are mentioned in the university's own online publications, as is a prominent figure in local journalism. However, the largest category of local individuals named by elite students were student journalists. This reflects the group's extensive

engagement with and dissemination of student journalism; the names of several university publications are also keywords.

This intellectually sophisticated journalistic content may have been valuable to students as an opportunity for elite self-presentation; however, such student journalism was also extensively disseminated because participants were often involved in its creation, pointing to the prominent place of formal university organizations in the lives of this group. This tendency towards formal associational engagement is also reflected in other keywords such as 创行 (*chuangxing* – Enactus), an entrepreneurial and philanthropic university association with which several elite students were engaged. Other student associations also generated statistically significant keywords that fell outside the top 100 presented here, such as a musical theatre society.

These patterns of named entities reveal two groups extensively engaged with local cultural production – the journalistic efforts of their same-university peers for the elite students, and the participatory musical events that punctuate social life for the bohemian group, as well as local online media focused on these events. They reveal, for the elite-students, membership of a broader student group that is tightly bounded, with scant extra-group interaction at the local level; this contrasts with their extensive engagement in online media with content concerning intellectual figures and commercial or elite cultural producers at trans-local and global levels. The keyword lists provide little evidence of high-status figures among their peers, but ample evidence of the importance of university officials, as well as journalists and other media professionals. Similarly, we see an overwhelming tendency for named local groups or collectives to be structured by formal institutional membership, whether at the level of academic department, university association or the whole university.

The local media environment of the bohemian group is no less preoccupied with Liangshan's music scene than elite-student journalism is with Liangshan University.

Moreover, whereas almost all the students who appear in the elite-student WC corpus do so in their capacity as journalists or editors, members of the bohemian group are considerably more likely to feature as the *subjects* of the content that other bohemians share. The greater public prominence of bohemian group members serves as the basis for a media environment which is rather more inward-looking at the local level. While much of this is in WeChat public-account articles, we also see evidence of filmmaking in their social media corpora, with the keyword <ye he>, an individual who directed a feature-length documentary focused on one of the more prominent bohemian participants, who appear themselves in both UG and WC keyword lists as <zhou longwei>. Nor was Zhou Longwei the only bohemian participant to have been the focus of a feature-length documentary film. The prominence of their own subculture and its members in their information environment reflects its greater distance from broader fields of Chinese public discourse than that of the elite students.

5.3 Named Entities Analysis – Trans-Local and Global

Elite-student keyword lists contained very few trans-local place terms, but far more global location terms, including sites in Australia, France, the USA, Turkey, the Baltic and Vietnam. This usage was chiefly in posts concerning participants' own touristic travel, although some of these locations refer to institutions of higher learning, from posts by those planning to study abroad. The elite students' emphasis on their international mobility, at times through extended textual description, but especially through photography, reflects the considerable prestige associated with this travel, as well as the elite academic attainment on which it depended in the case of overseas postgraduate study.

The more extensive use of trans-local location terms among the bohemian group reflects, on the one hand, the necessary mobility of individuals involved in China's music scene, often used in the context of participants' own tours as performers or in ancillary roles. Certain exceptions to this general trend are telling. One keyword, yumon, refers to a second-hand clothes market. Second-hand clothes are typically avoided by Chinese people due to

taboos surrounding death; their popularity among the flamboyant, anti-commercial bohemians was quite absent among the elite-student group. Furthermore, the location <maying>, appearing in content concerning group of local musicians who moved to a remote rural location, reflects the considerably greater affinity for rural and natural environments among the bohemian group, as compared to both the elite-student group and Chinese urban society more generally, where rural life and people are typically stigmatized (Murphy, 2004).

We also see a consistent tendency for trans-local individuals and groups named by bohemians to reflect actual personal connections, forged through social interaction surrounding musical events, along lines of genre affiliation. Such named individuals hew to the bohemian group's preoccupation with certain underground musical genres, including psytrance, hip-hop, punk and reggae, though more commercially oriented genres, including folk-rock, rock and indie-pop are also represented. Other individuals are not named as musical performers but are nonetheless connected to underground music scenes. The only named trans-local individual in the bohemian keyword lists entirely unconnected to music is a senior state official whose name appears in the context of explicit political critique. A historical figure also appears in the keywords due to featuring in a song authored by a bohemian participant. As a soldier slain fighting in the *Guomindang* (Nationalist) army against the Japanese during the Second World War, this may be considered veiled political critique, given sensitivities surrounding the respective contributions of the CCP and *Guomindang* forces during that conflict (Mitter, 2020).

Named global individuals and groups also reflect the same preoccupation with music, yet again, almost all these individuals are also personally acquainted with members of the bohemian group; Shpongle, a psytrance and ambient group from the UK known as 'the most popular act in the psychedelic diaspora' (St John, 2012: 19), constitutes perhaps the only exception. Here we see an essential property of the structure of relations among bohemian groups, which is that however dense and multiplex their social networks may be at the local level, these local scenes are also networked horizontally, connected both with other bohemian

scenes in China and globally, chiefly through subcultural affiliation and the personal interactions this generates. Terms employed in their online output reflect personal connections between bohemian participants and the reggae scene in Jamaica, the punk scene in Cuba, and the psytrance scenes in Europe, Thailand and beyond. However, compared to the elite students, the bohemians refer to fewer international locations. Some bohemians did not see international travel as a realistic possibility; it was not uncommon for them to refer to China as a prison.

In contrast, trans-local individuals among elite-student keywords tended to be associated with elite entertainment cultures, especially filmmaking, fine art, poetry, and Chinese opera. In addition to cultural producers, several trans-local figures occur in the context of news stories, reflecting elite-students' greater engagement with public and mass-media discourse in journalism from both student and official, national-level news outlets. Furthermore, the greater preponderance of global intellectual figures in the social media output of the elite students – such as in fields of media theory, entrepreneurship, artificial intelligence and learning skills – reflects the greater prestige associated with academic distinction among this group. Among the bohemians, the only broadly comparable figure was Alexander Shulgin, a chemist whose inclusion here reflects the affinity between the psytrance subculture and hallucinogenic drugs.

These considerations might be taken to imply that the bohemians are less cosmopolitan than the elite-student group; undoubtedly, here we see less diversity and fewer global references in their posted content, given the widespread preoccupation with music and other bohemian cultural practices. The bohemian group are shown to be enmeshed in a local culture that is considerably more all-encompassing, patterning their social media output at local, trans-local and global levels. At the same time, we see a greater localization of global culture among this group which, in concrete terms, means that its members personally know and regularly interact with a far greater number of foreigners. By contrast, the social media output of the elite-student group reveals a pattern of cultural engagement that is richer and

more sophisticated, but also more impersonal. The fields of global intellectual and high-cultural content to which they ascribe prestige are too broad to be encompassed by such horizontal networks of personal acquaintance as are reflected in bohemian social-media output.

Here we see not merely a difference in the hierarchies of value that characterize the cultures of the two groups, but in the structure of their online information environments. While both are highly globalized, the elite-student environment is greater in scope, more vertically integrated with national public discourse, and areas of global discourse that accord with their elite sensibilities. The bohemians are interfaced with neither; their alternative information environment is chiefly articulated through personal connections along lines of subcultural affiliation that extend horizontally. Though this environment is global in reach, it connects local subcultural communities that, wherever they may be, also diverge from their surrounding mainstream and elite societies and cultures. In short, while bohemians are enmeshed in global subcultural networks, elite-students aspire to a culture of commonly accepted international prestige.

5.4 Cultural Consumption: Favorite Media Content

In semi-structured interviews, participants from both groups were invited to name their favorite films, TV shows, music and books. Cultural tastes, as much research attests, ‘constitute an integral part of our identities’ (Lewis et al., 2008), as well as offering insight into the broader groups within which individuals are embedded (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994) and their political views (Rogers and Jost, 2022). Responses to open-ended inquiries concerning favorite cultural content, like content posted on social media, are inextricable from issues of prestige. While they tell us about actual cultural consumption, and the extent of cosmopolitanism in such patterns, they are simultaneously accounts of the kinds of content respondents would like others to know that they consume. Because such sentiments are

Figure 29: Favorite Items of Media Content Named by Elite-Student and Bohemian Groups

	Group	
Media	**Elite Student**	**Bohemian**
Total Films	64	49
Mean Films	4	4.45
Total TV Shows	68	27
Mean TV Shows	4.25	2.45
Total Music	68	54
Mean Music	4.25	4.91
Total Books	64	34
Mean Books	4	3.09

conditioned at the social level, individual tastes reflect the evaluative hierarchies shared among groups. For cosmopolitan groups, such responses therefore reveal the hierarchies of status and prestige that govern the interface between global and local cultures.

In all, eleven bohemian participants and sixteen elite students responded to these questions with enough specificity to be useful; Figure 29 summarizes the number of favorites they named from each type of media content. Here we can see that members of the bohemian group named, on average, considerably fewer favorite TV shows and books than the elite students, though slightly more music and film favorites. This broadly reflects patterns of engagement with these forms of content; several bohemian participants reported not engaging with TV shows or books at all, naming none. However, the slightly greater number of named musical favorites belies the considerably greater engagement with music among the bohemian group.

Because we are interested in the cosmopolitanism of these patterns of engagement with cultural content, geographical origins have been ascribed to each item. Figure 30 breaks down the origins of the two groups' favorite cultural content to the national level. The same data are presented visually, for films in Figure 31 and Figure 32, TV shows in Figure 33 and Figure 34, music in Figure 35 and Figure 36, and books in Figure 37 and Figure 38. This reveals

Figure 30: National Origins of Favorite Cultural Content by Group

Geographical Origins of Favourite Films

Elite-Student Group

Geographical Origin	Count	Percentage
US	30	46.88%
Mainland China	8	12.50%
UK	5	7.81%
Japan	5	7.81%
France	4	6.25%
Taiwan	3	4.69%
Hong Kong	2	3.13%
Thailand	2	3.13%
Italy	2	3.13%
Korea	2	3.13%
Sweden	1	1.56%

Bohemian Group

Geographical Origin	Count	Percentage
US	25	51.02%
Japan	8	16.33%
Hong Kong	6	12.24%
UK	4	8.16%
Mainland China	3	6.12%
Jamaica	2	4.08%
Italy	1	2.04%

Geographical Origins of Favourite TV Shows

Elite-Student Group

Geographical Origin	Count	Percentage
Mainland China	25	36.76%
US	23	33.82%
UK	10	14.71%
Japan	6	8.82%
Korea	4	5.88%

Bohemian Group

Geographical Origin	Count	Percentage
US	11	40.74%
Mainland China	7	25.93%
Japan	6	22.22%
UK	2	7.41%
Canada	1	3.70%

Geographical Origins of Favourite Music

Elite-Student Group

Geographical Origin	Count	Percentage
US	23	33.82%
Taiwan	10	14.71%
UK	9	13.24%
Hong Kong	7	10.29%
Mainland China	6	8.82%
Korea	3	4.41%
Australia	2	2.94%
Spain	1	1.47%
Singapore	1	1.47%
Ireland	1	1.47%
France	1	1.47%
New Zealand	1	1.47%
Malaysia	1	1.47%
Japan	1	1.47%
Local	1	1.47%

Bohemian Group

Geographical Origin	Count	Percentage
Mainland China	13	24.07%
UK	11	20.37%
US	10	18.52%
Local	8	14.81%
Jamaica	4	7.41%
India	2	3.70%
Germany	1	1.85%
Canada	1	1.85%
Israel	1	1.85%
Africa	1	1.85%
Mali	1	1.85%
Russia	1	1.85%

Geographical Origins of Favourite Books

Elite-Student Group

Geographical Origin	Count	Percentage
Mainland China	17	26.56%
UK	12	18.75%
US	10	15.63%
France	5	7.81%
Inapplicable	5	7.81%
Italy	3	4.69%
Japan	3	4.69%
Austria	2	3.13%
Colombia	2	3.13%
Brasil	2	3.13%
Germany	1	1.56%
Australia	1	1.56%
Israel	1	1.56%

Bohemian Group

Geographical Origin	Count	Percentage
Mainland China	18	52.94%
UK	3	8.82%
US	3	8.82%
Japan	3	8.82%
Inapplicable	3	8.82%
Germany	2	5.88%
France	1	2.94%
Colombia	1	2.94%

Figure 31: Geographical Origins of Favorite Movies – Elite-Student

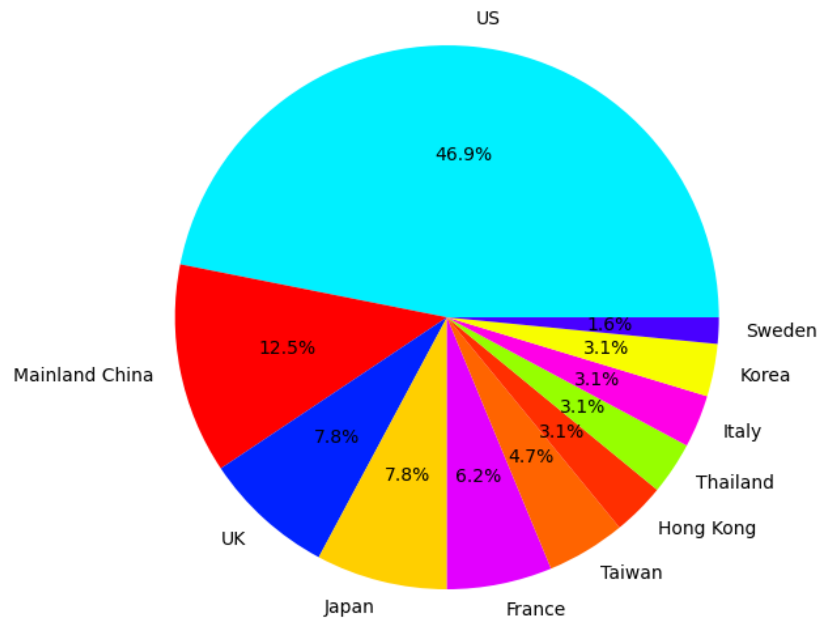


Figure 32: Geographical Origins of Favorite Movies – Bohemian

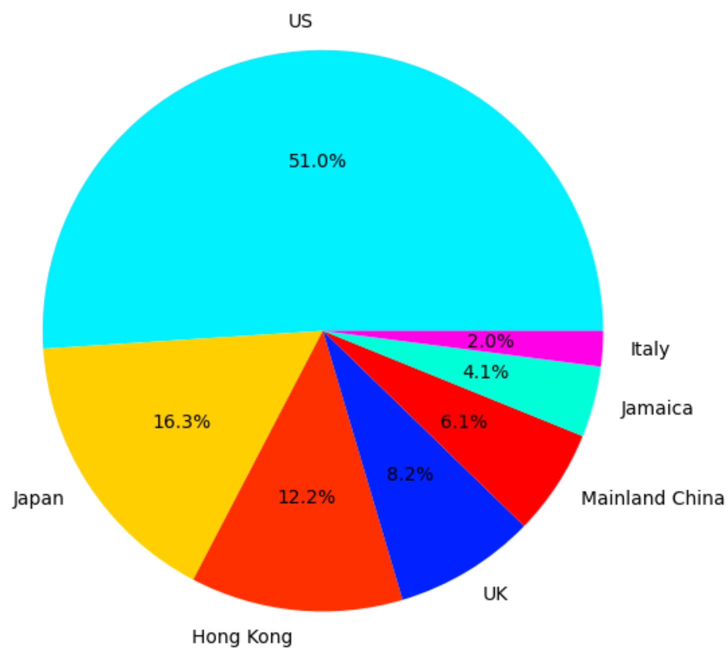


Figure 33: Geographical Origins of Favorite TV Shows – Elite-Student

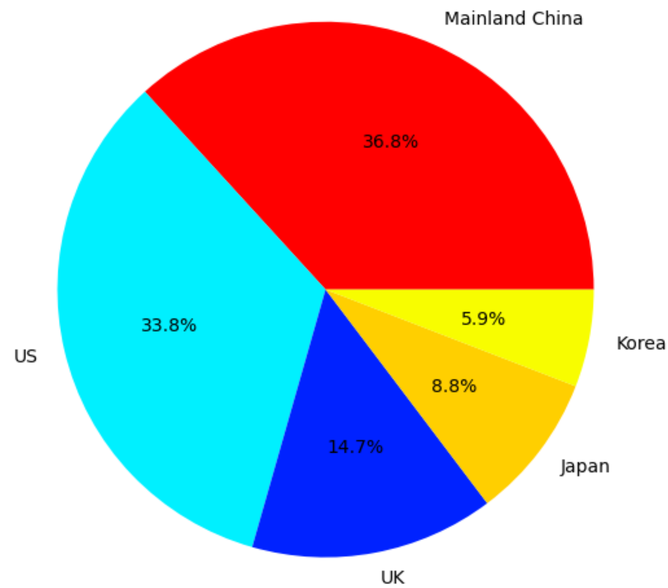


Figure 34: Geographical Origins of Favorite TV Shows – Bohemian

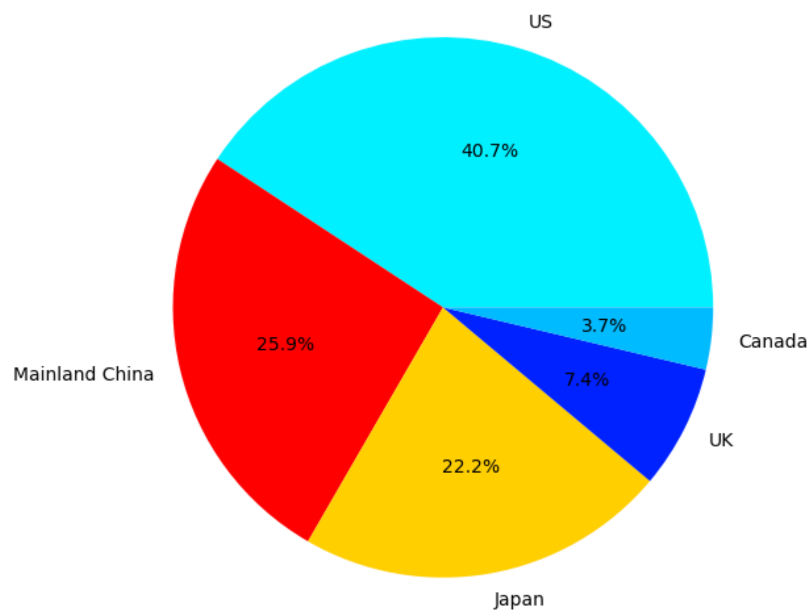


Figure 35: Geographical Origins of Favorite Music – Elite-Student

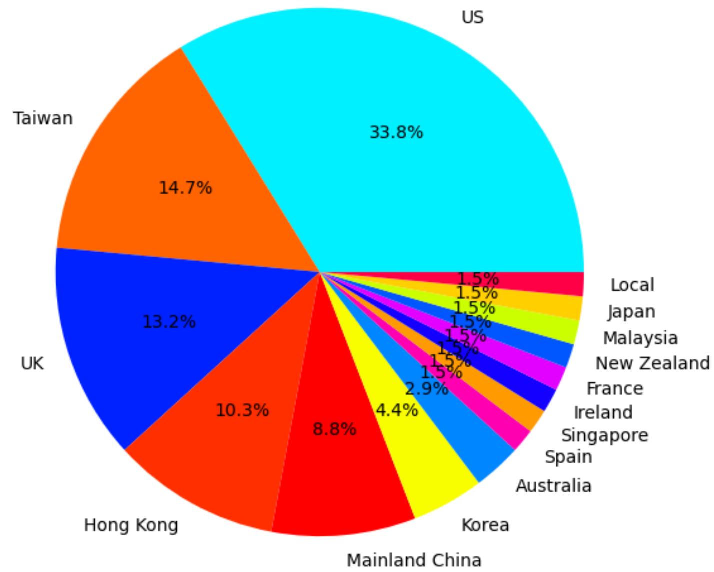


Figure 36: Geographical Origins of Favorite Music – Bohemian

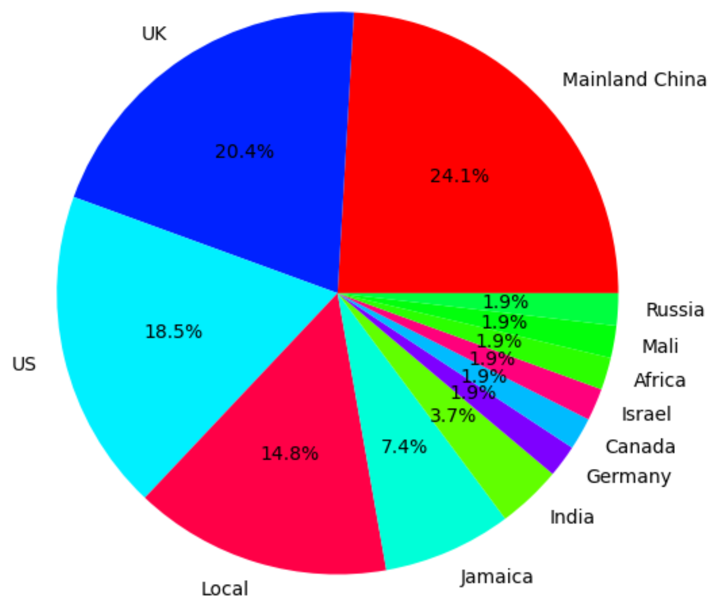


Figure 37: Geographical Origins of Favorite Books – Elite-Student

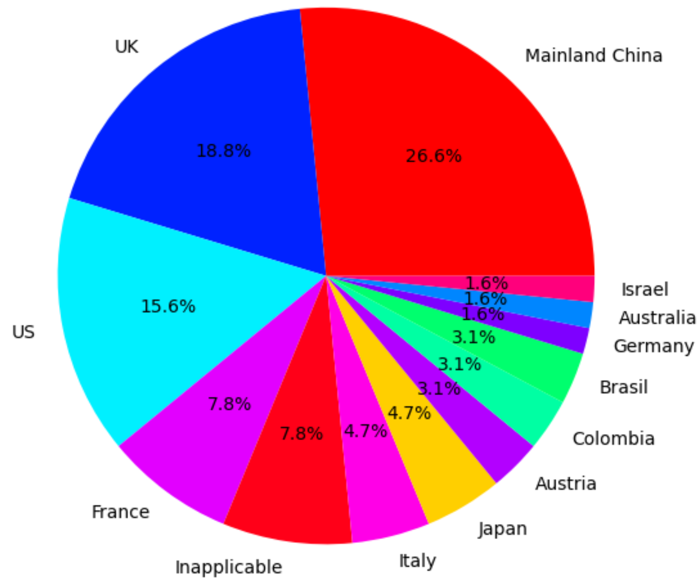
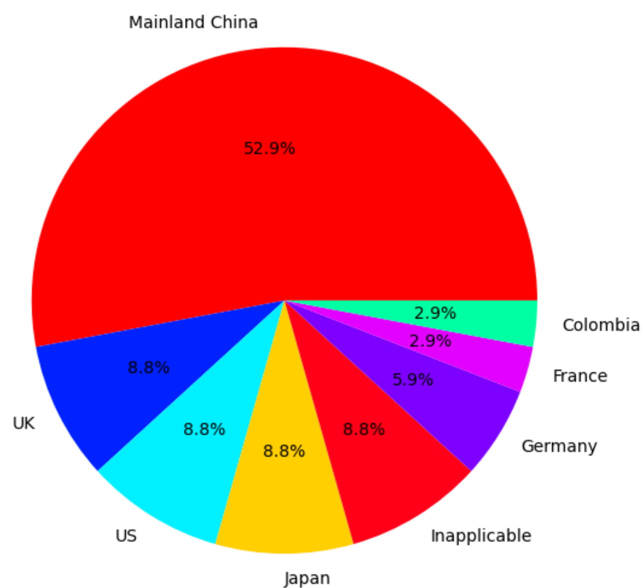


Figure 38: Geographical Origins of Favorite Books – Bohemian



highly cosmopolitan tastes among both groups, with foreign content accounting for at least half of named favorites in each category, apart from books for the bohemian group.

For films and TV, we see that the elite students are rather more engaged with mainland Chinese content than the bohemians, who are conversely much more likely to name favorite music and books from mainland China than the elite students. The bohemians are rather more likely to name favorite films with non-mainland Chinese origins – a tendency driven by the enthusiasm of several bohemian participants for Hong Kong gangster films. Conversely, while no bohemian participant named a non-mainland Chinese song or artist as their favorite music, they accounted for more than one quarter of the named favorites among the elite students, including artists from Chinese communities in Malaysia and Singapore. This is a reflection of conventional taste; *Gangtai* music – pop originating chiefly from Hong Kong and Taiwan known for its 'sweet, romantic character' (Baranovitch, 2003: 18) – has long dominated China's commercial music industry, increasingly alongside stylistic imitators from the mainland and wider diaspora. *Gangtai* music is pejoratively 'perceived to be the inauthentic Other' (De Kloet, 2010: 32) among Chinese rock fans; so too with the bohemian group. By contrast, bohemians' favorite music is more likely to originate from the UK, from other developing nations, as well as mainland China and, notably, to be local to their own city. Finally, for favorite books, we see a considerably wider range of national origins among the elite-students, as well as a greater number of favorite books from the UK and US, whereas the bohemians are much more likely to prefer books from mainland China.

Rather more revealing than these geographical origins are the kinds of content that constitute favorites among both groups. As we are chiefly interested in trends at the group level, the items named as a favorite by multiple group members are of especial interest; Figure 39 summarizes these shared favorites for all four kinds of content. For the elite students, we see an appreciation for both works with a cachet of high-cultural distinction, and

Figure 39: Favorite Cultural Content Shared by Multiple Members of Same Group

Favourite Films Shared by Multiple Group Members

Group: Elite Student		Group: Bohemian	
Media or Creator	**Participants**	**Media or Creator**	**Participants**
Titanic (1997)	2	The Godfather (1972)	3
Farewell My Concubine (霸王别姬) (1993)	2	Takeshi Kitano (Japanese Director)	2
The Wasted Times (罗曼蒂克消亡史) (2016)	2	The Harder They Come (1972)	2
Your Name (2016)	2	Fight Club (1999)	2
Marvel Cinematic Universe Films	2	Pulp Fiction (1994)	2

Favourite TV Shows Shared by Multiple Group Members

Group: Elite Student		Group: Bohemian	
Media or Creator	**Participants**	**Media or Creator**	**Participants**
Black Mirror (2011)	3	Journey to the West (西游记) (1986)	2
2 Broke Girls (2011)	3	Black Mirror (2011)	2
Empresses in the Palace (后宫·甄嬛传) (2011)	3	Shameless (2011)	2
Downton Abbey (2010)	2	Breaking Bad (2008)	2
The Vampire Diaries (2009)	2	X-Files (1993)	2
Friends (1994)	2		
Sherlock (2010)	2		
Westworld (2016)	2		

Favourite Music Shared by Multiple Group Members

Group: Elite Student		Group: Bohemian	
Media or Creator	**Participants**	**Media or Creator**	**Participants**
Eason Chan (陈奕迅)	5	**<kangju>**	6
Coldplay	3	Kawa	2
Mayday (五月天)	3	Sex Pistols	2
Taylor Swift	3		
Joker Xue (薛之谦)	2		
Lady Gaga	2		
Yoga Lin (林宥嘉)	2		
Big Bang (빅뱅)	2		

Favourite Books Shared by Multiple Group Members

Group: Elite Student		Group: Bohemian	
Media or Creator	**Participants**	**Media or Creator**	**Participants**
Jane Austen	2	Wang Shuo (王朔)	2
Victor Hugo	2	Wang Xiaobo (王小波)	2
Gabriel García Márquez	2	Haruki Murakami	2
Haruki Murakami	2	Yu Hua (余华)	2

for foreign mass-market entertainment. Shared literary favorites were often prestigious canonical works, and shared film favorites often had an art-house aesthetic. This tendency emerges even more forcefully in the favorites of individual student participants, as in a wide

range of novels from Chinese, US, and European literary canons, as well as poetry from both China and Europe. A taste for distinction is also reflected in individual favorite films and television, including various European and Chinese art-house directors, as well as, in a rather different sense, through a widespread appreciation of costume drama. Participants cited various Chinese, British and American series and films focused on the lives of historical elite or aristocratic groups.

A further area of cultural distinction among the elite students was the especial engagement of two participants in traditional Chinese musical forms, including Chinese opera (*xiqu*, 戏曲), especially the dominant style of Peking opera (*jingju*, 京剧), and instrumental music on traditional stringed instruments, the *pipa* (琵琶) and the *ruan* (阮). References to Chinese opera were apparent in keywords derived from the social media output of several participants, as with 汉剧 (*hanju*) and <liangju>, both regional styles, as well as the names of performers and awards associated with the tradition. The folk origins of this tradition aside, its contemporary deployment in the social environment of the Chinese university serves as a form of elite cultural distinction, as Ma (2019) has persuasively argued in the case of Kun opera (*kunqu* – 崑曲), an eastern regional variant. We might compare this appreciation with elite students' social-media keywords referring to the Western theatrical and orchestral canon, such the Shakespearean character Othello (*aosailuo* – 奥塞罗), and Basilio, a character from the ballet of Don Quixote. However, a distinctive aspect of Chinese opera which partly underlay its appeal surrounds the air of gender fluidity inherent to a performance tradition in which cross-dressing is commonplace, as well as associated implications of same-sex romance. Such themes are reflected in shared favorite film, *Farewell My Concubine*, which depicts the lives of Chinese opera actors in the mid-20th century. Interest in issues of gender and sexuality, both personal and intellectual, was common among the elite-student group.

The elite students were also considerably more engaged with academic and intellectual content than the bohemians, generally naming works by foreign academics as

favorites. Some books were related to the elite students' study of communications and media theory, though they were also engaged with fields including anthropology, sociology, political science, critical theory and, most prominently, history. No participant named a historical work by a mainland-Chinese scholar as a favorite. This lean towards the West is partly a product of the dominance of the Global North in the international field of academia, and consequent globalization of this group's elite educations. It also reflects the cosmopolitan cachet they associated with Western academic writing. However, the impact of this intellectual engagement occurs in combination with these students' mandatory doctrinaire ideological educations, drawing exclusively on CCP-endorsed writing. The cumulative effect is to introduce dissonance into a specific element of in their intellectual life.

The Chinese Party-State does not fundamentally differ from Western modes of empirical social-scientific or historical explanation; elite students can draw equally from East and West in forming their causal understandings of sociopolitical phenomena. Where the communicative diversity of their academic life generates dissonance (Zhou, 2000; Repnikova, 2017), and where the consequent tendency towards relativism (Collins, 2009) is most clearly apparent, is in the normative realm. Given the breadth of elite-student reading, succinct characterization of this normative conflict is difficult; one prominent axis of variation surrounds the level of ethical analysis. Party-State perspectives emphasize the importance of China's economic development and modernization, in a teleological narrative of resurgence from the nadir of 19th-century colonial humiliation. Under this collectivist framework, in which the interests of the Chinese people, state, and political elite are conflated, meritocratic authoritarian hierarchies and the imposition of inequities upon recalcitrant minorities are justified through a paramount national interest that is understood in broadly consequentialist or utilitarian terms. Western perspectives, by contrast, are likely to focus on the individual as the unit of analysis. Informed by the egalitarianism of rights-based legal systems, such ethical perspectives emphasize rules or guiding principles and are less likely to justify arbitrarily negative repercussions for certain individuals or groups in terms of consequences at the

collective level. Elite-student exposure to this dissonance tends to encourage a collapse of the normative with the descriptive, and generate a wearied aversion to idealism divorced from pragmatic reality, combined with a sophisticated disdain for strong moral or emotional commitments to political ideals that are radical in any direction.

At the same time, elite-student favorites evinced conventional, mainstream tastes, as reflected in the considerable degree of crossover among the musical acts named as favorites by members of this group. Whether Anglo-American, *Gangtai*, mainland Chinese, or Korean, all are associated with extreme levels of popularity and commercial success. Individual favorites similarly reflected this theme, though were more varied; one participant reported an extensive appreciation of Anglo-American musical theatre and Disney soundtracks. Mainstream taste was also reflected in elite-student engagement with televisual content. Among both shared and individual favorite films, commercial blockbusters and film franchises were prominent; one such series, the Transformers films, also occurs as 变形金刚 (*bianxingjingang*) in the elite-student UG keyword list. Similarly, conventional taste underlies many shared and individual TV favorites, typically situation or romantic comedies from the United States. Although named less frequently, some mass-market televisual entertainment from mainland China were also favorites, often 'idol dramas' (*ouxiangju* – 偶像剧) – vehicles for popular celebrities. In a point that applies also to foreign special-effects-driven blockbuster film franchises, appreciation of this content reflects a considerable degree of integration with the popular tastes of mainstream Chinese society. While elite students prefer foreign cultural content to an atypical degree, the kinds of global content they prefer are often those most popular within the mass market of Chinese cultural consumption.

Quite unlike the elite students, a considerable portion of the cultural content named as favorites by members of the bohemian group evinces a tone of rebelliousness. This is typically manifested in the depiction of transgression, alongside a depiction of society as morally ambiguous, warranting transgression from the heroic individual or demanding it through constrained choices in an environment of corruption and moral turpitude. This theme

pervades the shared favorite films of the bohemian group, as well as their individual favorites. Their limited appreciation for films from mainland China was focused generally on films banned in that country; strict state controls over filmmaking ensure a great domestic scarcity of the kinds of transgressive antiheroes and dystopian depictions of the contemporary social order that evidently appealed widely within the bohemian group.

The same appreciation of rebelliousness or transgression is apparent in bohemian literary favorites, such as the so-called 'hooligan' literature of Wang Shuo, or the embrace of outsider status in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Outsider figures were also drawn from Japanese culture, such as favorite *manga* (graphic novel) and TV series focused on bounty hunters, outlaws and *rōnin* ('wanderer' – samurai without lord or master), struggling to survive and live with integrity in corrupt, unjust societies. Moreover many of the underground musical styles favored by bohemians rely on rebellious symbolism, such as punk, hip-hop, reggae and psytrance, as well as in the anti-commercialism of '90s US grunge, '60s US countercultural folk and rock, and the influential Chinese rock pioneer Cui Jian, whose work is often associated with the Tiananmen protests of 1989 and whose reputation, as de Kloet notes, is that of 'China's most political rocker' (2010: 162).

What I mean by rebelliousness here is often manifested as a very particular kind of anti-heroism – one that is as imperfect as the conditions that provoke it, and which is very frequently quixotic or self-defeating; a protagonist who embraces self-destruction through a refusal to bend or compromise. Consider the plot of the shared favorite, the 1972 Jamaican film *The Harder They Come*. In it, a poor man's dreams of success as a musician are frustrated by the corrupt stranglehold of a record producer on the local music industry. Turning to crime to support himself, running marijuana with the collusion of a corrupt police force, he is betrayed by a fellow criminal and kills a police officer to escape capture, leading to cycles of further betrayal and violence and a burgeoning reputation as an outlaw. As his song is re-released to exploit this notoriety, he seizes upon his own outlaw image and, ultimately, chooses a stylish death in a hail of bullets over surrender.

The bohemian group's favorite cultural content also reflects an interest in, broadly speaking, subaltern peoples – minority ethnic groups, both in China and overseas, as well as cultural content from developing nations. Favorites included African-American and black-British hip-hop and trip-hop artists, as well as artists, often working in traditional styles, from Mongolia, Tuva (on the Russia-Mongolia border), India, Jamaica, and Africa. They also included localizations of these styles, such as a Liangshan band drawing on the Tuvan tradition, and the Chinese reggae band Kawa, where the Jamaican style is infused with the musical tradition of China's Wa minority. This tendency is also reflected, in a rather more extended sense, in several participants' enthusiasm for the electronic genre of psytrance, within which, as St. John writes, 'the idealized "tribal" other is raised as a standard under which transnational communities dance' (2012: 6); 萨满 (*saman* - shaman) was a bohemian WC keyword beyond the top 100, deriving from its usage in both psytrance-related content, and articles with an anthropological focus.

A further theme that emerges from bohemian participants' favorite cultural content is their notable engagement with spirituality or mysticism. Their named writings show an appreciation for religious traditions including Islam, Christianity, Daoism and Buddhism, as well as the Buddhist Zen tradition. This partly reflects the syncretic spiritual tendency inherent to China's heterodox cultural tradition (Harrell and Perry, 1982), but also more cosmopolitan influences, such as the heritage of the US counterculture, in its association with 'disavowal of the materialism of American society' (Miller, 2011: 95), as well as the group's engagement with psytrance which, as St. John argues 'inherits the dynamic tension between the ecstatic and proactive dispositions that is the legacy of a counterculture possessing its formative moments in the 1960s and 1970s' (2012: 9). Part of this legacy, beyond 'alienation … [from] possessive materialism' (St John, 2012: 23) is an explicitly spiritual dimension (Greener and Hollands, 2006). Similarly, another participant's wide-ranging love of reggae music was closely associated with his religious identification as a Rastafarian.

5.5 Orthodox and Heterodox Cosmopolitanisms

Elite university students naturally draw upon China's orthodox Confucian tradition, not only because they embody the highly educated ideal that it lauds, but because it offers an effective guide to navigating the formal and hierarchical relationships that characterize the Chinese university environment. Within that environment, and to an even greater extent, the highly rigorous and competitive boarding high schools from which most elite university students have graduated, following this expected model of behavior is pragmatically advantageous. Accordingly, when they reach out to the world in their cosmopolitan patterns of cultural consumption, they grasp content that reinforces or defends their elite position within orthodox Confucian hierarchies, in their contemporary formulation in which cosmopolitan refinement has become integral to ideals of self-cultivation.

For bohemians, the heterodox tradition serves as a 'field … that produces alternative subjectivities in traditional Chinese culture' (Song, 2019: 107), allowing individuals stigmatized as deviant in China's mainstream culture to transform that stigma into pride. Their need, therefore, is for symbolic and cultural resources that facilitate this subcultural renegotiation of prestige, yet such content is often lacking within mainstream and mass-market fields of cultural production in China that are dominated by the Party-State. They reach out to the world because they are cosmopolitan but, at the same time, their cosmopolitanism is further spurred by the absence within China's borders of the cultural resources they desire and depend upon to sustain their heterodoxy, and the transmutation of shame into pride that it permits.

These two traditions thus help to explain the differences between the two groups' mediated communications already described in this chapter – both their distinct cosmopolitanisms, reflected in different patterns of local, trans-local and global relations, and the distinct systems of value and prestige that these patterns reflect. In the remainder of this chapter, I will advance this argument, drawing on further evidence from both groups mediated

communications, but also moving beyond them to flesh out the local cultures that underlie these media practices. In so doing, I will highlight aspects of these cultures that can be understood in purely symbolic terms, while also necessarily describing the wide range of practices with which these symbolic frameworks are intertwined.

5.6 Elite-Student Culture and Cosmopolitan Distinction

The culture of the elite-student group accorded great prestige to the capacity for intellectual abstraction. Elite university students in China are accorded high social status; this stems ultimately from the traditional orthodox Confucian culture, in which the scholar-official is vaunted, as well as the fusion of Confucian and neoliberal values, reflected in concepts such as *suzhi,* that dominates the mainstream culture of contemporary China (Anagnost, 2004; Kipnis, 2007; Zhang and Ong, 2008), as described in chapter two. Membership of an elite educational institution is perhaps the highest demonstrable embodiment of *suzhi* for young people within a culture in which formal education is prized. For almost all students[17], attaining entry to an such an institution depends on success in the extraordinarily competitive national university entrance examinations (*gaokao* – 高考). The importance of the *gaokao* is comparable to its imperial-era predecessor, the *keju* (科举) examination, which for 1,300 years served as 'almost the only path of upward mobility in China'; today, 'the *gaokao* is as powerful as the *keju* was in determining the course of an individual's life' (Zhao, 2009: 75, 79). The overwhelming importance of this examination, which encourages rote learning in a limited range of subjects, is frequently criticized within China; concerns include its role in stifling students' creativity and critical thinking (Woronov, 2008; Zhao, 2009; Zhang, 2017). Efforts at reform are consistently hindered by the public perception that the exam, for all its

[17] Some exceptions exist; the only elite-student participant not a member of the journalism and communications department, who was studying translation and interpreting, had attended a specialist high-school for the study of foreign languages. Specialist schools of this kind are rare; because their students do not study the full Chinese high-school curriculum, they cannot take the *gaokao*, and are therefore admitted to university courses related to their field of study based on recommendation (*baosong* – 保送).

flaws, acts as a social leveler; as Wu (2019) writes, 'the test is meant to be the epitome of meritocracy — at least in theory, everyone has an equal opportunity to score well, get into a top school, and change their lives'.

Mainstream Chinese culture 'place[s] an extremely high value on external indicators: grades, test scores, and most important, admission to prestigious universities' (Zhao, 2009: 94). Here normative values are reinforced by pragmatic concerns; whereas Collins (2019) has depicted credentials – especially postgraduate and professional qualifications – as a crucial contributor to closure and stratification in American society, in China the prestige of one's undergraduate university, and by extension the *gaokao* results on which entry depends, remain paramount. Once entry to an elite institution is attained, graduation is almost guaranteed – Chinese university studies are considerably less competitive and challenging than high-school *gaokao* preparation. The high social status of the elite students thus depended fundamentally on the university they attended; it is this which underlay the extensive reference to Liangshan University, and their own status as members of that prestigious institution, in the social media output of this group.

Of course, within a cohort of students at an elite university, institutional membership itself is universal and thus meaningless as a form of distinction. For many elite students, self-presentations of intellectual sophistication and academic success serve to distinguish themselves further by leaning into the scholarly Confucian ideal. This is reflected in the elite students' frequent naming of academic and intellectual figures in their social media output, as well as the general abstract and conceptual content of this output, evidenced through keywords such as 卡理斯玛权威 (*kalisima quanwei* – charismatic authority), 赶超型 (*ganchaoxing* – catch-up [modernization]), 保守主义 (*baoshouzhuyi* – conservatism), 消费主义 (*xiaofeizhuyi* – consumerism), 新殖民主义 (*xinzhiminzhuyi* – neo-colonialism) and 女权主义 (*nüquanzhuyi* – feminism). It is also reflected in a widespread engagement with theoretical work surrounding study skills, resulting in keywords such as 沉思型 (*chensixing* –

reflective) and 隔离型 (*gelixing* – solitary). The elite students' social-media output also reveals a frequent tendency to publicize their engagement with the process of application for both exchange programs and postgraduate study, which are often implicitly self-presentations of academic excellence. This is reflected in a wide range of both Chinese and foreign-language keywords related to these processes, which strongly suggest the high prestige value for the elite students of their identity as an academic and intellectual elite, and their engagement with the orthodox Confucian cultural tradition in which this prestige is rooted.

The elite students are representatives of the scholarly Confucian ideal, but they are also immersed in a rather more specific culture – that of the media in general, and the Chinese media specifically. Because the elite students, with only one exception, specialized academically in courses taught within a journalism and communications department, their especial engagement with content related to these fields of study can also be seen as a specific reflection of the Confucian ideal. Among elite-student keywords, in addition to their naming of prominent scholars in these fields, we also see keywords such as 病毒式 (*bingdushi* – virality, describing dissemination), 窥私欲 (*kuisiyu* – voyeurism, describing the appeal of social media), 理解性 (*lijiexing* – comprehensibility, describing infographics), 关注度 (*guanzhudu* – degree of attention), 自娱型 (*ziyuxing* – recreational, a subset of live-streamers), and tweetdeck, an application for the management of Twitter accounts. However, in the elite students' extensive reference of student journalists and publications, as well as terms like 媒体人 (*meitiren* – media people) and specific media professionals, we see a certain amount of 'inside baseball', especially discussion of media and journalistic industries and careers. These students, most of whom were studying journalism, broadcasting and presenting, and network communication, were being prepared for careers in the media; many have experience in student journalism, and had undergone or were preparing for extended internships in the media, typically at newspapers or internet companies. Through their studies and these experiences, they had internalized the culture of the Chinese media, in a sense that

must be considered separately from the more general influence of the orthodox Confucian tradition.

While discussion of the elite students' attitudes to information and its control is chiefly reserved for chapter six, it merits separate discussion here because of the distinctly Confucian lines along which they tended to resolve the 'ideological dissonance' Zhou (2000) has identified in the culture of Chinese journalism. As Repnikova notes about how journalism is taught in Chinese universities, while 'party ideology continues to be embedded within the teaching agenda', this conflicts with the way that 'professors … tend to incorporate teachings on the media's oversight role into their curricula through the state-endorsed concept of *yulun jiandu*... a Chinese version of the watchdog role played by the media in other countries' (2017: 403, 409). While this oversight role depends on relative freedom from Party-State constraints, the elite students were keenly aware of how stringent this control is in practice, from their experiences in journalistic student societies and, for older students, their third-year internships. Of course, sometimes control is subverted; consider Shi Ye's description of the initiative he exercised during his internship, working as a censor for a major Chinese internet company:

Shi Ye: *"But there's also a kind of stuff I censored… in the entertainment section, there's a lot of LGBT-related topics ... Lots of people incessantly abuse the people featured in the news. But according to my own values, LGBT ... when you see people express these wrong opinions, I really liked to delete them. But then, you have a contradictory feeling. On one hand, you're harming freedom of speech, but on the other hand…*

Thomas Flavel: *"You mean, although the comments didn't break the rules, you deleted them anyway?"*

Shi Ye: *"I deleted them. Because I had the power [Laughs]… My colleagues as well, it happened all the time. China's internet violence is too serious. Every news story, in the comments it's really ... it'll be there. There are so many abusers. Slandering the rich, slandering officials, and LGBT people. And now especially common is slandering intellectuals, public intellectuals. These abusers, they don't care about logic, they just want to be violent, curse people to let off steam. It's like my boss there always said, how can the Chinese internet have so many stupid [expletive] – the way he talks is quite coarse – so many… they're so stupid, then he just gets someone to delete it."*

Here we see tension between the ideal of freedom of speech, which many elite students took seriously in principle, and the reality of strict controls under the Chinese system. We see subversion of that control, according to a subjective perspective on what should be censored, such as abuse directed against LGBT communities. However, in this subversion we can observe an internalization of the control regime. While elite student participants generally felt that freedom of speech was too constrained in China, they were mostly concerned with the freedoms of media professionals, responsible and sophisticated like themselves, rather than ordinary people. They typically felt that some people could not be trusted to speak freely, and were insufficiently sophisticated to be exposed to content seen as pernicious, such as religious material, without being harmed. This justification of communicative control follows a Confucian elitist logic, in identifying a moral and intellectual underclass from whom communicative freedoms are rightly denied. Pye notes the 'ordering of society based on a hierarchy of merit and reason' (1988: 39) inherent in the orthodox Confucian tradition; more recently, Bell and Wang (2020) have drawn upon the Confucian tradition's fusion of moral and intellectual hierarchies in arguing, against electoral democracy, for a technocratic authoritarianism that they term 'political meritocracy'.

Shi Ye was not unique in this elitism; rather, he was possibly the least elitist among the student group. Unlike the great majority of student participants, whose backgrounds were affluent and urban, his own was relatively disadvantaged and rural. Perhaps the most intellectually gifted among this group, he had won a place at a highly competitive boarding high school where, after initially struggling due to a lack of fluency in Mandarin[18], he excelled at his studies. His university experience, within a socioeconomically advantaged peer group, highlights a certain tension in the value system on which the elite students' high social

[18] While in theory all public schooling in China takes place in Mandarin (with limited exceptions for ethnic minority provinces), in practice, teachers in disadvantaged rural areas often lack fluency in standard Chinese and therefore rely upon local dialects instead. Because written Chinese is generally unchanged between dialectical variants, dialect speakers can excel in examinations; non-standard spoken Chinese nonetheless remains a clear linguistic marker of socioeconomic disadvantage, especially for younger generations.

status depends. Consider his response to an interview question asking whether he had experienced discrimination from more affluent classmates:

Shi Ye: *"No, not really, not directly anyway. Maybe a little because of my accent, but nobody has said anything to my face. Its more about cultural capital, like in Bourdieu*[19]*. Maybe you've never been abroad, so you can't talk about travel. Or maybe there are some aspects of culture that you're not familiar with, especially Western culture, because you didn't receive that kind of education. So, you can't join in that kind of conversation, and people think you're boring."*

Here we can see that Shi Ye, who embodies the Confucian ideal in purely intellectual terms, is nonetheless constrained from ascending to the apex of the elite student social hierarchy. This implies an inherent degree of indeterminacy in the concept of *suzhi*; as Woronov notes, 'although the concept of quality is hegemonic in China today, there is still no consensus on how to define the term' (2008: 418). This indeterminacy, and resulting tension between competing definitions, has long played out in Chinese public discourse on the education system. In short, the mechanistic character of the *gaokao* examination system leads some to believe that gaining entry to an elite institution is not a true reflection of students *suzhi*; such views sometimes imply that this is precisely because gifted students from rural or impoverished backgrounds are also admitted in this way (Kipnis, 2007). Since 1999, official educational policy has advocated 'education for quality' (*suzhi jiaoyu* – 素质教育) – a nebulously defined and diversely implemented concept (Woronov, 2008), perhaps understood most clearly in contrast with its opposite, exam-oriented education (*yingshi jiaoyu* – 应试教育), which characterized Shi Ye's high-school education and which remains the norm for most Chinese students.

Other elite student participants were keen to emphasize that they had received a *suzhi* education. Consider the following response from Cao Qiuyue concerning her high-school experience:

Cao Qiuyue: *"The special thing about my high school was … in China, most schools provide exam-oriented education, but at my school its maybe more suzhi education … We have a lot*

[19] Shi Ye refers to Bourdieu (1984).

of different subjects. My school was pretty big, we had a swimming pool and things like that, the gymnasium was pretty big. Also, we often had exchanges with other schools, for example in year two we had high-school students come from Hong Kong and we hosted them for a while. And we had lots of famous people come to give lectures … And we have a going-abroad class, who didn't take the gaokao and did Advanced Placement classes, to go to university in America … Education for quality – it's like its more multifaceted, like you're being cultivated as a person, not just as an exam machine. Quality – apart from knowledge there is also the body, and culture, I think it gives you a more broad-minded perspective, and it makes you think deeply."

In this response we can see the divergence between the concept of *suzhi* and formal measures of educational attainment, emphasizing the prestige value of cultural cultivation in the round. It also shows how Cao Qiuyue – a student from an affluent background who was keen in this initial interview to emphasize her extensive experience of overseas travel – conflates the strictly pedagogical aspects of *suzhi* education with more socioeconomically determined forms of prestige, such as extensive sporting facilities, or the cosmopolitanism implicit in international connections. Inevitably, within a cohort of uniformly high prior educational attainment, not all elite students have the capacity to distinguish themselves from their peers through presentations of academic excellence. For some such students, especially those whose affluence and more diverse, non-instrumental educational background have provided them with the cultural capital to do so, presenting themselves as cultured and cosmopolitan serves as a successful alternative strategy of distinction. But more fundamentally, this conception of non-instrumental cultural cultivation as a manifestation of *suzhi* is entirely consistent with the orthodox Confucian cultural hierarchy in which this modern concept is partly rooted. Levenson, in his history of late-imperial Confucian intellectual life, places great emphasis on a paradoxical quality of the Confucian scholarly ideal: while predicated on the formal credentials of the *keju* examination system, the form of cultivation required within this system was distinctly non-instrumental. 'Artistic style and a cultivated knowledge of the approved canon … these, not specialized, 'useful' technical training, were the tools of intellectual expression and the keys to social power' (1968: 16).

The influence of orthodox Confucian culture on the elite student group thus helps to explain the predominance of high culture and canonical works in both their favorite cultural

content and their social-media output, as described above. It also, rather less directly, underlies their cosmopolitanism – given that the fusion of neoliberal ideas with the Confucian tradition in contemporary Chinese culture has rendered cosmopolitan consumption prestigious, vaunted as a marker of elite status among Chinese youth. The Confucian cultural tradition does not necessarily generate globalized cultural tastes; it is also consistent with more parochial or nationalist proclivities. Rather, for groups like the elite students already predisposed towards globalized cultural engagement, fluent in foreign languages and able to evade border-level censorship, the Confucian tradition strongly influences the kinds of foreign cultural content they are inclined to draw upon.

In Lisa Rofel's ethnography of desire in contemporary China, she emphasizes the importance of cosmopolitan consumption as a mark of distinction. Insofar as the neoliberal reform of recent decades 'normalizes new forms of inequality, new ways to value human activity, and new ways of "worlding" China … the cosmopolitanism it produces is intimately tied to the emergence of a bourgeoisie'. What Rofel terms 'cosmopolitanism with Chinese characteristics' is expressed in young Chinese people's identities as consumers. This serves as a form of distinction because the capacity for cosmopolitan self-presentation is structured socioeconomically – 'wealth and, by association, consumption make a better cosmopolitan person' (Rofel, 2007: 112-3, 116). The elite-student group, despite largely hailing from affluent backgrounds, are at a life-stage that largely precludes extravagant displays of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 2007). But their elite liberal-arts educations leave them eminently well equipped to display distinction through cosmopolitan cultural consumption; the prestige value they associate with global cultural content is well evidenced in both their dispositions towards high culture in their favorite cultural content and social media output. This is also revealed in their consumption of mass-market commercial entertainment, which is overwhelmingly focused on content of foreign origin, compared to the relative scarcity of engagement with mainland Chinese mass-market content that lacks equivalent cosmopolitan

cachet. Similarly, engagement with local popular cultural production beyond the bounds of Liangshan University was absent.

Cosmopolitanism as a strategy of distinction is also reflected in the high prestige value associated with foreign travel among this group – a form of conspicuous consumption made available to many elite students through parental resources. The extensive use of foreign place names in the elite students' social media output, outlined above, are largely related to touristic travel; the minority connected with foreign study plans also reflect self-presentations of a different, though similarly elite variety. The high prestige value of overseas travel among this group is also reflected in non-location social-media keywords, such as 递签 (*diqian* – submit a visa application), but the most prominent way in which elite students convey their travel experiences to their peers is through photography. Typically this takes the form of artfully framed selfies, perhaps more unusual for their quality than their substance; around the globe, 'producing images of oneself … in order to present them to others is at the heart of profile-based identity work' (Moeller and D'Ambrosio, 2021: 3). While such images cannot be reproduced here without compromising participants' anonymity, Figure 40, Figure 41 and Figure 42 show non-identifying examples, from trips to Egypt, the United States and Finland respectively.

Such images reflect elite students' accomplishments as amateur photographers, including a range of technical skills surrounding the editing of digital images. But here we see an aestheticization of the experience of travel that is not merely a reflection of this group's technical accomplishments; such skills at capturing and manipulating digital images, as Moeller and D'Ambrosio (2021) observe, are not merely widespread but increasingly *de rigueur* among contemporary Chinese youth. Rather, in the highly aestheticized deployment of images of travel in the social media output of the elite student group, we see a self-presentation of refinement, in which the socioeconomic resources that underlie international mobility are downplayed – no images of luxury hotels, for example – as they are converted into marks of cultural distinction. In portraying travel as refined and cultured, rather than as a

Figure 40: Photograph Posted on WeChat by Elite Student, from Trip to Egypt

Figure 41: Photograph Posted on WeChat by Elite Student, from Trip to the USA

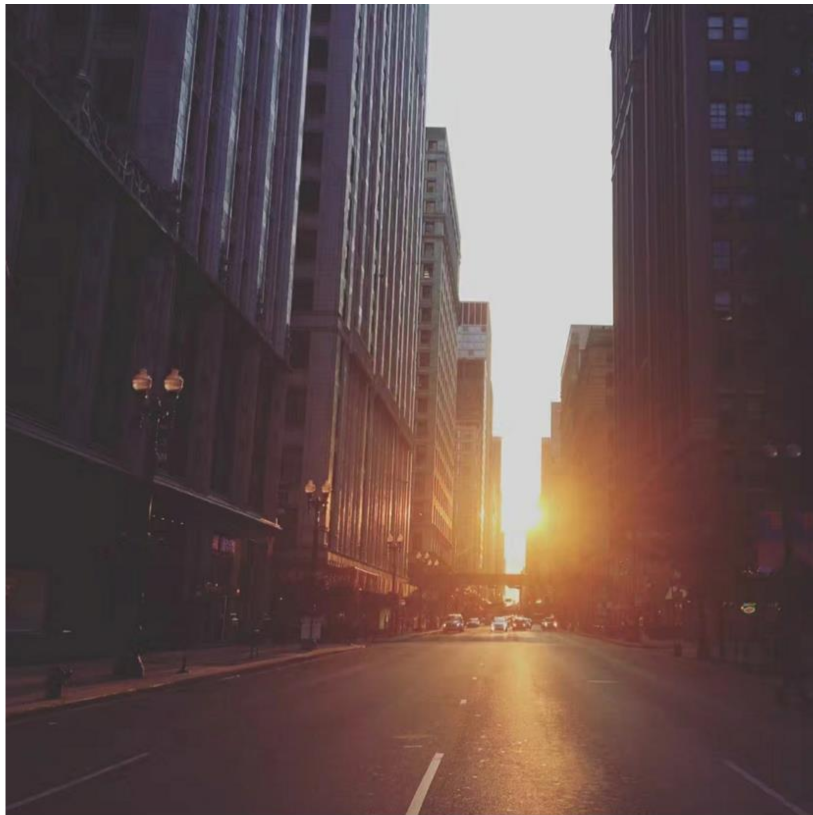


Figure 42: Photograph Posted on WeChat by Elite Student, from Trip to Finland

consumer experience, the elite students reveal a value hierarchy that is simultaneously Confucian and cosmopolitan.

However, in the prestige value among the elite students of their capacity for international mobility, we also see reflected the 'interweaving of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the Chinese case' that Tyfield and Urry (2010: 279) have observed. Incidents affecting Chinese travelers overseas are prominent among news stories in elite-student social-media outputs; this has suggestive implications for their political worldviews, which are discussed in chapter six. My point here, from a cultural perspective, is that as an elite, cosmopolitan group, the orthodox Confucian cultural tradition strongly influences their view of themselves in the world, the way they see themselves, or aspire to be, part of an international elite. This cultural tradition thus shapes the substance of their engagement with foreign cultures, where their high-brow, canonically oriented tastes in Chinese cultural content are mirrored. Accordingly, we see scant engagement with content from developing nations, an absence of engagement with non-prestige content from such locations, and an

absence of cultural engagement with self-consciously subaltern groups from the developed world, in stark contrast to bohemian cultural tastes. While cosmopolitanism has an independent prestige value for this group, it is only cosmopolitanism of a certain kind – the mass-market content they consume overwhelmingly derives from developed nations that themselves embody prestige, while global exceptions to this geographical focus are found almost invariably in high culture. The orthodox Confucian influence on this group frames their self-image as a cultural elite; in combination with their cosmopolitanism, this requires them to maintain a sense of cultural superiority not only over non-elite groups within China, but internationally. The subaltern, oppositional aesthetics of deviant subcultures, however global and cosmopolitan, hold little appeal for them.

Rather than displacing the culture of the elite students, the independent prestige value of cosmopolitanism within that culture, as a marker of *suzhi* that encompasses socioeconomic class and cultural refinement, is employed to legitimize one's position in the elite Confucian hierarchy. At the trivial level, cosmopolitanism legitimizes the guilty pleasure of watching trashy TV and movies. However, it can also operate at a more fundamental level, serving for example to challenge the non-normativity of gender or sexual identities within that tradition and China's dominant culture more widely. This is reflected in such elite-student keywords as 保守主义 (*baoshouzhuyi* – conservatism) and 女权主义 (*nüquanzhuyi* – feminism), as well as 'LGBT' – a statistically significant keyword outside the top 100 in the WC corpus. Discussion of these issues in a political context is reserved for chapter six; here, it suffices to say that the character of such concerns also reflects the pragmatism of the elite-student group. I do not intend to downplay the importance of feminist or LGBT issues or activism in China. However, given a traditional culture that privileges the heterosexual male, most Chinese students have non-normative elements of gender or sexuality. A future China in which the rights of women and LGBT communities were considerably improved, especially among elite groups, is not hard to imagine – far easier than the radical, even millenarian visions of societal change advanced by some bohemians.

Just as the elite students draw on cultural content in line with their tastes, and those tastes serve as markers of their position in a Confucian cultural hierarchy, the bohemians also can be thought of as drawing on tools, from a global cultural repertoire, that serve their needs in a local hierarchy of social status. It is the local culture, and the society in which it is expressed, that determines such needs – consequently, the bohemians and elite students draw upon sharply distinct kinds of global content. Their cosmopolitanisms are different. Elite students are already elite; they have little need for subversive, oppositional content from overseas, and are not influenced by it. Whether or not radical systemic social or political change would benefit this elite group, the pragmatism inherent to the Confucian tradition helps to ensure that belief in its very possibility would seem, among elite students, hopelessly naïve. By contrast, not only would progress on feminist or LGBT issues in China personally benefit almost every member of this group[20], but it is also realistic, something that both should and *could* happen – because it is reconcilable with China's authoritarian status-quo.

Elite groups such as this are able to influence and gradually reconfigure the cultural hierarchy by which they are rendered elite, and are motivated to draw on cosmopolitan content to do so, especially in relation to areas that affect them directly such as gender and sexual identities. Their ability to do so, however, rests largely on the open environment that prestigious institutions like Liangshan University are permitted to maintain under China's highly differentiated structure of liberties, in which elites are 'granted more privileges and opportunities for self-expression and development' (Yan 2009: 290). In this sense, their capacity for wider influence draws upon and continues to support the traditional Confucian cultural hierarchy. The greater freedoms enjoyed by groups such as the elite students depend on institutional mechanisms that segregate them from other non-elite groups; this in turn is reinforced by the influence of the orthodox Confucian tradition, in the snobbery of academic elites, and in social norms against interaction with strangers, unless legitimated by mutually

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[20] Issues of sexuality did not form part of my interviews. However, of only three male members of this group, one volunteered his status as 'half out of the closet'; the two others expressed a strong interest in LGBT issues.

known intermediaries or institutional connections (King, 1991). Moreover, though far less coercively constrained than that of the bohemians, elite students' capacity for wider influence is nonetheless strongly shaped by the Party-State's control over online communication, and its influence over the mores of broader, more closely regulated student groups. Groups like the elite students, in the way they reach out to the world as cosmopolitan elites, have an outsized influence on the ongoing development of mainstream Chinese culture – but it is far from unconstrained.

5.7 Bohemian Culture and Heterodox Cosmopolitanism

The bohemian group is also influenced by orthodox Confucian culture; as I have emphasized, the heterodox and orthodox Confucian traditions are intertwined and accessible by anyone who is culturally Chinese. The bohemians still understand and experience the cultural concepts, such as social face and filial obligation, which inform orthodox Confucian patterns of social interaction. They understand the concept of *suzhi*, even if they dispute its definition. Some are graduates from elite or overseas universities; they could be considered high in the Confucian hierarchy themselves. However, bohemians are influenced by the heterodox tradition because its alternative system of meaning offers greater socio-emotive rewards than are available in a mainstream society that is dominated by the orthodox Confucian tradition and neoliberal hierarchies of materialistic success.

While the elite students see themselves as cosmopolitan, educated and Chinese, rather than Confucian, bohemian participants were far more self-consciously aware of their heterodox culture. The two key terms they used to describe their own sociocultural environment were underground (*dixia* – 地下), which has non-commercial and sometimes subversive implications, and *jianghu* (江湖), meaning rivers and lakes. Both terms were keywords outside the top 100 in the bohemian WC corpus, occurring 422 and 146 times respectively. The implications of heterodox *jianghu* culture for social interaction and organization were discussed in chapter four; here I emphasize its cultural aspect, as a

framework of meaning that valorizes quite different attributes and conduct to the orthodox Confucian tradition. Returning to Zhou Longwei's account of the concept:

Zhou Longwei: *"In Chinese history … all the heroes come from jianghu. But in this city, this country, jianghu is very different from most people's ordinary life. Their life is work every day, support my family, then pay tax, pay tax … But jianghu … when you do business, you encounter a lot of hassles and problems, from other people's rules or the government. So, you get together with other people who have the same problems and find a way to solve them."*

Thomas Flavel: *"I'd like to ask about heishehui. Do you think they're a problem in Liangshan? Do they have a bad influence?"*

Zhou Longwei: *"In the past, all heishehui were part of jianghu culture. But at that time, they had very little interaction with the government. But these societies now, they engage with the government more and more … because of forcible eviction-and-demolition, that's one reason. Society is just like that now. If you asked me, I'd choose how they were before. At that time, they loathed the government, they were opposed to them. And they would help people. But now, they're just like the government, they bully people. They're together with the government, trying to find a way to make money, just bullying the ordinary people."*

Zhou Longwei's account shows the association of *jianghu* culture with social autonomy, an attribute that closely jells with the strongly independent do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos of the global punk subculture (Dunn, 2016), the local punk scene in Liangshan, and indeed the local underground scene in general. But we also see in Zhou Longwei's account a valorization of *jianghu* culture – contemporary *heishehui*, part of *jianghu* almost by definition, are critiqued for failing to live up to its ideals. They are seen as corrupted by the government, rather than vice versa. *Jianghu* is not just a space of murky dealings at the edge of the law – it is also the source of a powerful heroic ideal. Similarly, when bohemians spoke of their contribution to their local scene, they often adopted a heroic tone – a sense of moral mission underlay the importance of this local subculture and its cultural production.

Pye notes that, in contrast to the Confucian tendency towards in-group and self-aggrandizement, 'in the popular, rebel, culture…there was always a strong romantic streak: acts of personal sacrifice were expected to evoke unalloyed awe' (1988: 58). We see this tendency reflected in the Bohemians' social media output, with keywords such as <zeng ying>, a *Guomindang* WWII martyr, and in Figure 43, the photograph posted to WeChat of a

Figure 43: Bohemian-Posted Image of a Visit to the Grave of Lin Zhao, Dissident & Poet

visit to the grave of a dissident executed by the CCP. In a more extenuated sense, the ideal of self-sacrifice in China's heterodox tradition underlies two interrelated cultural properties of the bohemian group which render them fundamentally different from the elite students. This difference lies firstly in a certain anti-commercial, even anti-materialist tendency, reflected in the prestige associated with being authentically *underground*, and secondly in a related attitude to time – a strong preference for extended, non-instrumental social interaction over the diligent pursuit of remunerative or careerist activities. Of the two, it is perhaps the latter that constitutes the greater cultural break for young entrants to the scene.

Song Fa came to Liangshan from an impoverished village; consider his account of entry to local bohemian culture:

Song Fa: *"I worked in a bar for a while, then I met a guy who introduced me to <Mao Fan> and then I started living in the village, in the commune up there. I lived there for a while, staying in Liangshan but not working for the first time. But the big change I found hard at first was because before I'd known a different kind of person. Those people they were all: "I*

have to make great efforts and struggle, I have to get the money to buy a car, to buy an apartment". But then, EH! I suddenly knew this different kind of person and they gave me this… this way of thinking, its more about living and enjoying life, hanging out with friends, playing music, smoking weed (yezi – 叶子). Back then I had this girlfriend, and I overheard her talking to her mother, who asked what I do, so she replied 'he plays every day'."

Song Fa is ambivalent about this newfound indolence – he is from a rural background where it is strongly stigmatized. Nonetheless, in his subsequent successful career as a sound engineer, he reports repeatedly making career sacrifices to have more free time, or to live in the relative backwater of Liangshan and be part of its scene. Adopting a non-diligent lifestyle is not only an underground phenomenon; more recently the Lie Flat (*tangping* – 躺平) lifestyle movement has attracted significant mainstream online interest, especially among white-collar graduates who frame their embrace of non-diligence as a reaction against the severe culture of overtime work and internal workplace competition in China's tech industries (Bandurski, 2021). Nor is heterodox culture inherently non-diligent or non-commercial, as Osburg's (2013) ethnography of new business elites shows. Rather, within the bohemian cultural scene, heterodox *jianghu* culture shapes the way that this lifestyle choice is legitimized, often through the concept of underground. Legitimization of this kind is necessary for such lifestyles to be sustained against the force of stigmatization from the cultural mainstream.

One important meaning of the term underground is as a cultural ideal – to be underground is strongly laudable for a Liangshan bohemian. In this sense, it denotes a small subsection of the bohemian cultural scene, that part where commercial motives are absent, nothing is censored, and authenticity is absolute. This prestige reflects a long-established local DIY ethos, from a time when performance venues for punk music had to be established. Just as it valorizes the uncompromising, struggling artist, this ideal also serves to legitimize anti-materialist lifestyle choices within the bohemian cultural scene much more widely. We can see here, perhaps, a cosmopolitan innovation, an echo of the 'voluntary detachment from majority society' and 'disavowal of the materialism of American society' (Miller, 2011: 93-4)

that characterized that country's hippie movement, earlier bohemian communities (Brooks, 2000), and indeed the European romanticism that was their intellectual precursor. But the way that such lifestyles are rendered moral is distinctively heterodox Chinese; rejecting the diligence and materialist aspirations that dominate mainstream Chinese society is framed as a form of underground authenticity that evokes *jianghu* ideals of self-sacrificial heroism.

This valorization of selflessness can be politically significant. As Pye notes, in the stoic fatalism or pragmatic conformity of the Confucian tradition, heterodox culture 'held that any evidence of mistreatment ought to trigger impassioned outbursts… [where] the articulated anger at mistreatment stems from frustration at injustice' (1988: 56). To adopt such a stance is heroic – oriented towards justice as a wider social good and, in an authoritarian context, frequently associated with negative consequences for the individual concerned. The underlying unity between ideals of self-sacrifice, and of quixotic, dangerously outspoken protestation of injustice lies in their collective character – they are oriented towards the group and the powerful, egalitarian bonds of friendship between group members. Such bonds only become politically significant under certain circumstances; on a more routine basis, a bohemian cultural logic, informed by heterodox ideals of honor that valorize selfless commitment to the group (Boretz 2011), strongly encourages contribution to local underground cultural production without expectation of remuneration or mainstream social prestige. In this sense, while the heterodox tradition facilitates cosmopolitan interactions in conditions of social diversity, it also encourages localism by strongly supporting solidarity among members of the immediate community. It therefore also serves to legitimize cultural practices that are shared among that community but stigmatized in mainstream society, some of which – such as the consumption of cannabis – constitute cosmopolitan innovations.

Cannabis has been known medically and cultivated in China for two thousand years; as a recreational drug, aside from among the largely Islamic Uighur ethnic minority from China's northwest, its use has been extremely rare. Once 'believed to lead to daemon possession and insanity', Dikötter, Zhou and Laamann suggest that its 'generally negative

connotations' persist to this day, and that due to 'lack of interest', 'cannabis…failed to become part of narcotic culture in modern China' (2016: 167-9). In Liangshan's bohemian cultural scene, this is no longer the case. At certain semi-public sites in the bohemian cultural scene, it was consumed and even sold with impunity – something apparently only possible due to a *heishehui*-mediated relationship with local law-enforcement.

In Liangshan, trade in those illegal drugs most commonly consumed in China (heroin, and more recently methamphetamine and ketamine (Zhang and Chin, 2016)) remained the purview of *heishehui*, and were distributed chiefly to underclass groups. By contrast, a quite different set of drugs were popular within the bohemian scene (chiefly high-quality, imported leaf cannabis, but with a long tail of rarer substances such psilocybin mushrooms, LSD and MDMA), and were distributed within bohemian networks. Consumption of these fashionable substances was of general cultural significance among bohemians as a sumptuary marker of group membership, in a similar manner to the widespread consumption, in marked contrast to wider Chinese tastes, of India pale ale and other craft beers within the scene, as reflected in numerous bohemian social-media keywords. It also served as risky 'edgework' (Lyng, 1990) of a kind that, in its transgressive character, drives solidarity within a wide range of deviant subcultures (Becker, 1963; St John, 2012; Moran, 2015).

Bohemians necessarily bump up against *heishehui* for reasons quite unconnected to interactions surrounding the trade in cannabis – because the bars and venues that form the basis of the scene's commercial infrastructure and cultural production inevitably fall within the territory of one gang or another. Anyone opening a public place of business in Liangshan is highly likely to be approached for protection money by such organizations. One contact, a friend of a bohemian participant who was a student at Liangshan University, was forced to close his new music venue not long after opening, due to exorbitant demands for such protection payments. Conversely, another bohemian participant did not have to make such payments for her business at all, due to her connections with a senior bohemian figure highly regarded by the local *heishehui*. What we see here is not exactly organizational isomorphism

between the bohemian cultural scene and the *heishehui*, but rather a shared heterodox cultural frame that allows their necessary interactions to proceed smoothly.

The egalitarian fraternity of the heterodox *jianghu* tradition has historically been strongly gendered (Osburg, 2016; Song, 2019); the same has also been said of 'Chinese rock culture, in which female voices are marginal' (De Kloet, 2010: 104). Given this context, the extent of female involvement in Liangshan's bohemian scene was remarkable, as with women such as Zhu Lanfen, a bar owner, who occupied central, important positions. Women were involved in cultural creation as performers and in auxiliary capacities; though making up a relatively small minority of instrumental musicians, they were well-represented as DJs in electronic genres. The widespread interest in feminism observed among the elite students was not similarly evident among bohemians, regardless of gender, but feminist activists were not uncommon at the more politically active fringes of the scene.

Bohemian women, moreover, are also influenced by *jianghu* culture; Zhu Lanfen herself reported comfortable familiarity with *heishehui* through family connections. However, in some respects, this cultural tradition works to women's detriment; the bohemian community is not a paragon of gender equality. For example, some female bohemians reported antipathy towards a member of the scene who was thought to have treated his ex-girlfriend badly; his important role as a promoter ensured that they still regularly interacted with him, and indeed considered him a "friend", albeit one they disliked. Here we see that an egalitarian bond of friendship highly tolerant of difference, which permits considerable group solidarity across barriers of class, creed, culture and gender, is not necessarily an unalloyed good – it can also serve to diminish the social sanction of objectionable behavior, especially when directed against those outside the group.

Historically, the heterodox tradition has combined a spurning of Confucian social hierarchies with the vaunting of outspoken protestation against injustice, the valorization of heroic self-sacrifice, a mystical faith in the power of symbolism to effect transformative

change, and the accommodation of syncretic melting-pots of cultural meaning, bestowing on many manifestations of heterodox culture a subversive aspect, leading even to organized resistance against the power of the state. Yet this is far from inevitable. As we see from Pye's (1988) argument for the importance of the heterodox tradition in Maoist political culture, from Osburg's (2013, 2016) depiction of its role in ordering corrupt relations between government officials and business elites in the reform era, and indeed Zhou Longwei's account above, of the cooptation of *heishehui* by elements of the local state, heterodox culture can also be deployed in the interests of established structures of power. The amenability of certain elements of the bohemian cultural scene to equivalent cooptation is discussed in the conclusion to this thesis. At a cultural level, what we see here is that the heterodox tradition is not determinative; unity among its diverse manifestations exists at the level of 'family resemblances' (Wittgenstein, 2009: 36e). Subgroups in Liangshan's bohemian cultural scene are not the same as *heishehui*, but have certain features in common, and those features are different from the areas in which they resemble China's syncretic religious sects. Conversely, each local manifestation of heterodox culture will possess unique features, which nonetheless cohere with the overarching tradition and reflect its cultural logic. Cosmopolitanism distinguishes the bohemian cultural scene, yet the way that its members reach out to global cultures is nonetheless thoroughly heterodox. Indeed, it is through global subcultures that bohemian heterodoxy is expressed.

5.8 Bohemian Heterodoxy and Global Subcultures

In the sub-section of Liangshan's bohemian scene on which my research focused, heterodoxy was chiefly expressed through the embrace of three[21] global subcultures: punk, reggae, and psytrance. Each of these is prominently reflected in the bohemian social media corpora. For punk, we see keywords including 古巴朋克 (*guba pengke* – Cuban punk) and 良

[21] Hip-hop, prominent in Liangshan's broader scene, was less so in the subsection on which my research focused.

心朋克 (*liangxin pengke* – good-hearted punk), as well as several punk bands including the locally prominent <kangju>. 朋克 (*pengke* – punk), by itself, is a statistically significant keyword outside the top 100 in both bohemian corpora, occurring 58 times in the UG corpus and 1106 times in the WC corpus, as well as in numerous other compounded keywords. For reggae, 雷鬼 (*leigui* – reggae), 雷鬼乐 (*leiguiyue* – reggae music), and the English word 'reggae' are all in the top 100 keywords, as well as several Chinese reggae bands and artists, local and trans-local. For psytrance, a more recent import, English is preferred, as in such top-100 keywords as 'psytrance', 'psychedelic' and 'psybient', and the names of numerous local, trans-local and global events, as well as psytrance DJs, both Chinese and foreign.

In Liangshan, the bohemian cultural scene is imbued with a degree of overall coherence by congruences between the system of value and meaning inherent to the heterodox tradition, and those of the distinct global subcultures through which heterodoxy finds its local bohemian expression. In this sense, the influence of global subcultures follows a local logic; O'Connor has similarly argued that 'punk subculture is selectively accepted in Mexico according to the needs of marginalized Mexican youth', with 'Mexican punks themselves shaping a subculture according to what makes sense for their situation' (2004: 178). Local culture strongly influences which global subcultures Chinese youth choose to engage with – yet this choice still makes a great deal of difference.

Music has a certain 'malleability' (Taylor, 1997) that facilitates its flow between locations, its localization and reproduction in new cultural contexts. What I mean by localization is the disembedding of a cultural form from its original context and its adaptation to the local culture in which it is subsequently reproduced; the same process has been described as 'glocalization' (Robertson, 1995) by scholars contesting the association between cultural globalization and homogenization. However, subcultural styles such as, in the context of my field site, punk, reggae, and psytrance, represent 'hard' cultural forms which, in the sense Appadurai ascribes to cricket, 'come with a set of links between value, meaning, and

embodied practice that are difficult to break and hard to transform' (Appadurai, 1996: 90). Cultural forms of this kind, though localized in their global propagation, comprise frameworks of meaning that are less likely to be altered through this process. Chinese punk is distinctly Chinese, but its localization involves the importation of a wide variety of symbols and physical practices, some quite unconnected to music, that are largely unscathed by their Sinicization, exerting a recognizably punk influence in this new locale. Considerations of brevity preclude lengthy examination of the global subcultures favored in Liangshan; I will focus on such resilient elements within the frameworks of meaning and praxis with which these global musical subcultures, as hard cultural forms, are inextricably associated.

5.9 Heterodox Congruences in Liangshan's Bohemian Scene

Punk is Liangshan's foundational style; while a bare handful of local bands continue to perform in the genre, its influence, and especially that of the subculture with which it is associated, is felt to this day throughout the scene. However, while the heyday of this style is widely mythologized locally, one should not overemphasize its absolute scale; as de Kloet writes of the Beijing scene, based on fieldwork in 1997 and 2008, the 'punk circle is marginal, in terms of both size and popularity, but is very visible given its extravagant styles' (2010: 61). The recent history of Liangshan's bohemian scene is characterized by the rise of punk, its subsequent fall from prominence, and its supplantation by other global subcultural forms – including reggae and psytrance – characterized by distinct affinities with this foundational style. In Liangshan, just as Clark argues for the persistent influence of the punk ethos in subsequent subcultural forms after the end of its 1970s Anglo-American heyday, 'punk had to die so that it could live' (2003: 234). But on a deeper cultural level, the coherence between the sequence of global subcultures prominent in Liangshan's bohemian scene reflects a fundamental compatibility between their frameworks of oppositional symbolism and the underlying heterodox tradition that frames their localization. This compatibility, in concert with the syncretism and accommodation of cultural heterogeneity

inherent to the heterodox tradition, strongly supports the coherence of the whole bohemian scene, despite its contemporary stylistic diversity.

Punk is a form of rock music that typically features an angry emotional tone and distorted electric guitars, in which ‘songs are short, high-energy and have few chord changes’ (Dunn, 2016: 11). Originating in the late 1970s in both the United Kingdom and the United States, it was associated with a clothing style that Hebdige describes as ‘cacophony on the visual level’ (1979: 26). Dunn characterizes punk as a framework for the formation of ‘oppositional identities’, providing ‘cultural resources for the expression of an individual’s frustration with the way the world is’ (2016: 28, 37). An abrasive, shocking quality is key to this oppositionality; one can scarcely imagine the reaction in conservative Liangshan when local youth began adopting this style. Confucius, after all, forcefully condemned music that was ‘loud and jarring, which encouraged disorder and threatened the integrity of the state’ (Tuan, 1995: 89).

Punk’s oppositionality is also exhibited by the subsequent genres that supplanted it, as are two other attributes similarly reflected in its lasting influence. Dunn presents the global punk subculture as a set of social practices centered fundamentally on the ‘notion of do-it-yourself’, and the ‘intentional transformation of individuals from consumers of mass media to agents of cultural production’ (Dunn, 2016: 13). This represents a fundamental congruence between the DIY punk ethos and heterodox *jianghu* culture, which has historically served to facilitate self-organization independent of existing social and institutional structures. Secondly, punk echoes the egalitarian, socially cross-cutting tendency in that tradition; ‘DIY punk [is] an inclusive welcoming home for social outcasts and misfits’ (Dunn, 2016: 16). But while punk is welcoming to the socially excluded, it is not a subculture of the underclass in Liangshan. Some key figures in the early punk scene were from local working-class communities; others came to the city as students attending elite universities.

Among the genres that emerged in Liangshan to fill the space left by the decline of punk was reggae – a musical genre originating in Jamaica, ‘in which the fundamental ingredients were an aggressive, syncopated bass line, a minimalist (but highly ornamented) drum set pattern, and a chordal instrument (usually guitar and/or piano) playing starkly on each offbeat eighth note’ (Veal, 2013: 42). As Hebdige observes of the early years of British punk, ‘heavy reggae …occupied a privileged position inside the subculture as the only tolerated alternative to punk’. The relationship between the two subcultures was less musical than a symbolic affinity. This reggae was specifically British, a subculture of black youth who embraced their stigma in white society, with themes of Back to Africa, Ethiopianism, and the Rastafari concept of ‘dread’ constituting ‘an exotic semantic interior which was irrevocably closed against white Christian sympathies’. It was in this oppositional aspect that its appeal lay; ‘for the punks to find a positive meaning in such a blatant disavowal of Britishness amounted to a symbolic act of treason which complemented, indeed completed, the sacrilegious programme undertaken in punk rock itself’ (Hebdige, 1979: 67-8, 29, 64).

The reggae scene in Liangshan was small but growing; there were bands and DJs playing reggae or the related genre of dub, and signifiers of reggae and Rastafari such as dreadlocks were relatively common; 脏辫师 (*zangbianshi* – dreadlock hairdresser) is a bohemian social-media keyword. The chief representative of the reggae subculture in the bohemian group was Zhou Jinhai, a locally influential figure. He was introduced to both reggae and Rastafari through a close friend from a Caribbean-American background; he gave every appearance of genuine if idiosyncratic adherence to this faith, including following the dietary requirements, though not the proscription of tattooing.

Reggae coheres with both punk and the heterodox tradition in its association with rebelliousness. It was through spirituality, in its association with the new religious movement of Rastafari, that the subversive elements of reggae were given their fullest expression – ‘rooted in the epic stories of the Old Testament, Rastafarian belief also drew on the pan-Africanist ideas of Marcus Garvey, which introduced a crucial political component into the

religious equation' (Veal, 2013: 25-6, 43). In a Chinese cultural context, in addition to this spiritual aspect, the embrace of signifiers associated with black cultural identities, such as dreadlocks, serves as 'self-stigmatization' (Ma, 2002: 187) in the ritualistic processes through which group membership and solidarity are generated, in a similar sense to the extravagantly transgressive styles associated with punk. However, despite the symbolic coherence of punk and reggae, it is in that aspect of the reggae subculture most unlike the secular anarcho-punk perspective that it coheres most closely with China's heterodox cultural tradition – the fusion of religion with dissident politics. Historically, heterodox faith in China was not necessarily subversive, but millenarian beliefs usually constituted a 'central ingredient' of sectarian rebellions (Harrell and Perry, 1982: 294). Millenarianism also characterizes the Rastafari faith, including the central belief 'that Western civilization (referred to as "Babylon") was evil and doomed to imminent destruction' (Veal, 2013: 26). The concept of Babylon was important to Zhou Jinhai, while also offering an opportunity for somewhat surreptitious political critique and religious evangelism. For him, it referred not to Western civilization, but the CCP, as well as the cabal of global elites with which he believed them to be in malevolent cahoots. In an especially explicit example, he wrote on WeChat:

'China will become the center of Babylon, the most sinful country on the planet! Corruption, suspicion, and jealousy from top to bottom have been deeply imprinted in people's hearts. Jah has sent his disciples down to soothe my bewilderment about religion, my thoughts about political corruption, poverty and crime. I will open my heart to the power of love, self-improvement, and setting aflame! Waiting for the final judgment of Solomon!'

Similar themes of heterodox spirituality were reflected in the Liangshan's psytrance subculture. Psytrance is a musical genre, and associated global subculture, which originated in the Indian coastal state of Goa, chiefly among expatriates of western origin. Rietveld characterizes the style as follows: 'With the exception of an occasional atmospheric break, the musical structure moves on relentlessly, in a repetitive weave of disco/techno kick drums (providing the *motorik* 4/4 beat), a hypnotising drone-like bass pattern and mid-range digital sequences in a pulse rhythm of sixteenths in phased tonalities and resonant textures that provide the "acid", or psychedelic elements' (2010: 69). Psytrance arrived in Liangshan in the

mid-2010s, by which time it was already well-established in China; at first in Beijing, with a subsequent focal point in the southern province of Yunnan. The scene remained small at the time of my fieldwork, but was growing rapidly in Liangshan, and was represented at some level in every major Chinese city.

The psytrance subculture is characterized by an anti-commercial, underground 'DiY ethic', wherein 'psychedelic squat parties are intentional fronts for "free culture", and party crews and collectives … subsist in the margins "off the grid" of neoliberalism …offering cooperative models in response to possessive materialism [and] unsustainable consumption' (St John, 2012: 102, 163). While this reflects close congruence with Liangshan's foundational punk subculture, unlike punk, psytrance is also subversive, and heterodox in a Chinese context, because of its element of syncretic spirituality, often closely connected to the use of hallucinogenic drugs. Entheogens – 'substances the consumption of which purportedly awakens the divine within' (St John, 2012: 145) – are employed in diverse indigenous religions broadly captured by the ill-defined term 'shamanic' (Forte, 1997), in addition to Rastafari. An interest in spirituality is a common attribute in the global psytrance subculture (Greener and Hollands, 2006), and this was no less true of psytrance enthusiasts among the bohemian group, in stark contrast to the entirely atheistic elite-student group.

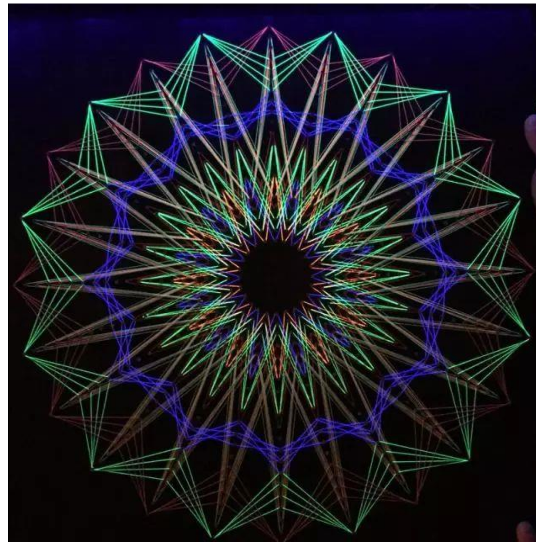
The spiritual leanings of bohemian psytrance enthusiasts were highly eclectic, as likely to draw on concepts from Chinese culture – reflected in bohemian social media keywords 符命 (*fuming*) and *yuanqi* – as notions of shamanism or other non-Han religious traditions, mystical oneness with nature or contact with extraterrestrial beings. In this predilection for 'fashioning of a spiritual life out of composites' (St John, 2012: 104), we see an aspect of psytrance subculture that is strongly appealing for those steeped in the Chinese heterodox tradition, which has long been characterized by a tendency towards religious syncretism (Harrell and Perry, 1982). Like the historical Confucian tradition (Kuhn, 1990; see also Pye, 1988), the overtly atheistic CCP's stance towards spirituality is one of restrictive monopolization – permitting five organized religions imbued with its own ideology (Huang

and Yang, 2005; Yang and Wei, 2005). Psytrance is distinctly heterodox because the highly idiosyncratic systems of spiritual belief it encourages stand outside the scope of such organizational and regulatory structures, as 'alternative spirituality … is almost impossible for authorities to regulate' (Yang, 2006: 98).

To an even greater extent than punk and reggae, an eclectic diversity of physical practices fall under psytrance's subcultural umbrella. Some are technologies of the self, such as yoga, *qigong* or meditation. Extreme efforts are taken in producing the décor (a bohemian social media keyword) at psytrance events. String art (a bohemian keyword) is one form this can take, employing fluorescent textiles to imbue a space with the characteristic psychedelic style; Figure 44 was created by a bohemian participant. VJing (video jockeying) is another way event spaces are enhanced, through the creation of manipulation of projected video imagery that is synchronized to the music. Other practices are more performative, including dance, *poi*, fire staff, hula hoops, or other dexterity or circus skills. Other practices are bodily, including temporary body and face painting, permanent modification through tattooing, tissue piercing, tunneling and sculpting techniques. While many of these practices are not exclusively associated with psytrance, all are highly likely to be encountered at a psytrance event and are part of the subculture. The diversity of these practices constitutes an extreme example of a common property of bohemian scenes – the incorporation of extraneous skills, and diversely skilled individuals, in the art worlds of their cultural production (Becker, 2008). The embodied physicality of these practices serves to intensify ritual interactions in the face-to-face gatherings that are integral to the psytrance subculture.

These three global subcultures exhibit a set of overlapping congruences. Punk shares an explicitly rebellious aspect with reggae, and an anti-commercial DIY ethos with psytrance, while psytrance and reggae share a disposition towards entheogenic spirituality. Each shares an air of oppositionality, in their embrace of symbolic demarcation from mainstream culture, and of a sense of righteousness in the legitimization of this deviance. These characteristics cohere also with the heterodox tradition that informs their localization in Liangshan. But this

Figure 44: Image of String Art from a Bohemian WeChat Post



localization also implies integration onto distinct national and global networks with which each subculture is associated.

As Xiao argues, ‘punk bands form a broad though not dense network across China’s larger and smaller cities alike’ (2018: 34). However, international connections forged by members of Liangshan punk bands on international tour subsequently facilitated local underground music production, sidestepping the state monopoly on the large-scale manufacture of CDs; another such connection is reflected in several bohemian social-media keywords connected to the Cuban punk scene. The welcome that Liangshan punks found abroad, particularly in squat communities associated with punk scenes in Eastern Europe, served as a conduit for both radical ideas, especially anarchism, and for a collective mode of living, both of which were brought back to Liangshan and propagated in a localized fashion, including by an individual who appears the social-media keywords as <mao fan>. While connections with other reggae scenes within China were well-developed, as reflected in bohemian social media keywords such as 蒋亮 (*Jiang Liang*) and Kawa, Liangshan’s scene was also characterized by cosmopolitan connections. Zhou Jinhai was assiduously engaged in developing contacts in Jamaica, chiefly through VPN-enabled access to Facebook, and professionally involved in organizing tours within China by reggae performers from that

island, such as <ken holt>, and other countries. Liangshan's psytrance scene was also networked with others throughout China, as reflected in the social media keyword 灵族 (Spirit Tribe), a Yunnan-based collective. Yet St John notes the 'the transnational character of psyculture' (St John, 2012: 4); local scenes throughout the world are similarly networked together in a global web of horizontal connections. We see evidence of these global connections in the bohemians' social media keywords, not only in the names of a substantial number of non-Chinese psytrance DJs, but also through such keywords as goaproductions, 望月狂欢 (*wangyue kuanghuan* – full-moon party, an event in Thailand) and Ozora (Hungary) as well as, outside the top 100, Belantara (Malaysia), Sonica (Montenegro), and Antaris (Germany). Crucially, punk, reggae and psytrance scenes are also closely interconnected at the local level, at least in Liangshan. This shows how the dense, multiplex connections that characterize local bohemian scenes impact their trans-local and global interconnection, through the superimposition of multiple subcultural genre-affiliated networks. This superimposition depends on the coherence imparted to Liangshan's bohemian scene, and the diversity of global subcultures that coexist within it, by the heterodox tradition.

5.10 Implications of Elite-Student and Bohemian Cosmopolitan Cultures

This exploration of elite-student and bohemian cultures offers insight into three interrelated aspects of these groups. Firstly, the intense physicality of bohemian subcultures such as punk, reggae, and psytrance contrasts sharply with elite-student proclivities for mediated communication, and for intellectual and cultural content from which this emphasis on physical co-presence and participatory engagement is absent. This factor also contributes strongly to the distinct patterns of social organization that characterize the two groups, because the dense, multiplex patterns of social connection among the bohemians are a product of the greater ritual intensity generated by these physically embodied cultural practices. The ingredients that Collins (2004) identifies in an intense ritual interaction are found in greatest abundance at those paradigmatic high points of bohemian cultural life, when the greatest

number of separate practices come together in participatory musical events, from the turbulent mosh pit of a punk gig to the thronging dance floor of a psytrance event.

The culture of the elite-student group, by contrast, does not accord prestige to physical practices that afford such ritual intensity. Here we may discern the influence of the elite Confucian tradition, in which Gernet identifies a ‘deeply rooted contempt in the governing classes for physical effort’; ‘the lettered Chinese … was to be a pure intellectual who thought that games of skill and athletic competitions were things for the lower classes’ (1996: 331; see also Yu and Bairner, 2011). Elite-student cultural life obviously does not lack physicality, but beyond classroom settings and amateur dramatic or operatic performance, those practices which are accorded sufficient prestige to be reflected in their social-media outputs and cultural consumption include international travel, photography (reflected in several keywords concerning photographic equipment), the cinema trips that sustain their extensive engagement with film, and the reading and writing associated with their engagement with literature, academic writing and student journalism. These practices do not support large-scale face-to-face group interactions of high ritual intensity. The absence of participatory physical practices from elite-student culture thus helps to explain both the fragmented structure and homogeneity of their social networks.

Secondly, this cultural difference helps to explain differences in the structure of the information environments in which the two groups are embedded. It is because of the physicality of bohemian cultural life that the patterns of named entities in their social-media output so closely maps onto patterns of personal acquaintance, because the horizontal connections that network local bohemian scenes together, though maintained through the internet, are overwhelmingly forged through face-to-face interactions. Even the purposeful pursuit of such connections along lines of subcultural affiliation, as with Zhou Jinhai’s VPN-enabled online search for contacts in Jamaica’s reggae scene, are ultimately oriented towards future face-to-face interactions. Elite-student culture, refined and academically sophisticated, is unconstrained by this predication on physicality, reaching out further into national and

global fields of high culture and intellectual abstraction, as well as mass-market audiovisual entertainment. Insofar as these students' reach is constrained, it is by a hierarchy of prestige that is influenced by orthodox Confucian sensibilities.

The structures of elite-student and bohemian information environments are strongly shaped by the hierarchies of value and prestige that pervade their divergent cultures. Student patterns of cultural engagement, even in their more conventional preferences for commercially mainstream content, reveal an elitist aspect, from their taste for *Gangtai* pop, with its evocation of a 'cosmopolitan, urban lifestyle' (De Kloet, 2010: 165) in the affluent non-mainland Chinese territories of Hong Kong and Taiwan, to their preference for Anglo-American film and TV which, even for mass-market entertainment, also carries a cosmopolitan cachet. Their more refined tastes are guided by aesthetic or intellectual distinction transparently, including academic writing, art-house cinema, canonical literature and poetry, or Chinese opera; only when elevated by such distinction do they engage in content from non-developed foreign countries. By contrast, bohemian cultural engagement is guided by an opposition to such hierarchies, drawing as they do on a wider range of cultures to which the Chinese cultural mainstream accords little prestige; any overlap between their tastes and mass-market preferences is chiefly in works with a distinctly rebellious tone. Nowhere is this preference for oppositionality more evident than in their musical tastes, as in the subcultural genres of punk, reggae and psytrance, and other styles such as hip-hop not discussed here for reasons of brevity.

Thirdly, this discussion has established that the Chinese orthodox Confucian and heterodox traditions continue to exert an influence on even such contemporary cosmopolitan youth groups as these, fundamentally shaping the impact of their cultural globalization. A culturally and intellectually elitist hierarchy of value, rooted in the orthodox Confucian tradition, bestows on the elite-student group a strong preference for cultural content that serves as a form of cosmopolitan distinction, defending and elevating their own position in that hierarchy. This serves to integrate elite-students closely into mainstream Chinese society

and public discourse in which this hierarchy is manifested, while also dissuading them from forming affective bonds and sympathies with groups occupying less elevated positions.

Bohemians, by contrast, influenced by a heterodox tradition that challenges this dominant hierarchy, seek out cultural resources with which to mount such a challenge in their local scene. Because such resources are scarce in a mainstream culture dominated by the Party-State, they choose to localize global subcultures that cohere with key attributes of the heterodox tradition: the shocking oppositionality of punk; the millenarian righteousness of reggae; the syncretic spirituality and transgressive entheogenesis of psytrance; the autonomous DIY ethos that each subculture shares. The overarching coherence of these styles in the local context, and the dense local interconnection of individuals deeply engaged in such seemingly distinct subcultures (which nevertheless cohere in their opposition to mainstream culture), is rooted their fundamental compatibility with the heterodox tradition. This overarching heterodox coherence and interconnection serves to locally aggregate the ritual intensity of a wide range of group interactions within disparate subcultural genres, combining their effects into a general sense of solidarity, an egalitarian bond that encompasses much of the overall bohemian cultural scene. It is this socio-emotive property of the bohemian cultural scene that underlies and sustains its members' divergence from China's mainstream national culture.

6 Elite-Student and Bohemian Politics

In this chapter, I argue that the social and cultural differences between the elite-student and bohemian groups, including their divergent forms of cosmopolitanism, have powerful political effects, shaping their political worldviews, information environments, and dispositions towards contentious communication and action. These relationships between social organization, culture and politics are contingent. It is perfectly possible for heterodox cosmopolitans to remain apolitical, or even to strongly support the political status quo; likewise, it is perfectly conceivable for orthodox cosmopolitans to engage in systemic dissent. Nonetheless, the influence of the heterodox cultural tradition on bohemian groups in China disposes them positively towards oppositional global subcultures; this combination, under certain enabling conditions such as high solidarity in dense yet diverse networks combined with the influence of local high-status figures, renders such groups considerably more amenable to subversive politicization than elite students, or culturally mainstream youth in general.

The politics of elite-student groups are characterized by a pragmatic orientation, whereas those of bohemian groups are idealistic. The consequence of this difference, in combination with these groups' distinct patterns of social organization – which are congruent with (in the case of elite-students) and cut across (in the case of bohemians) the compartmentalized structure imposed by Party-State social management – is to generate a tendency for bohemian politics to be more irreconcilable, and for elite-student politics to be more reconcilable, with the authoritarian status quo. The distinction between pragmatic and idealistic politics should be distinguished from that which He and Su draw between 'interest-oriented' and 'value-oriented' (2018: 401) contention in China. Pragmatic politics can also be value-oriented, but the claims it generates are moderated by an acknowledgement of practical political constraints that are largely immaterial to an idealist. Pragmatic elite students therefore pursue their political values in ways that accommodate the entrenchment of the

authoritarian system or, in some cases, rely upon its affordances. We might compare this orientation to the great majority of 'mass incidents' that regularly occur in China, which are generally tolerated by central authorities, but which tend to be local in scope and limited to defending the material interests of bounded groups. Such contention is simultaneously interest-oriented and pragmatic – because only political claims pursued in this way, by appealing to higher levels of the state within the compartmentalized structure it imposes, are likely to succeed. Accordingly, while the pragmatic politics of elite-student groups have more in common with the dominant form of Chinese contention, it is the idealism of bohemian politics, largely unconstrained by considerations of practical efficacy, that supports the finding of common cause across compartmentalized boundaries – and the synthesis of disparate localized discontents into diffuse anti-system dissent.

In this chapter, I show how elite-student and bohemian political worldviews differ in accordance with the distinction between pragmatic and idealistic politics, while highlighting connections between those outlooks and the social and cultural differences between the groups that I have outlined in earlier chapters. I also address the two groups' distinct information environments, outlining their dispositions towards news information and state information control, and the differing constraints to which they are subject in their own online communications. I then explore their distinct patterns of contention in both online and offline spheres, before discussing the social and cultural foundations of their divergent politics.

6.1 Political Worldviews

Worldviews are 'sets of beliefs and assumptions that describe reality' (Koltko-Rivera, 2004: 3), which 'tend to be shared by members of a social/political group' (Baele et al., 2021: 1669). Such worldviews offer insight into group behavior because, as 'generalized attitudes toward the world and its social organization', they are 'orienting dispositions, serving to guide people's responses in complex situations.' (Peters and Slovic, 1996). Here, because I am focused on political behavior, I employ the term 'political worldview' in a rather narrower

sense, to designate the sets of normative judgements and empirical beliefs about the world – often implicit and unsystematized – that underlie the markedly distinct politics of the elite-student and bohemian groups.

Political worldview, as I use the term, should be distinguished from the concept of ideology, which is narrower still, typically denoting sets of beliefs or public policy preferences that are systematically coherent in such a way that 'the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence' (Converse, 1964: 207), often varying along a single dimension (e.g. Jessee, 2009; Pan and Xu, 2015). Ideological coherence is arguably less widespread in authoritarian systems where competing systems of political belief are not presented to the public as part of the democratic process (Wu and Meng, 2019); my use of the term political worldview is intended to capture a wider range of beliefs, attitudes and orientations which, by merit of their breadth, offer greater insight into political dispositions in such an authoritarian context.

In this chapter I focus on five interrelated aspects of the elite-student and bohemian groups' characteristic political worldviews: I draw on survey responses from both groups that uncover beliefs and attitudes that are narrowly ideological, before exploring their trust of various social groups, their beliefs concerning the state and social order, their evaluations of the main problems facing China today, and their predictions for China's future.

6.2 Survey Results

To compare the two groups and contextualize their politics, I employed a survey instrument, the Chinese Political Compass, which explores attitudes to political, economic, and cultural issues. This allowed the responses of 29 participants in my research to be compared with those of 171,830 individuals who completed the survey in 2014. A summary of both groups' responses to each question, as well as those of the far-larger 2014 sample (hereafter, 'large-N'), is in appendix B. Pan and Xu (2015) drew on the 2014 data to argue that ideology in China varies along a dominant right-liberal and left-conservative dimension

across political, economic and cultural issues. I follow their method by combining my participants' responses with the 2014 sample and applying principal component analysis (PCA) to reduce the dimensionality of the survey responses. Pan and Xu argue that the dominant variable derived from this PCA represents the liberal-conservative ideological axis, based on those questions with the greatest positive or negative contributions. Figure 45 shows the five most liberal questions and Figure 46 the five most conservative, from my own identical results. The PCA allows each survey participant to be positioned on the liberal-conservative axis and the distributions of ideological views within both groups, as well as the large-N sample, to be compared.

Figure 47 shows these distributions in boxplots[22], while Figure 48 tabulates their summary statistics; higher numbers are liberal and lower conservative. The elite-students' median position on the liberal-conservative axis is somewhat more liberal than that of the large-N sample, and the bohemian participants are somewhat more liberal still. Liberal and conservative are used here in a sense particular to China's political context, between 'conservatives on the left who support a socialist (authoritarian) state, who emphasize national unity and security, who think highly of the old communist/socialist economic system, and who value traditional culture, versus liberals on the right who advocate for a constitutional democracy, who embrace individual liberty, who support market-oriented reform, and who are enthusiastic about modern science and technology' (Pan and Xu, 2015: 2).

Pan and Xu showed a high degree of correlation between liberal and conservative views on the political, economic, and cultural sections of the survey. Conducting PCAs for the political, economic, and cultural sections separately allows the groups' liberal/conservative views on these topics to be compared, as shown in Figure 49 and

[22] Outliers, those observation which fall more than 1.5 times the interquartile range above or below the 75% and 25% quartiles respectively, have been excluded from this chart; extreme outliers in the large-N sample prevented visual comparison of elite-student and bohemian distributions.

Figure 45: Questions with Greatest Positive (Liberal) Contribution to PC1

Question Number	Question	Contribution to First Principal Component
12	It is acceptable besmirch the images of national leaders and founding leaders in literary and artistic works.	0.21
3	When events that have major repercussions for the safety and security of people occur, the government should freely disseminate information even if information disclosure increases the risks of unrest.	0.21
6	It is preferable to let universities recruit students by themselves than to have a unified national college entrance examination system.	0.2
2	Human rights take precedence over sovereignty.	0.2
17	Lawyers should do their utmost to defend clients even if the client has committed a crime.	0.19

Figure 46: Questions with Greatest Negative (Conservative) Contribution to PC1

Question Number	Question	Contribution to First Principal Component
9	National unity and territorial integrity are the highest interest of society.	-0.22
46	The Eight Diagrams (Bagua) in The Book of Changes (Zhouyi) can explain many things well.	-0.21
20	The state should take measures to train and support athletes so they can win glory for the country in various international competitions.	-0.2
33	People who make money through capital gains contribute less to the society than people make money through labor.	-0.19
48	It is unnecessary to push forward the simplification of Chinese characters.	-0.19

Figure 47: Liberal/Conservative Ideology

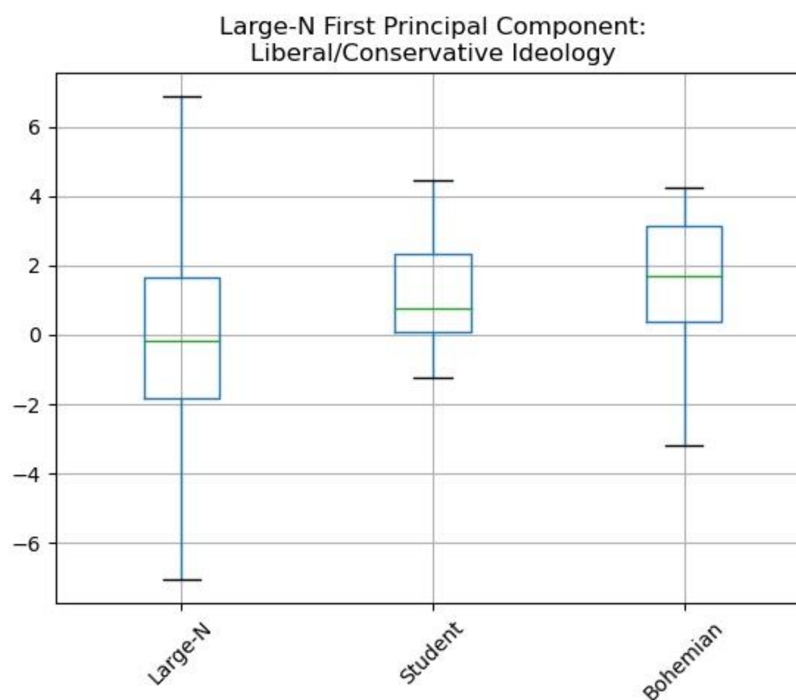


Figure 48: Summary Statistics for Liberal/Conservative Ideology (PC1)

Group	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	25%	50%	75%	Maximum
Student	17	1.13	1.71	-1.23	0.08	0.77	2.34	4.45
Bohemian	11	1.39	2.21	-3.19	0.38	1.71	3.16	4.26
Large-N	171830	-1.97E-04	2.91	-11.79	-1.83	-0.17	1.65	12.30

Figure 49: Liberal/Conservative Ideology on Political, Economic and Cultural Topics

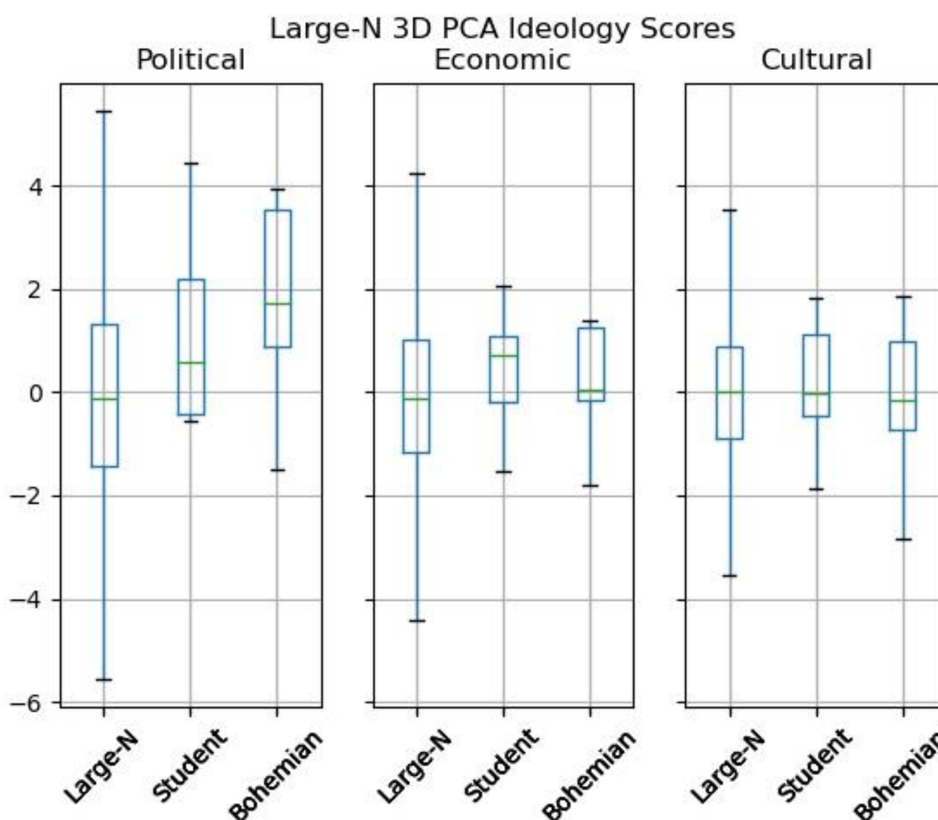


Figure 50: Summary Statistics for Liberal/Conservative Ideology on Different Topics

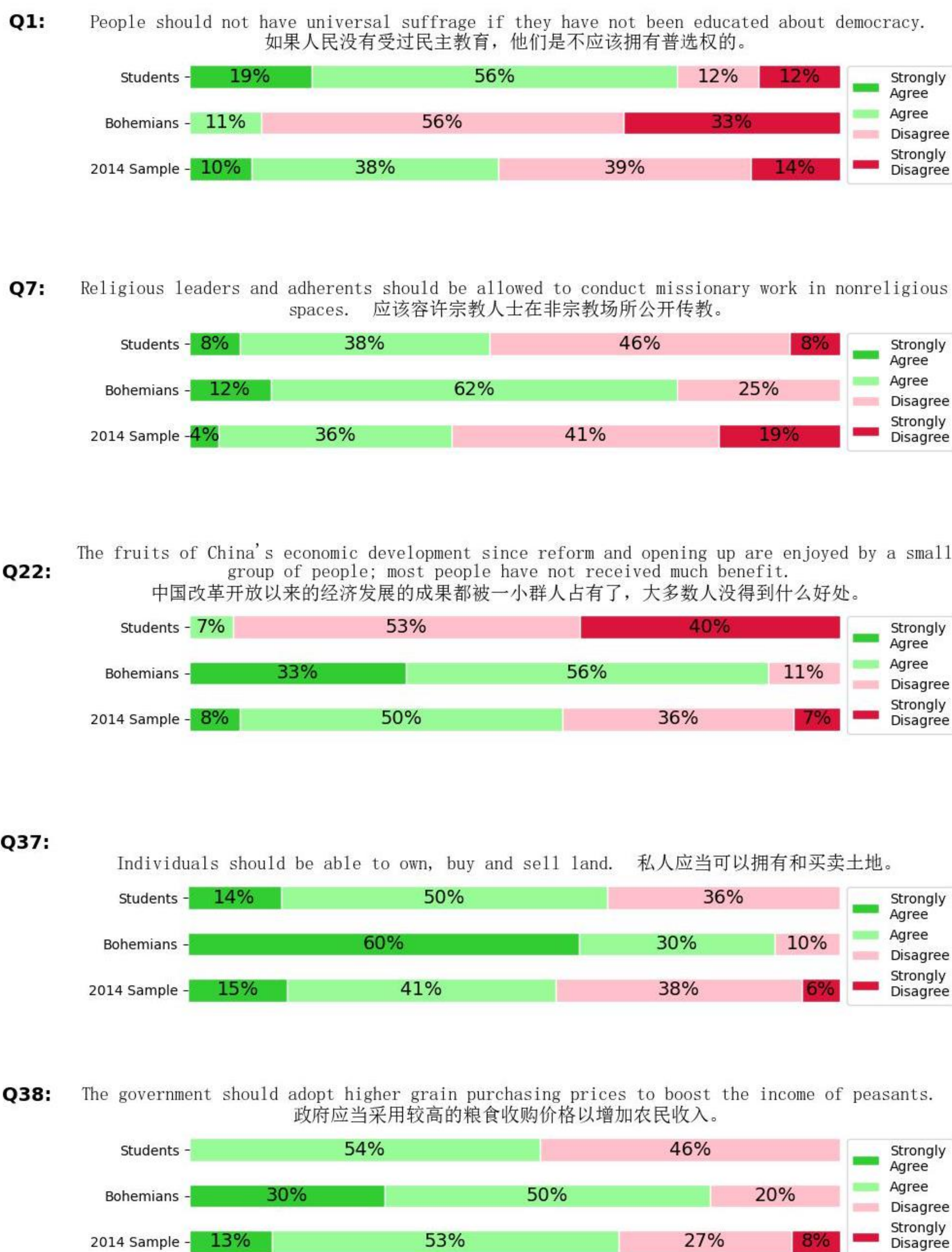
Question Topic	Group	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	25%	50%	75%	Maximum
Political	Student	17	1.03	1.46	-0.57	-0.42	0.57	2.20	4.45
	Bohemian	11	1.89	1.70	-1.49	0.88	1.71	3.52	3.94
	Large-N	171830	-2.18E-04	2.18	-6.99	-1.43	-0.12	1.32	7.41
Economic	Student	17	0.61	1.47	-1.52	-0.21	0.71	1.09	4.54
	Bohemian	11	0.23	1.12	-1.81	-0.16	0.03	1.24	1.37
	Large-N	171830	-7.35E-05	1.85	-7.71	-1.16	-0.14	1.00	8.27
Cultural	Student	17	0.26	1.30	-1.87	-0.47	-0.01	1.12	3.61
	Bohemian	11	-0.03	1.35	-2.83	-0.74	-0.16	0.98	1.85
	Large-N	171830	-3.03E-05	1.58	-6.14	-0.90	4.72E-04	0.87	5.90

summarized in Figure 50. Here we see that in the political realm, the bohemian group is considerably more liberal than the students, who are in turn more liberal than the large-N sample. Economically, however, the bohemians are rather more conservative (i.e. leftist) than the students, though the median bohemian is more economically liberal than the median large-N respondent. Culturally, the bohemians are slightly more conservative than the students, and the median student is fractionally more conservative than the median large-N respondent.

Given the small scale and non-representative sampling of my research, these findings do not undermine Pan and Xu's macro-level argument. However, they do run contrary to what this argument would lead us to expect, which is that the more politically liberal group is likely to also be more economically and culturally liberal. Moreover, subsequent survey research in China has challenged Pan and Xu's contention of a single axis of ideological variation. Wu and Meng argue for two axes of ideological variation – a left-right economic dimension and an authoritarian-democratic political dimension – that are largely independent; they suggest that 'while more educated individuals are more likely to support the market economy, they are not any more supportive of democratic ideals' (2017: 3).

My findings suggest that the variation between these two groups' authoritarian or democratic views may be rooted more fundamentally in their elitist or egalitarian attitudes. Consider the groups' responses to five questions shown in Figure 51. In question one, we see that 89 percent of the surveyed elite students agreed that the insufficiently educated should not have the right to vote, compared to only 11 percent of bohemians who agreed. Similarly, in question seven, almost 75 percent of bohemians agreed that public religious proselytizing should be legalized, whereas only 46 percent of elite students similarly agreed. These responses reflect the bohemians' greater confidence in the faculties of ordinary Chinese people, in contrast to the elite students, who frequently see them as credulous and easily manipulated.

Figure 51: Selected Responses to Ideology Survey Questions



Contrast these politically liberal bohemian views with their attitudes towards economics. In question 22, we see that 89 percent of bohemians agreed that China's capitalist economic development during the reform era has chiefly benefited a small elite, compared to

only seven percent of elite students. Similarly, with question 38, 80 percent of bohemians believed that the state should intervene in grain pricing to boost the income of peasants, compared to 54 percent of elite students. In both cases, egalitarian values, which lead bohemians to adopt more liberal positions on political issues, contribute to more leftist economic positions. But this is not consistently the case, as question 37 illustrates. Whereas 90 percent of bohemians agreed that Chinese people should be able to own, buy and sell land, only 64 percent of students similarly agreed. This issue also touches on urban-rural inequality because the prohibition on buying and selling land effectively only applies to rural areas; here we see that the bohemians' egalitarianism trumps their leftist economics.

The results of this survey show that bohemian perspectives are more critical than those of elite students. Both in political views that challenge the legitimacy of China's authoritarian single-party system, and in economic views that reflect trans-class and trans-local sympathy with rural and other disadvantaged groups, they indicate an idealistic tendency towards dissent that is irreconcilable with the systemic status quo.

6.3 Trust

The conventional view has long been that in China, due to the influence of a Confucian tradition that prizes familial and personal relationships, particularistic trust is high but generalized trust is low (Weber, 1951; Fei, 1992; Fukuyama, 1995). And yet, survey evidence suggests that generalized trust in China is unexpectedly high, to the point that the country is often excluded as an outlier from multi-national analyses (Allik and Realo, 2004; Delhey and Newton, 2005; Bjørnskov, 2007). Moreover, much evidence attests to the high levels of trust that Chinese people place in institutions, particularly the CCP and the national-level government (Nathan, 2003; Li, 2004; Tang, 2005; Wang, 2005a, 2005b).

Steinhardt identifies potential measurement problems with these findings, but offers evidence that, in mainland China, 'high confidence in institutions contributes to high levels of generalized trust' (2012: 434). High institutional trust in China is rooted in various factors,

including performance legitimacy (Wang, 2005a), media control, propaganda and educational indoctrination (Yang and Tang, 2010), and the structure of local-central state relations (Li, 2004). Furthermore, Zhai (2018) has shown that traditional Confucian political values remain dominant in China, compared with other Asian countries, and are strongly associated with institutional trust. An element of Confucian culture that Zhai does not discuss, but which I argue plays a prominent part in that culture's contribution to institutional trust, is its emphasis on formal educational credentials, which tends to support the belief that hierarchies are meritocratic.

I asked participants to rate the extent to which they trusted different social and occupational groups from one to five, with a score of one reflecting the least and five reflecting the greatest levels of trust. Figure 52 compares the distribution of trust responses for professional groups, Figure 53 for businesspeople and state employees, Figure 54 for the sub-groups of local and central government officials, and Figure 55 for all Chinese people, and people you encounter on the internet. Figure 56 presents summary statistics. Because I expanded the number of social groups for whom the question was asked during the interview process, the count of responses is inconsistent between questions.

Elite students reported a higher degree of trust than the bohemians for almost every social group, apart from 'people you encounter on the internet'. While both groups trusted people on the internet less than they trusted Chinese people in general, the discrepancy was much less pronounced for the bohemians. The elite students were only slightly more trusting of Chinese people in general than the bohemians, in contrast to their considerably greater level of trust in other social and professional groups. One elite-student participant explained her low trust in all Chinese people as follows:

Wan Shuang: *"It's like this – most Chinese people haven't had systematic training. They don't have very high academic credentials. They don't have very high cultural, moral, or artistic attainment."*

Figure 52: Trust in Professional Groups

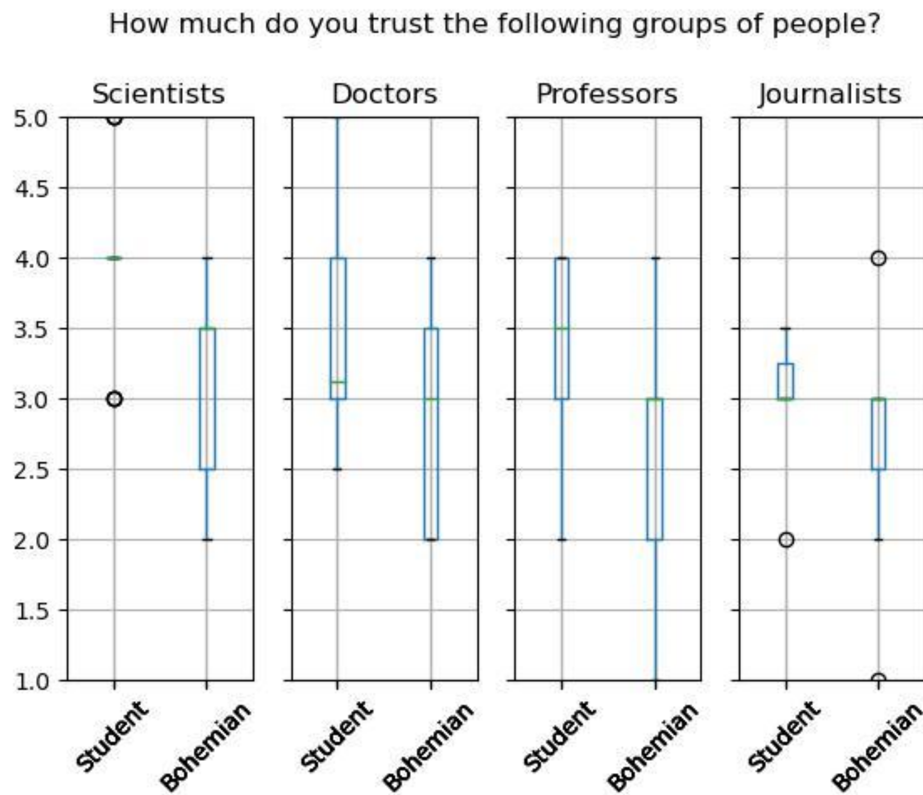


Figure 53: Trust in Businesspeople and State Employees

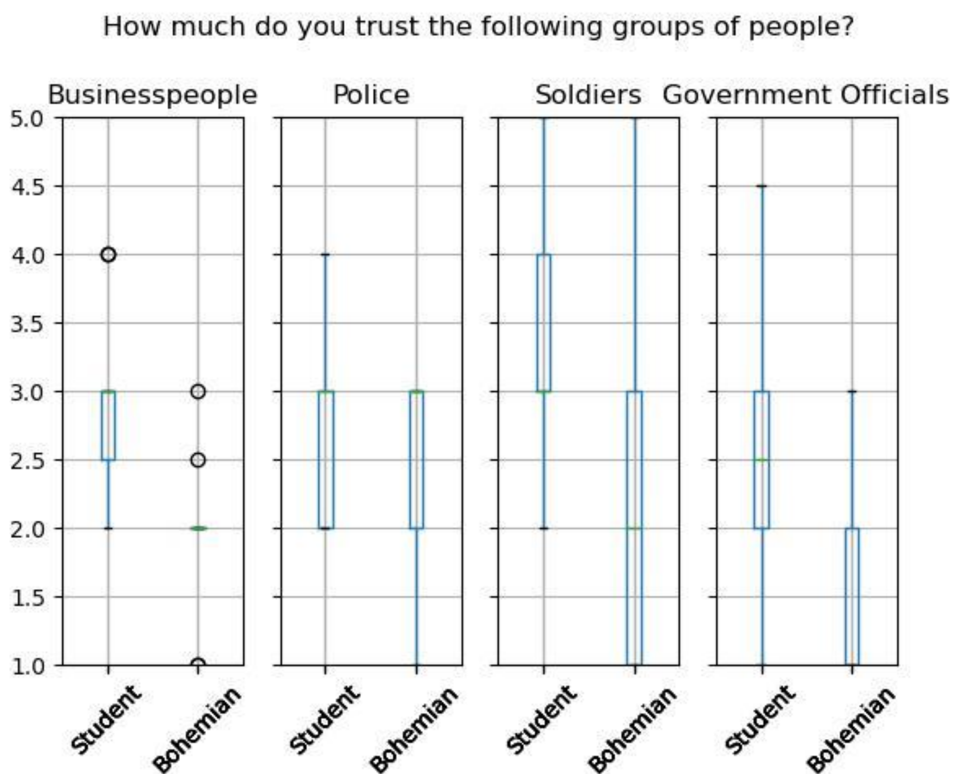


Figure 54: Trust in Government Officials

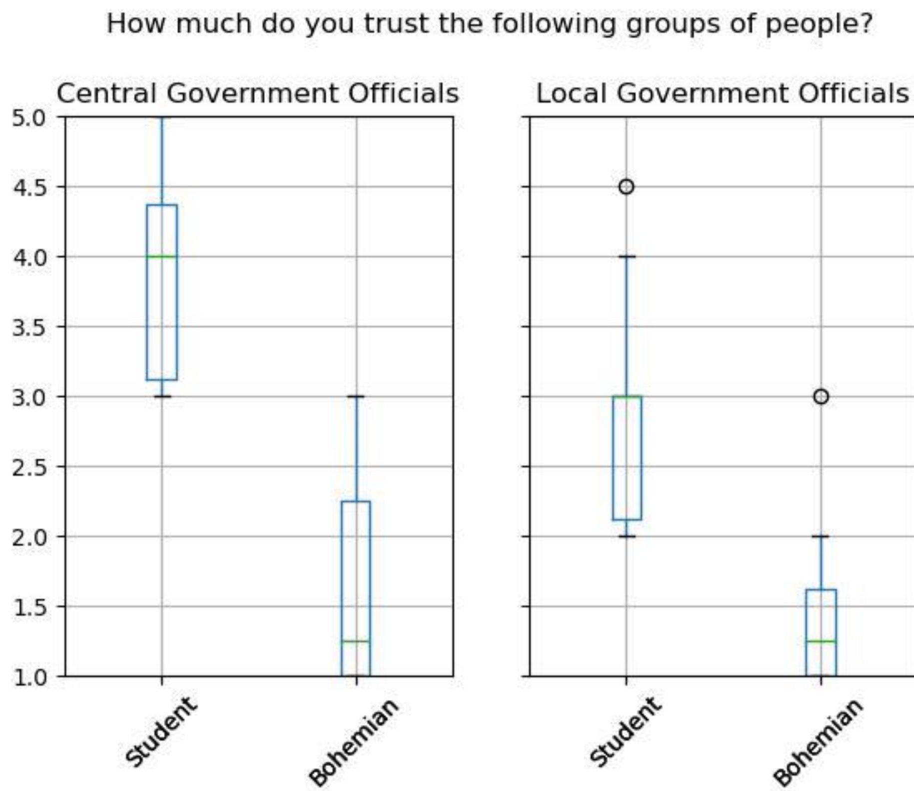


Figure 55: Trust in Chinese People

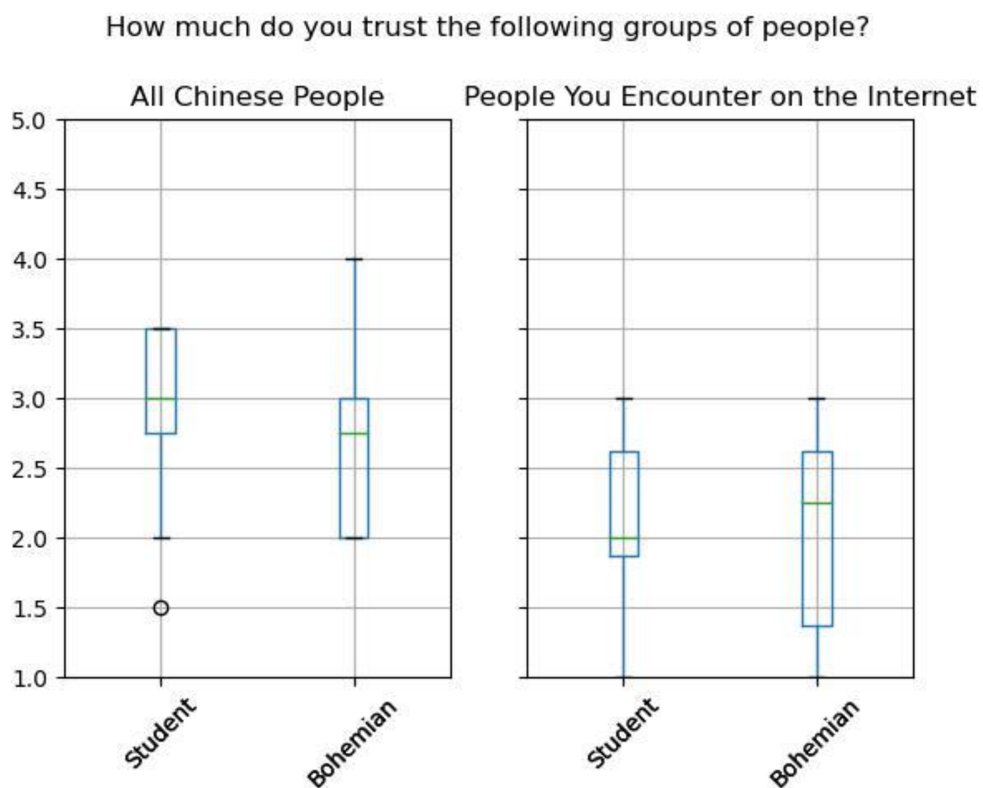


Figure 56: Summary Statistics for Generalized Trust in Social Groups

Social Group	Group	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	25%	50%	75%	Maximum
Scientists	Student	15	4.00	0.65	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00
	Bohemian	9	3.11	0.78	2.00	2.50	3.50	3.50	4.00
Doctors	Student	16	3.50	0.84	2.50	3.00	3.13	4.00	5.00
	Bohemian	9	2.83	0.87	2.00	2.00	3.00	3.50	4.00
Professors	Student	14	3.36	0.75	2.00	3.00	3.50	4.00	4.00
	Bohemian	9	2.61	0.86	1.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	4.00
Journalists	Student	15	3.07	0.37	2.00	3.00	3.00	3.25	3.50
	Bohemian	9	2.72	0.83	1.00	2.50	3.00	3.00	4.00
Businesspeople	Student	10	2.90	0.70	2.00	2.50	3.00	3.00	4.00
	Bohemian	9	1.94	0.63	1.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	3.00
Police	Student	14	2.71	0.76	2.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	4.00
	Bohemian	9	2.33	0.87	1.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Soldiers	Student	14	3.43	0.98	2.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	5.00
	Bohemian	9	2.33	1.41	1.00	1.00	2.00	3.00	5.00
Government Officials	Student	15	2.62	0.89	1.00	2.00	2.50	3.00	4.50
	Bohemian	9	1.61	0.86	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	3.00
Central Government Officials	Student	10	3.85	0.71	3.00	3.13	4.00	4.38	5.00
	Bohemian	8	1.69	0.88	1.00	1.00	1.25	2.25	3.00
Local Government Officials	Student	10	2.90	0.84	2.00	2.13	3.00	3.00	4.50
	Bohemian	8	1.50	0.71	1.00	1.00	1.25	1.63	3.00
All Chinese People	Student	16	2.88	0.65	1.50	2.75	3.00	3.50	3.50
	Bohemian	8	2.69	0.70	2.00	2.00	2.75	3.00	4.00
People You Encounter on the Internet	Student	16	2.06	0.70	1.00	1.88	2.00	2.63	3.00
	Bohemian	8	2.06	0.82	1.00	1.38	2.25	2.63	3.00

Such perspectives, in comparison with the especially high levels of trust elite students placed in scientists and, to a lesser extent, doctors and professors, suggest that their generalized trust is hierarchically structured in line with perceived specialist expertise and educational credentials. This closely conforms with the influence on the student group of the elitist Confucian tradition, in its tendency to associate credentialed expertise and cultural distinction with the moral property of virtue (Pye, 1988); this also underlies the high levels of trust elite students place in central government officials, reflecting a meritocratic or technocratic view of China's political order.

Bohemians, by contrast, saw members of a wide range of social groups, including representatives of professional and state institutions, as less trustworthy than elite students did. While bohemians were relatively more trusting of professional groups, they nonetheless felt that such groups were tainted by commercial and particularistic interests. For example:

Zhao Yusheng: *"Hospitals in this country… they're not about saving people. They're just [expletive] private companies, all about making money. They're not concerned with the interests of society at all."*

Nowhere is the discrepancy between bohemian and elite-student levels of trust more evident than for government officials, where the median response among bohemians was a score of one – the lowest possible level – and where low levels of trust were almost unchanged between central and local levels of government. Qin Zhengzhong justified this succinctly: *"These people are the ones responsible for all of China's problems"*. Bohemians tended to feel not that the Party-State had been corrupted but was, rather, a source of corruption. This spilled over into evaluations of other groups; one participant described soldiers as *"brainwashed"*, while another suggested they *"serve the state, not the people"*. Journalists, scientists, and the police were all criticized on the grounds that they were corrupted by Party-State influence.

Elite students trusted a range of professional groups because of their confidence in the hierarchy of specialist training and credentials that membership in such groups requires – including high-level officials. This trust trickled down to less-credentialed elements of the state that are ultimately overseen by trustworthy central-state elites. By contrast, the egalitarian bohemians saw any association between high levels of education and virtue or trustworthiness with great skepticism. They were also much more sensitive to the moral hazard that accompanies unconstrained authoritarian power, and thus tended to see powerful elites, as well as those under their direction, as inherently less trustworthy. Lacking confidence in the hierarchical institutions by which society is structured, their trust in that society was low. However, in relative terms, compared to their most trusted groups, bohemian trust in ordinary Chinese people was far higher than among the elite-students.

6.4 Social Order

These distinct perspectives indicate a considerably darker bohemian view of the social order, as opposed to the elite students, who saw the hierarchical ordering of society as meritocratic, while attributing benevolent virtue to those at the top. These views were also reflected in the two groups' attitudes to the maintenance of social order and stability, of which

elite students were far more approving than bohemians. For example, in discussing the merits of political and legal alternatives to China's authoritarian system, one elite student expressed the following view:

Xia Yan: *"The Hong Kong system… sometimes it's not as easy to control, not as easy to keep the people in ignorance and control the masses. They say they want more freedom, but that means more rebellion, and that leads to social elements that are not peaceful. I always think that you have to control the masses, pacify them – this has the benefit of social stability."*

Other elite students expressed authoritarian preferences in positive terms:

Song Liqin: *"I think it's much better to have a powerful leader and political party. When they're making big decisions, they're not distracted by things other than the interests of society. They can adopt incisive, creative policies for the benefit of the people."*

Such views clearly reflect a concern for the deleterious effects of popular political participation, revealing the influence of a Confucian perspective in which elites are uniquely qualified to discern the interests and safeguard the wellbeing of lower social orders. Bohemians, by contrast tended to express views that were not only more egalitarian, but also considerably more critical of how social order is maintained. Consider one bohemian's view of law enforcement:

Han Enlai: *"They say that China's a country with the rule of law, but that means the constitution and the rules have to be implemented. And it's not like that. The implementation makes the law an empty symbol, so why should I care about your law? I've got my own ways of dealing with these problems… If the country isn't ruled by law, what meaning do the laws have? What's the difference between the police and a bunch of hooligans?"*

Here we see an idealistic concern with righteousness and principle, but bohemians and elite students also differed in empirical beliefs about how order is maintained. Bohemians, rather more worldly, saw injustice as pervasive. For example:

Zhou Jinhai: "*Let's say you have some land. You don't want to sell it. But demolition-and-eviction comes to your village. The government will just send heishehui gangsters to pull your house down and beat you to death. How can you feel safe in such a society? When you encounter something unfair, there's nobody you can turn to."*

These responses also evoke a sense of moral decay in the ordering of society, and the 'contradiction … between loyalty to a rule of law that is patently unjust and faithfulness to a moral code that makes outlaws of the just', which Fitzgerald (1986: 375) depicts as central to the 14th century novel *The Water Margin* (Shi, 1986), the foremost literary representation of China's heterodox culture.

6.5 China's Biggest Problems

Bohemian and elite-student diagnoses of China's pressing problems were characterized by some overlap, but with differences in emphasis. For example, members of both groups mentioned censorship as a prominent problem. Though elite students typically approved of censorship in principle, they often objected to its the current extent, citing constraints on journalists, a recent crackdown on the use of VPN software, and specific restrictions on cultural production. For example, the only pressing problem identified by one elite student was as follows:

Zhu Peizhi: *"In recent years the government's restrictions on cultural products have been more and more strict. Whether it's the press or TV, they've set all these rules… I mean, in one way it's something they should do, its desirable. But I feel like they've taken it to an unnecessary extent."*

While elite students tended to identify specific problems, such as censorship of culture and media workers, bohemians tended to address these issues in general or universalist terms, frequently pointing to the lack of *"freedom of speech"* in China. However, in other areas, elite-student and bohemian evaluations of China's problems were entirely separate. Many elite students, quite unlike bohemians, felt that China's national unity was a pressing problem, whether through concern over separatism in territories already under the People's Republic of China's (PRC) control, such as Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong, or through the necessity of achieving unification with Taiwan. As one elite-student put it:

Meng Zongying: *"I think the most important issue is solving the Taiwan problem."*

Thomas Flavel: *"You studied in Taiwan, right? What do people there think about that issue?"*

Meng Zongying: *"They think all sort of things. Some of them think that the mainland has developed so well, they don't have any bad feelings. Some don't care one way or the other. Some are strongly opposed. But it doesn't really matter what they think. Making Taiwan a province of China is a problem for the mainland to solve. It's not up to the people in Taiwan."*

Bohemians tended to see shortcomings in Chinese culture as attributable to the pernicious influence of political elites. By contrast, elite-student concerns followed the opposite logic; they trended to see problems as inherent to the traditional values of lower social echelons, that contrasted with more enlightened elite attitudes:

Qian Xiulan: "*For people like us it's OK, but for the ordinary strata, the working class, the unfair treatment of women is serious. And children as well, especially in the countryside, they don't like to let children go to school ... These are things that society has to pay close attention to."*

Similarly, elite students who saw corruption as a problem tended to explain it in terms of Chinese culture, rather than politics:

Bai Lin: *"These problems are hard to solve, like the corruption problem. It's about relationships – in Chinese culture we have this term 'guanxi', and corruption is bound up with that. It's part of the culture."*

Attributing corruption to Chinese culture accords with a hierarchical perspective, requiring interventions by a virtuous elite to correct the failings of the Chinese people. Bohemians took a different view. During participant observation late one evening, Qin Zhengzhong reacted furiously to my tactless imputation of an association between corruption and Chinese culture. He launched into a passionate diatribe, pointing to the relative absence of corruption in culturally Chinese territories such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and condemning the corrosive effects of the CCP and China's authoritarian system in the strongest possible terms. As his anger receded, and he related to me his profound sense of shame at the pervasive degradation of moral integrity demanded by this system, he wept for his country.

In general, bohemian diagnoses of China's problems were frequently characterized by systemic political critique, expressed in moralistic terms or through ideals such as *"freedom of speech"*, *"democracy"*, *"rule of law"* and *"justice"*. These forms of idealistic discontent were identified as concerns by only a single member of the elite-student group, Li Qingzhao. While elite students were not hesitant to identify problems in China, the specific issues they identified were either reconcilable with China's authoritarian status-quo or, in many cases, dependent on the meritocratic technocracy of this system for their resolution.

6.6 China's Future

Participants were asked in interview to predict how China is likely to have changed in 50 years' time. Elite students offered a picture of China's future that was more optimistic than bohemian perspectives, characterized by greater stability, prosperity, and incremental reform.

Elite students envisioned China developing in a broadly liberal direction. The culture, they felt, would become more *"open"* and *"tolerant"*. For some, this expectation was associated with improvements in the *suzhi* of the Chinese population. Others saw such improvements as stemming from improvements in the law, though emphasizing that such changes were unlikely to take the form of universalistic, legally guaranteed rights at the individual level – one participant predicted more *"equal rights (pingquan – 平权)"*, but not *"human rights (renquan – 人权)"*. Nonetheless, elite-students felt that conditions for LGBT communities and women would improve significantly. One participant predicted that China would have a female leader within 20 or 30 years; according to another:

Shi Ye: *"I'm quite optimistic. I think that the rights of LGBT and other minority groups will improve. Probably we'll see gay marriage within 10 years."*

Many elite students' optimism about China's trajectory of change was expressed in terms of national unity, power, and prestige. Several participants anticipated that the PRC would achieve unification with Taiwan, typically through peaceful means such as

"persuasion". Apart from the arguably internal matter of Taiwan, all elite-students saw China's rise as an essentially peaceful phenomenon. Furthermore, no elite-student saw any likelihood of drastic change to the Chinese political system. Song Liqin felt this was more likely to occur in the United States:

Song Liqin: *"I think America is too free. Too democratic. I just think it isn't realistic to ask people to vote on every little thing. And like in Britain, with Scottish Independence, you can't let Scotland be independent just because the people there want to be independent. And with Brexit – you can't just let the people decide these things based on their feelings. I don't want China to become too democratic, like Britain or America… The Chinese system, it's like a dynasty. And imperial dynasties usually last about 400 years. The American system, it's a dynasty too, but it's a lot older and weaker... I think American democracy will probably change to another political system."*

Bohemian visions of China's future tended to be far darker. Several participants felt that China would go to war, whether through international conflict, or to stoke nationalist sentiments as a response to domestic unrest. Internally, several bohemians felt that the Chinese public would increasingly demand reforms, but that these were unlikely to be accommodated. Many bohemians felt that China's current problems would not improve, or would worsen: persistent corruption, ever-greater inequality, accelerating environmental degradation. Accordingly, the most consistent theme among bohemians was that China was likely to see large-scale unrest:

Shen Yongliang: "*I don't know about 50 years, but within 30 years there will be a great, violent change in China. Many people will die, and the rich will all emigrate. It's only stupid [expletive] that believe in the Chinese Dream*[23]*"*

In line with such predictions of unrest, bohemians were considerably more likely than elite students to envision a change of regime in China. The most common imagined cause was a future economic crisis, rooted in a collapse of the housing market. More generally, most bohemians believed the current system to be unsustainable. While some speculated that

[23] The Chinese Dream (*zhongguo meng* – 中国梦) is a concept disseminated under Xi Jinping, which refers to a future of prosperity and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, through recovery of its historical greatness.

systemic change might arise from developments among the political elite, such as internal schism within the CCP, others felt that it was more likely to be a bottom-up movement:

Qin Zhengzhong: *"I think within 20 years there will be big changes… everything will be good. The process…. I think it'll come from the masses, the change will originate from among the common people.*

Similarly:

Zhou Longwei: *"Either everything will change, or nothing will. Change will come from one thing, change of the flag*[24]*. That will influence every aspect – culture, intellectual life, every area of society. It will all start from one place. If you don't change that one thing, nothing else can change. I think change will happen, but reform... perhaps there will be reform, perhaps another way will arise. Perhaps there will be a revolution."*

Because bohemians felt that the highly desirable outcome of systemic political change would likely depend on considerable turmoil, such as a collapse of the economy or violent social unrest, attitudes towards this intermediate chaos were often ambivalent. Others adopted a more idealistic perspective that downplayed the chaos of political transition, and strongly emphasized its benefits:

Qin Zhengzhong: *"In 50 years? Firstly, a democratic party will certainly be in power. Lots of things will be completely different. If we were ruled by a democratic party, and everybody had the right to choose people they really believed in to rule over them, then we could really consider this to be a truly great and strong nation. I also believe at that time, foreign countries would be more willing to respect China, to have real relations, as well as real economic, business and trade connections. Right now, I think lots of countries don't respect China at all."*

This perspective, simultaneously nationalist, cosmopolitan, and dissident, also relates to a further set of developments concerning which bohemians frequently expressed optimistic views – the flourishing of Chinese culture and its international recognition. These attitudes suggest that while both groups were concerned with China's prestige, unlike the elite-students, who tended to see this as depending on the development of China's economic and

[24] The National Flag of the PRC, also known as the Five-star Red Flag, is a symbol of the Chinese communist revolution, representing the unity of the Chinese people under the leadership of the CCP.

military strength under the direction of the Party-State, or the raising up of lower social echelons to the level of civility attained by current elites, bohemians saw the basis of China's future prestige chiefly as a bottom-up social phenomenon, dependent on popular culture unconstrained by elite domination. The widespread sense of shame among bohemians at China's current cultural and political condition was almost entirely absent among the elite students.

In each politically relevant area of elite-student and bohemian worldviews described here – ideological attitudes, trust in social groups, attitudes to social order, China's current problems and future – we see reflected idealistic egalitarian attitudes among bohemians and pragmatic hierarchical attitudes among elite-students that are, respectively, irreconcilable and reconcilable with the authoritarian system.

6.7 Information Environments and Attitudes

Many of the political differences between the two groups addressed thus far relate to their empirical beliefs; one prominent source of such beliefs is engagement with news, broadly defined as information, irrespective of source or media type, concerning current events of perceived public importance. Research suggests that differences in empirical or factual belief are associated with differences in political preferences and participation (Reedy, Wells and Gastil, 2014; Hochschild and Einstein, 2015), and that subcultural groups with divergent political views tend to favor information gathered on social media or through alternative, internet-based news sources (Haller and Holt, 2019; Bhat and Chadha, 2020). This supports the expectation that the two groups compared in this study will diverge in their engagement with news information in a manner that is interdependent with their political divergence. Similarly, their attitudes toward information and its control, a subset of the two groups' political worldviews, also offer insight into how these worldviews are formed and sustained.

6.8 Reliability of News Sources

To evaluate both groups' attitudes towards news sources, I asked participants to rate the reliability of information, from one to five, in the following sources: domestic newspapers, including the official party organ *Renmin Ribao* and the *Nanfang Zhoumo*, a commercial publication from Guangzhou once known for its independence, now largely brought to heel since a 2013 protest by its journalists over censorship (Wong and Buckley, 2013), as well as foreign newspapers; TV news, including China Central Television (CCTV) as well as local and foreign broadcasts; news websites, including official domestic journalistic sites, domestic news aggregators[25] and foreign sites; various forms of news information on social media, including the output of domestic official news sources, domestic 'self-media' (*zi meiti* – 自媒体) such as public accounts on the WeChat platform, and social-media content originating in foreign countries, as well as user-generated social media content, distinguishing between that created by individuals known to the participant and by strangers.

Unsurprisingly, given their education in a journalism and communications department, the elite-student group were more avid consumers of varied news content than the bohemians. They were much more likely to mention and distinguish between the reliability of specific sources of journalistic content not directly addressed in the interview questions, including news outlets such as *Pengpai*[26], *Jiemian*[27], *Caixin*[28] or *Fenghuang Weishi*[29], and foreign sources, many requiring the use of a VPN – typically Anglo-American publications such as the New York Times, Pro Publica, the Financial Times, or the

[25] A popular source of news in China, online aggregators operated by large technology companies such as Baidu, Tencent, Sina and NetEase are permitted to reproduce stories published by heavily regulated official news sources, but are not allowed to produce their own content outside relatively innocuous areas such as entertainment and sport.
[26] *Pengpai* is a Chinese digital newspaper run by the Shanghai United Media Group, known for relative autonomy from state control.
[27] *Jiemian* is a Chinese digital newspaper startup with a focus on tech and business news.
[28] *Caixin* is a Chinese media group known for investigative journalism.
[29] Phoenix Television is a partially state-owned television network; partly based in Hong-Kong, it has a reputation for somewhat more liberal reporting than its mainland counterparts.

Economist, as well as broadcast networks including the BBC, CNN, NBC or Fox. While bohemians were typically much less familiar with the news-media landscape in general, especially foreign-language content, they were more likely to use domestic news aggregators, and many reported using VPNs to access sources with which no elite student reported engagement – Chinese-language Youtube video channels or overseas-hosted news sites with an anti-CCP slant. These include channels from Taiwan, news-aggregator sites with a dissident perspective such as *Aboluo Wang*, and often sources associated with the Falun Gong movement such as the Epoch Times, New Tang Dynasty Television and China Forbidden News. Bohemian engagement with these sources, despite their lack of religious adherence, supports Thornton's contention of 'Falun Gong's extraordinary success at marrying digital organization and information dissemination strategies with an ongoing multimedia "war of position" against the PRC government'. (2010: 232). Some participants – especially bohemians – hesitated to evaluate the reliability of sources of news with which they were unfamiliar. For this reason, the data presented below exhibit an uneven count of responses between different categories of news sources.

Elite students consistently considered all official, Party-State-controlled sources of news information to be more reliable than bohemians did. By contrast, bohemians considered news information accessed through social media – except for content generated by official sources – to be more reliable than elite students did, especially for user-generated content from known individuals. At the same time, elite students tended to see Party-run, official or national-level news sources as more reliable than commercial, independent, or local sources. Bohemian attitudes were almost diametrically opposed. Furthermore, despite their lesser familiarity with them, bohemians considered foreign sources of news information to be more reliable than elite students, who considered both foreign newspapers and websites to be generally less reliable than those in mainland China. Some elite-student participants felt that it was because of the extensive Party-State controls to which these sources were subject, and

their absence in other national contexts, that Chinese publications could be relied upon, because the dissemination of inaccurate information would be prevented or swiftly censored.

Figure 57 presents evaluations of reliability for newspapers; Figure 58 compares elite-student evaluations of domestic and foreign newspapers, because no bohemian reported familiarity with the latter. Figure 59 presents evaluations of reliability for TV news, Figure 60 for news websites, Figure 61 for news on social media, while Figure 62 compares estimations of reliability for news on social media from known and unknown individuals. Figure 63 tabulates summary statistics.

These high evaluations of reliability for official, state-controlled media among elite students accord with patterns observed among the wider population; Liu and Bates note that ‘media credibility ratings in China are much higher than those in America’ (2009: 307). Other research has shown that while high levels of education and internet-use tend to lessen this trust, such ‘demographic and media use factors are only weakly related to people’s trust in state media; however, trust in other social sources, especially government, has a huge impact on trust in state media’ (Xu, 2012: 42). Elite students considered state-controlled media to be reliable because they trust the authorities who exercise that control. Conversely, bohemians, less trusting of their government, considered the media that it controls to be less reliable than foreign or unofficial sources of information. The least reliable form of social media news information in the eyes of bohemians, user-generated content from unknown individuals, received a higher mean reliability score than the *Renmin Ribao*. Moreover, the highest mean reliability score among bohemians was for user-generated content posted by known individuals within their social circles.

However, several elite students, who considered information from official, Party-State controlled media to be highly reliable and accurate, also emphasized that they did not necessarily trust these sources to the same degree. No bohemian made this distinction. Elite students did not exhibit attitudes of blind credulity, nor were they unaware of the restrictions

Figure 57: Reliability of Newspapers

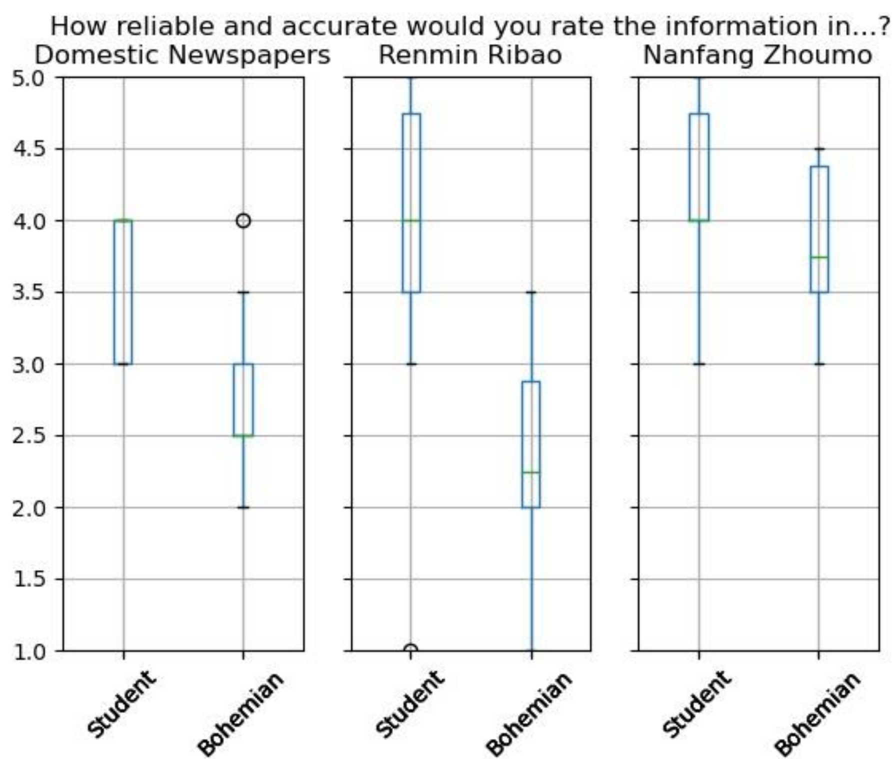


Figure 58: Reliability of Domestic and Foreign Newspapers

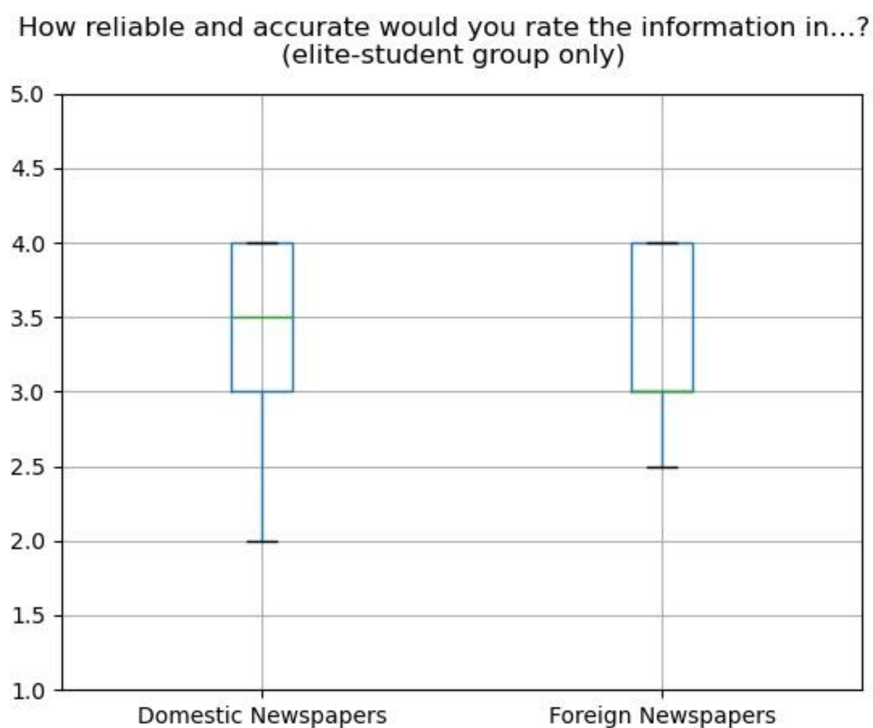


Figure 59: Reliability of TV News

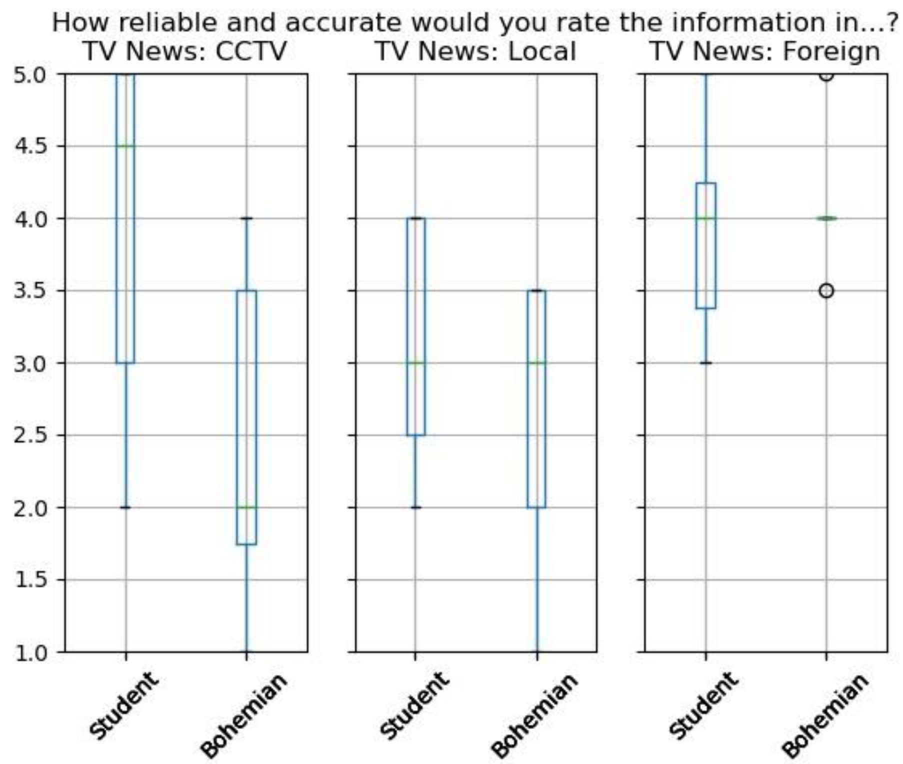


Figure 60: Reliability of News Websites

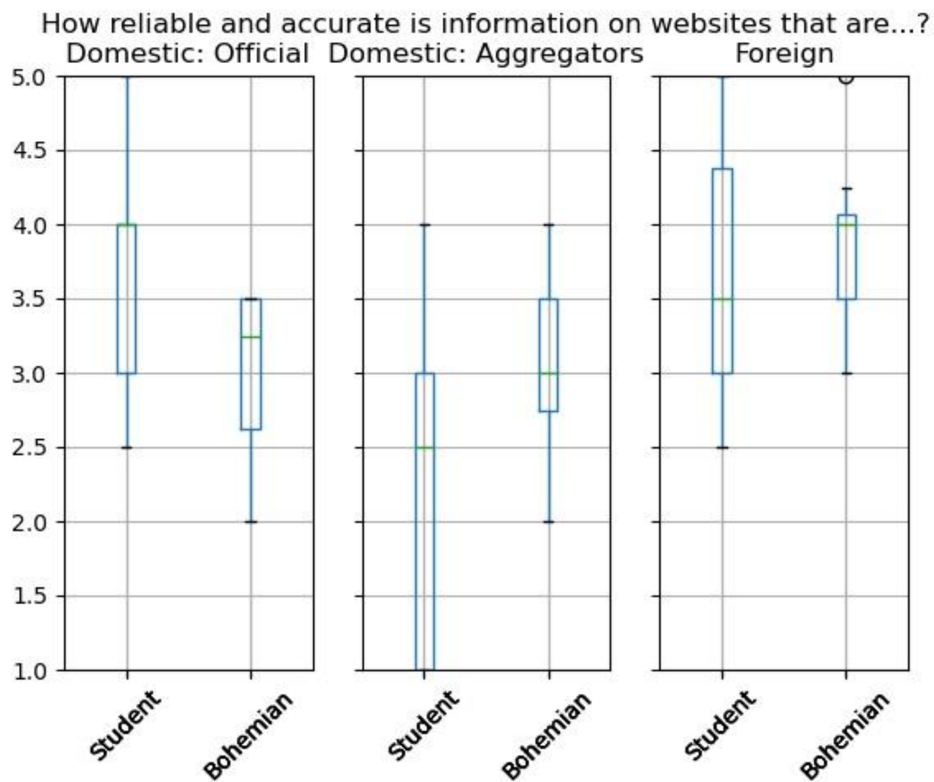


Figure 61: Reliability of News from Social Media

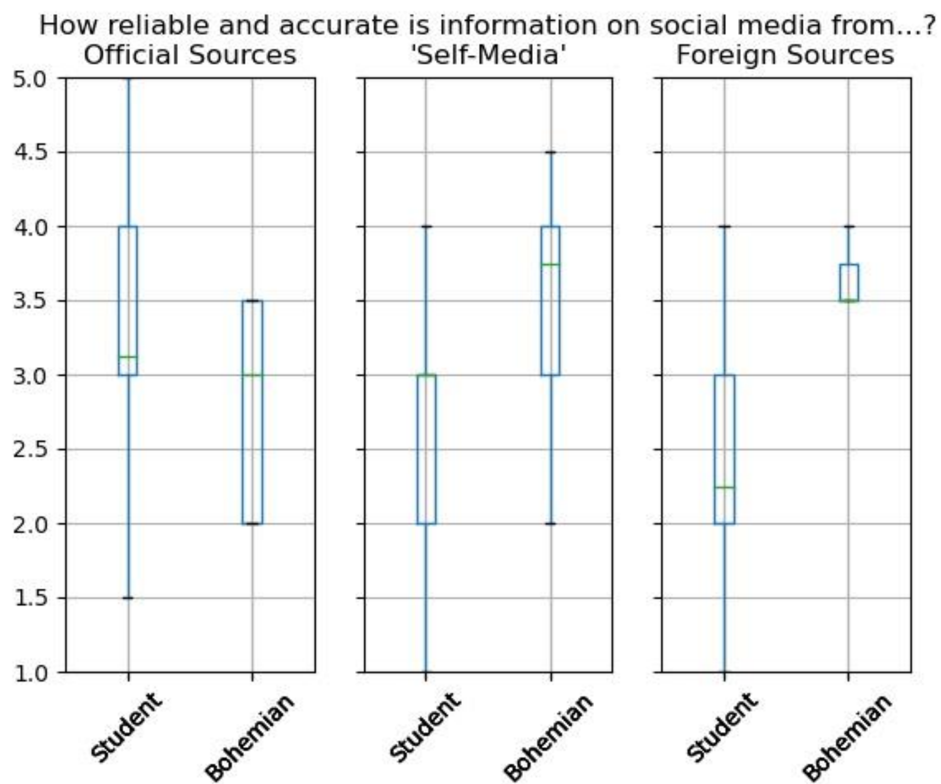


Figure 62: Reliability of News from Known and Unknown Individuals on Social Media

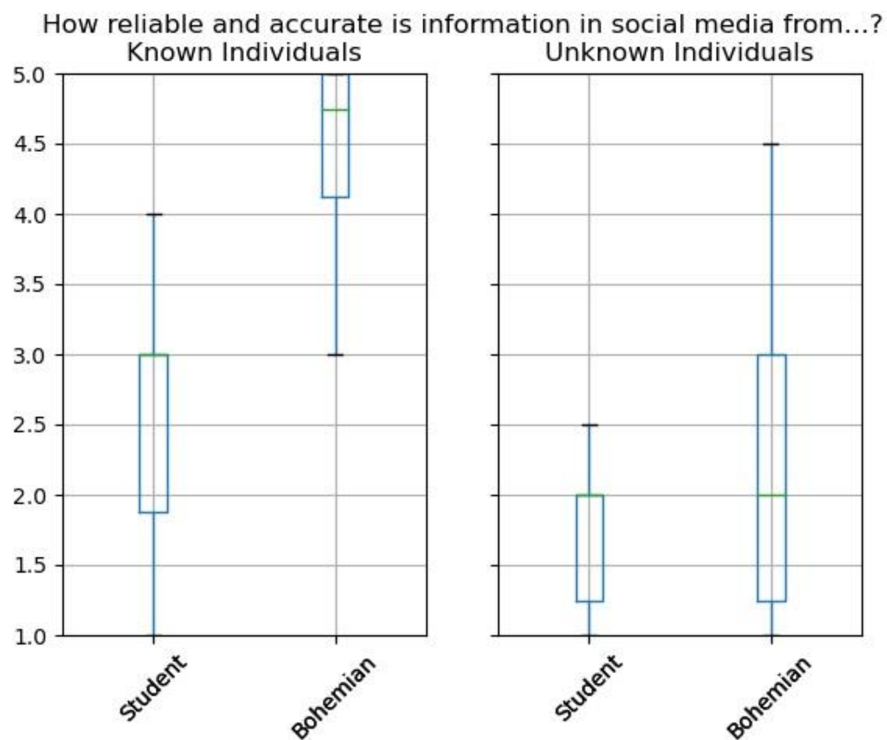


Figure 63: Summary Statistics of News Source Reliability

Information Source		Group	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	25%	50%	75%	Maximum
Newspapers	Domestic Newspapers	Student	16	3.66	0.47	3.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
		Bohemian	9	2.78	0.67	2.00	2.50	2.50	3.00	4.00
	Renmin Ribao	Student	11	3.86	1.19	1.00	3.50	4.00	4.75	5.00
		Bohemian	6	2.33	0.88	1.00	2.00	2.25	2.88	3.50
	Nanfang Zhoumo	Student	11	4.27	0.61	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.75	5.00
		Bohemian	6	3.83	0.61	3.00	3.50	3.75	4.38	4.50
	Foreign Newspapers	Student	13	3.37	0.53	2.50	3.00	3.00	4.00	4.00
		Bohemian	0	~	~	~	~	~	~	~
Television News	TV News: CCTV	Student	16	4.03	1.01	2.00	3.00	4.50	5.00	5.00
		Bohemian	8	2.38	1.16	1.00	1.75	2.00	3.50	4.00
	TV News: Local	Student	9	3.11	0.82	2.00	2.50	3.00	4.00	4.00
		Bohemian	5	2.60	1.08	1.00	2.00	3.00	3.50	3.50
	TV News: Foreign	Student	12	3.92	0.76	3.00	3.38	4.00	4.25	5.00
		Bohemian	7	4.07	0.45	3.50	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00
Websites	Domestic Websites: Official	Student	15	3.68	0.78	2.50	3.00	4.00	4.00	5.00
		Bohemian	6	3.00	0.63	2.00	2.63	3.25	3.50	3.50
	Domestic Websites: Aggregators	Student	15	2.20	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.50	3.00	4.00
		Bohemian	7	3.07	0.67	2.00	2.75	3.00	3.50	4.00
	Foreign Websites	Student	14	3.63	0.85	2.50	3.00	3.50	4.38	5.00
		Bohemian	8	3.91	0.60	3.00	3.50	4.00	4.06	5.00
Social Media	Official Sources	Student	14	3.23	0.95	1.50	3.00	3.13	4.00	5.00
		Bohemian	7	2.79	0.76	2.00	2.00	3.00	3.50	3.50
	'Self-Media'	Student	15	2.53	0.93	1.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	4.00
		Bohemian	8	3.50	0.80	2.00	3.00	3.75	4.00	4.50
	Foreign Sources	Student	10	2.45	0.83	1.00	2.00	2.25	3.00	4.00
		Bohemian	3	3.67	0.29	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.75	4.00
	Known Individuals	Student	12	2.58	1.02	1.00	1.88	3.00	3.00	4.00
		Bohemian	6	4.42	0.80	3.00	4.13	4.75	5.00	5.00
	Unknown Individuals	Student	11	1.73	0.52	1.00	1.25	2.00	2.00	2.50
		Bohemian	7	2.29	1.29	1.00	1.25	2.00	3.00	4.50

imposed by Party-State control, but they generally felt these this seldom resulted in the dissemination of false information. This reflects a more sophisticated understanding of how Party-State media control operates – by suppression rather than fabrication, and through ‘distraction’ and ‘attention management through agenda-setting’ (Chan, 2007: 558). One bohemian, explaining why he gave the *Renmin Ribao* the lowest possible reliability score of one, responded succinctly: *“It’s all fake”*. By contrast, one elite student, who gave the same publication a score of four, felt that *“It’s very boring, and its mostly high-level politics, but if you want to know what’s going on in the Party, it’s a pretty good source”*.

Elite students were of course aware of inherent biases in Chinese state-controlled media, but felt that bias in foreign sources of news, with which they were considerably more engaged than the bohemians, lessened their reliability to a greater extent. For example:

Liang Hong: *“Foreign news sources often have very obvious biases. For example, Bloomberg, they have these conspiracy theories about Chinese politics, especially about Xi*

Jinping[30]*. And Fox News, they vilify (chouhua – 丑化) China, but they love Trump. But CNN makes Trump look stupid. I feel like they're all just working for their economic interest groups."*

Furthermore, elite-students associated reliability with journalistic professionalism, and saw the high levels of Party-State control to which such sources are subject as generally supporting such professionalism:

Yi Qi: *"When you're transmitting to a billion people, you have to guarantee the truthfulness of the news. Because otherwise… Xinwen Lianbo is CCTV, and CCTV's status as Party media will decline. Its degree of trust will be lower. That's why they have to be very careful, to make sure that the news is always reliable, so that most Chinese people always believe them."*

These divergent evaluations of news-information reliability are partly rooted in the differences between the elitist, hierarchical perspective of the orthodox tradition, which supports confidence in credentialled media professionals and central authorities, and the egalitarian perspective of the heterodox tradition, which encourages suspicion of hierarchies and powerful elites, but supports far greater confidence in information conveyed by ordinary Chinese people. However, a more direct influence lies in the congruence between these sets of attitudes to information, and the distinct worldviews of the two groups. Elite students' more positive views of China's social order and the Party-State rendered them comfortable with their sanguine depiction in official media, despite their awareness of the distortions imposed by Party-State control. By contrast, bohemians saw Chinese society as oppressively lawless and unjust, and saw the Party-State as pernicious and predatory. The Panglossian perspectives in state-controlled media were therefore deeply incongruous and dissonant – consequently, they relied upon and attributed reliability to unofficial sources of information on social media or, to a lesser extent, foreign news sources beyond the Party-State's control.

[30] Here the participant refers to a report (Bloomberg, 2012) alleging that close relatives of Xi Jinping have accumulated fortunes of hundreds of millions of dollars, partly through their family connections with China's leader. The publication of this report saw the Bloomberg website blocked in China (Reuters, 2012).

At the same time, for all their awareness of its omissions, their greater engagement with Chinese mass media supported the elite-students' positive disposition towards the political status quo, while their more skeptical attitudes towards information disseminated outside the official system of professional journalism led them to discount the credibility of news with negative implications for CCP rule that is excluded from that system. Bohemians, however, were largely disengaged from the mainstream news media; some were more influenced by the anti-CCP propaganda disseminated by Falun Gong than by the CCP itself. They occupied a quite separate information environment, finding confirmation and reinforcement of their anti-status-quo political perspectives from the unofficial rumors and scandals that they were exposed to within social-media circles.

6.9 Online Anonymity and Freedom of Speech

Interview questions exploring both groups' attitudes towards online anonymity and freedom of speech revealed sharply divergent attitudes. Elite students were considerably more likely to see online anonymity as bad thing. For example:

Yi Qi: *"No, I don't think anonymity is a good thing. Many people can say whatever they want on the internet, and you can't tell who they are. That's why the internet is full of violence and disorder. But people should be responsible for their words."*

Most elite students – though not all – agreed that anonymity from the standpoint of other users was acceptable in certain online spaces. However, only one felt that the Chinese internet users should be able to communicate anonymously from the standpoint of the government. Moreover, elite students were less likely to connect the issue of online anonymity with that of freedom of speech, and several explicitly rejected this association when it was suggested. Bohemians, by contrast, universally supported anonymity from the standpoint of the authorities. Though some took a nuanced view, linking anonymous communication with abusive online behavior, they nonetheless felt that it was rendered necessary by the character of state power:

Shen Yongliang: *"Under a good system, in a good society, you don't need anonymity. If it wasn't illegal to speak up for yourself. But if you want to say, 'I oppose the Communist Party', you have to use a fake name. If it wasn't dangerous to oppose the Communist Party, there would be no need for fake names."*

Unlike their attitudes to anonymity, elite-student and bohemian attitudes to freedom of speech were superficially similar. Most elite students felt that freedom of speech was important, although some expressed this view with reservations. For example:

Zhu Peizhi: *"The things I want to express are all within the country's limits. For myself as an individual, I've never felt that my freedom of speech has been limited at all. So, it's hard for me to say whether freedom of speech is important."*

Moreover, when presented with a range of potentially transgressive communications, elite-students typically felt that freedoms should be curtailed in each case. They frequently endorsed the suppression of communication that impinges negatively on others, such as online harassment, but also tended to define harm to others at the collective rather than the individual level, in terms of social stability. Allied to this perspective was often a paternalistic attitude concerning which elements of society could be trusted to exercise such freedoms responsibly:

Song Liqin: *"I think journalists' freedom of speech is quite important. Because journalists will go and research an issue's actual state of affairs, and they tell everybody the truth of the matter. So, they need the freedom to describe the truth. But ordinary people, lots of them are irrational, they don't understand the issue at all. So, if you give them absolute freedom of speech, you end up with nonsense and lies. They start rumors and get other people stirred up. The consequences are very negative."*

By contrast, bohemians tended to advocate freedom of speech as an almost absolute principle. While almost all elite-students felt that online religious evangelism should be suppressed, no bohemian felt similarly. None felt that communicative freedoms should be curtailed in the interests of social stability, which was often summarily dismissed as a transparently self-interested justification of Party-State control. Bohemians were conscious of harmful ramifications of communicative freedom, such as online abuse, but felt that its costs

were outweighed by its benefits. Though this was often expressed at the level of individual liberty, some bohemians took a more collective view. Song Fa, hailing from an impoverished rural community, offered a perspective that contrasted sharply with paternalistic attitude of many elite students:

Song Fa: *"I think society benefits when its more open. We should know how the government operates, what they're doing. But also, if my home has been demolished, I should have a place to speak. Or if I get ill, and I'm treated badly by the doctor, I could tell other people. Freedom of speech, it's not like you're saying, all these people expressing opinions that don't mean anything. It's about understanding real problems so they can be solved. And it's more important for the working class, because right now they don't have a voice at all."*

6.10 Privacy and Online Surveillance

Both groups expressed concern over the privacy of their online activity, but elite students were considerably more concerned by surveillance by internet companies for commercial purposes and, with only one exception, expressed approving attitudes towards government surveillance. One participant's contrasting attitudes to these two forms of surveillance were typical of the group:

Ren Meihui: *"I think if the government is looking at my private chats … I'm not worried. It doesn't influence me if they look. The government, it's not like these companies just looking to make money, it's tightly controlled. They don't have commercial motives; their motives are about national defense and protecting national security. So, I accept it, even though I can't accept these commercial companies that are entirely about making money."*

All bohemians objected much more strongly to state surveillance and were much more likely to see themselves as among its targets. While some worried that such monitoring could expose their illegal drug consumption, bohemians were chiefly concerned about politically sensitive communication. Among the more moderate perspectives on the topic, which nonetheless reflects the general bohemian perception of the Chinese government as untrustworthy and threatening, was as follows:

Wan Xiaosheng: *"I don't really like surveillance of any kind. But private companies are only about profit, about earning money. They don't influence your personal safety. But government*

surveillance threatens your personal safety. I can't accept it … Because it's not about terrorism – it's about controlling the people, all the people."

6.11 Censorship and Self-Censorship

Attitudes towards and experiences of online censorship and self-censorship differed starkly between the two groups. Elite students were far less likely to have experienced online censorship, and universally denied self-censoring online due to political sensitivity. Bohemians, in contrast, were considerably more likely to have been censored – for some, this experience was entirely routine – and none felt this to be erroneous. Several had experienced the rather more drastic deletion of their social media accounts altogether, due to their tendency to post politically sensitive content. This represents a much more punitive measure than the deletion of a single post, because of the loss of social capital implied by losing one's online contacts. Several had also been detained by the police due to their online communications. Nonetheless, some were keen to present themselves as uncowed by the censorship system:

Thomas Flavel: *"When you see that something you've sent has been censored, do you ever feel scared?"*

Qin Zhengzhong: *"I'm already accustomed to it [laughs]. I'm accustomed to it. Ask me all you want, I'm not going to be afraid of that. [In English:] I've done nothing wrong. I stand for the right."*

However, most bohemian participants were less blasé about the potential ramifications of unfettered online communication and were lent less courage by their own sense of moral righteousness. Most openly admitted to being fearful and engaging in some form of online self-censorship as a result. For example:

Thomas Flavel: *"If your posts are censored regularly, do you feel worried? Do you consider… avoiding sensitive topics?"*

Cui Zhen: *"Yes, of course. Sometimes… do you know 'checking the water meter'? The Chinese government… maybe there is a guy who expresses his political views too drastically,*

and secret people from the government knock on his door, asking to check the water meter. He lets them in, and then they kill him. I worry about that."

Thomas Flavel: *"So have you decided against saying things online, because you were worried about what the government might do?"*

Cui Zhen: *"Yes. Many times. It's dangerous, you know?"*

Here we see how, for that small subset of Chinese people inclined to engage in politically sensitive online communications, self-censorship is imposed coercively, through fear that is amplified by the uncertainty that surrounds the enforcement of sanctions (Stern and O'Brien, 2011). The factual truth of 'control parables' (Stern and Hassid, 2012), such as that related here by Cui Zhen, are largely irrelevant if he and others like him believe those parables to be true and act accordingly. For less courageous or politically committed bohemians, Party-State control resembles, to draw on Link's evocative phrase a 'giant anaconda coiled in an overhead chandelier' (2003), which represses not through movement but by menacing stillness, and an ambiguity concerning what might provoke it to strike. This is quite unlike the communicative experience of elite students, for whom – as for a great many Chinese people – the anaconda is not apparent at all.

Because of their greater propensity for sensitive online communication, bohemians were also more likely than elite students to report taking steps to evade surveillance. Some described elaborate measures, such as employing an unregistered sim card in a feature phone for especially sensitive voice communication, kept separate from their internet-enabled smartphone. Much more commonly, bohemians reported employing evasive language for sensitive terms in their online communications. They reported using coded terminology not just for political communication, but also for that which was otherwise risky – most commonly surrounding the consumption or purchase of cannabis, or other illegal drugs. This points to a further way that the tendency towards political self-censorship in bohemian online communications was magnified. For example, discussing comedic memes featuring Chinese politicians with one participant:

Thomas Flavel: *"I saw this funny meme comparing Xi Jinping and Winnie the Pooh. I can send it to you if you like, but maybe it will be deleted…"*

Zhu Lanfen: *"[Laughs] Don't send it. Probably the police aren't watching my WeChat, but if you send that then they'll look up my chat records and find all the weed on there."*

Zhu Lanfen wasn't entirely serious here, but underlying her attitude is a general bohemian tendency, wherein taking on risk in one area of their lives leads them to manage risk more carefully in others. Those committed to sensitive political activity often make efforts to ensure that their lifestyle is otherwise unimpeachable, under the belief that authorities will take advantage of non-political transgressions to target them for political reasons. Conversely, bohemians engaged in illegal activity often feel that it would be foolhardy to make themselves a target by also engaging in sensitive politics. Fang Xiaobo, who had inadvertently developed some online celebrity when he was involved in an altercation on the street, which was filmed by a bystander and took on a life of its own when uploaded to a streaming site, expressed this perceived trade-off explicitly:

Fang Xiaobo: *"I'm pretty 'gangster' [in English], you know? I like the freedom… to smoke some weed, do some business. So, I can't… You know Cheng An and Shen Yongliang want me to sing these curse-the-Party songs. But I can't… I used to be quite radical, I used to post these things online, but it's too dangerous now that I'm an internet celebrity. You can't be a rebel and a gangster. It's different for Zhou Longwei. I really respect him: he just says whatever he thinks. I call him Zhou Laoda*[31]*, I respect him that much. But you know he doesn't smoke weed? He can't. If he smoked weed just once, they would arrest him straight away. They're watching him, like they're watching me. But I don't want to live like he does."*

Fang Xiaobo's account here also reveals a further dynamic which serves to magnify the tendency towards fear-based self-censorship: the widespread perception that celebrity, reflected in large-scale online followings or otherwise, renders one an especial target of surveillance, and considerably increases the danger associated with sensitive political communication. The selective monitoring of influential or especially sensitive users has long been established in scholarship on Chinese internet control (Yang, 2009; Fu, Chan and Chau, 2013; Custer, 2014).

[31] *Laoda* (老大) is a highly respectful honorific often associated with *heishehui*.

Accordingly, the online censorship system strongly constrains the wider influence of bohemian dissent, even for those who are not cowed in their outspoken views by fear of state sanction, and who – unlike Fang Xiaobo – are willing to live otherwise irreproachable lives to maintain their ability to speak out. High-status bohemian figures like Zhou Longwei – I encountered several others over the course of my fieldwork – can exert a powerful political influence at the local level. This is not a matter of indoctrination, but rather the normalization of dissenting views considered unusual in Chinese society more generally, which thereby become locally orthodox – assumed in a sense that inclines those who disagree to keep such views quiet. This represents an inducement to social self-censorship, albeit in quite the opposite direction to that which characterizes the Chinese communicative environment in general.

Of course, high-status bohemian figures are by no means necessarily dissenters. Even within my field site, other figures with their own spheres of influence adopted more accommodating stances towards the Party-State. However, the combination of China's heterodox cultural tradition and cosmopolitan engagement with global subcultures can allow those who do hold dissenting views to attain extremely high status at the local level and, armed with the oppositional symbolic repertoire of their chosen cultural form, exert a powerfully subversive influence. The potential for such influence, though uncertain and contingent, is nonetheless highly significant in the Chinese context, because among the primary purposes of the sophisticated apparatus of Party-State control over the education system – supported by its control over media and communications more widely – is to shield young Chinese people from such influences. Elite students who remain within the campus walls will never meet anybody like Zhou Longwei.

Like other bohemians who adopt stances of righteous integrity, Zhou Longwei did not admit to deliberately self-censoring his online communications. Nonetheless, he was keenly aware of the surveillance of his online activity, and his inclinations towards sensitive politics obliged him to walk a line in his online communications – one circumscribed by his

comparative celebrity. He reported, for example, abandoning some social-media platforms entirely due to censorship:

Zhou Longwei: *"I used to use Weibo, but my messages were deleted all the time, so I stopped using it. Now I just have the account for <kangju> [a band], which gets deactivated sometimes, but we've always been able to appeal and get it reactivated. The same with Douban, I used to write articles on there, but they were deleted all the time, so I stopped using it."*

On his one remaining domestic social media platform, WeChat, his posts were, in some cases, quite politically sensitive – more so than most bohemian participants, and far more so than any member of the elite-student group. However, the censorship system had already forced Zhou Longwei to abandon public-facing social media platforms, through which his political perspective might have reached an audience commensurate with his celebrity; instead, only around 1,500 close contacts on WeChat were exposed to his online output. This offers important insight into the limits of bohemian influence.

Simply put, the powerful influence that high-status bohemians exert, which for dissidents like Zhou Longwei can be politically potent at the local level, is not scalable. It depends on face-to-face interaction and personal acquaintance. Not only does the strict online surveillance and censorship to which such influential figures are subject preclude the dissemination of such views on public platforms with a wide reach, but their symbolically subversive cultural products are also excluded from mass media – formally so, since a 2018 directive that explicitly banned all depiction of 'subculture' from broadcast and video-streaming media (Sina, 2018). It remained possible at the time of my fieldwork for artists such as Zhou Longwei, whose lyrics are often highly sensitive, to make a living – though, in his own words *'only while we stay small. If we got too popular, we'd be arrested'*. They can tour nationally, with occasional difficulties, and internationally, and can record, produce and distribute their music on an underground basis. Through such efforts they can develop a wider reputation that transcends their network of face-to-face acquaintance. However, their music is effectively the only way in which they can communicate with such a fanbase – and even this

is constrained, because sensitive songs are unlikely to be disseminated through the streaming apps on which young Chinese people chiefly listen to music.

The experience of communicative constraint reported by the elite students was almost unrecognizably different to that reported by bohemians. Elite students were less likely to have experienced censorship, and the two groups differed to an even greater extent in how they subjectively experienced and understood this phenomenon. Those who had been censored felt indignant that their posts had been inappropriately or mistakenly targeted by a censorship system of which they generally approved. In the words of one elite student:

Qian Xiulan: *"I can't remember what I posted, but I think it was mistakenly deleted. I didn't post anything that I think should have been deleted. I could still see the post, but my friends couldn't. Probably I wrote some sensitive word in it by accident."*

Thomas Flavel: *"How did that make you feel?"*

Qian Xiulan: *"I felt very angry."*

Thomas Flavel: *"But didn't you say before that the government should control the internet, for reasons of social stability…"*

Qian Xiulan: *"Of course, some posts need to be deleted, but there was nothing wrong with my post. Deleting it was stupid."*

Here we see the typical attitude to internet censorship among elite students: while necessary and important, the system needs to be improved and refined in such a way as to become more tightly targeted. The implication of their views on the topic – though not explicitly stated – was that highly educated, responsible, and politically reliable individuals such as themselves should not be censored. They also universally denied engaging in fear-based self-censorship. A typically insouciant attitude was expressed by Liang Hong:

Thomas Flavel: *"Have you ever thought, when you're writing a post, "Maybe this is a bit sensitive, I shouldn't send it?"*

Liang Hong: *"Yes, but I would send it anyway … If I sent something sensitive and it got censored, I would feel happy. It's never happened to me, but I would feel like it made me cool."*

Elite students led communicative lives in which fear of the state was almost entirely absent. That such a group should live so comfortably within the system of media and internet control imposed by the Party-State speaks to the tenor of communicative life in China more widely. This group was considerably more typical than the bohemians – if they felt no fear, this offers suggestive evidence that the yoke of Party-State control rests lightly on the shoulders of a great many other young Chinese people like them. It would be wrong to conclude from this, however, that elite students' online communications were entirely unconstrained.

In chapter two, I drew upon academic work suggesting that self-censorship need not depend on fear to occur. Arsène's (2012) study of online self-censorship in China presents the phenomenon as driven chiefly by cultural factors that are specific to that country: a set of framing conventions rooted in ideals of responsibility and civility. Other scholars see online self-censorship as driven by general social factors; Hampton et al. (2017), drawing on the 'spiral of silence' theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1993), suggest that social media induces the self-censorship of political communication by increasing the awareness of others views and heightening social control. Though difficult to empirically distinguish, my research suggests that members of the elite-student group engage in both cultural and social self-censorship.

One cultural factor that inhibited this group's political communication was the hierarchically elitist quality of their worldview. The high levels of trust that elite students placed in central government officials supported an assumption that they knew best. Despite their critical views on specific areas of public policy, they often felt unqualified to discuss systemic political questions. The following comment was typical, though it came from someone who, as an intellectually gifted postgraduate student in the social sciences as well as a member of the CCP, one might think eminently qualified to consider such issues:

Liang Hong: *"I don't think I'm qualified to speak about political problems. I think it's likely there are big problems, but I don't especially understand these things."*

Moreover, many members of this group saw engaging in contentious political discourse as transgressive. This disapprobation was not rooted in formal prohibition, nor indeed in moral judgement. It is not that an elite-student who posts online content critical of the Party-State is a bad person, but they are nonetheless deviating from the ideal of a well-behaved student. This is powerful not least because it is seen as very much as in the interests of the student in question to live up to this apolitical ideal. Parental influence often powerfully reinforces elite-students' perceptions in this regard; De Kloet and Fung have argued that the depoliticization of Chinese youth and their insulation from counter-hegemonic influences is strongly supported by the mutual reinforcement of 'desired subjectivities as promoted by state, school, and family' (2017: 54); numerous elite students mentioned that their parents had admonished them not to post political content online. However, just as potent in sustaining this ideal is the influence of figures of authority within the university, such as the political counsellor that oversees each departmental cohort.

Few elite students expressed antipathy towards their own political counsellor, with whom some were personally close; they are also a source of rewards, as their evaluations of political reliability affect the apportionment of student scholarships, direct admission to graduate school, and CCP membership applications. In general terms, the influence of such authority figures – including students' own family – acts less as a fear-inducing apparatus of control than a mechanism through which an ideal of student behavior is enculturated. This ideal is instrumental, career-oriented, and pragmatically apolitical, valorized less in moral terms than as self-evidently in one's own best interests. Such attitudes would appear apathetic and cynically self-serving in the eyes of bohemians; conversely, bohemians' idealistic attitudes of systemic dissent would appear to elite students as unsophisticatedly naïve and risibly futile.

In addition to these cultural constraints on elite students' online political communications, my research showed that this group also engaged in social self-censorship by tending, to a far greater extent than bohemians, to tailor their online output in line with

their perceptions of the interests and opinions of its audience. WeChat allows for the grouping of contacts under an unlimited number of tags containing any number of contacts. Though sometimes employed simply to navigate a large contact list, tags also enable a group-splitting function, allowing the audience of a given post to be precisely specified, with as much granularity as one designs into one's system of tags. Unlike bohemians, every elite-student reported using tags and splitting the audience of their posts.

The extensive use of such privacy functions among elite students, but not among bohemians, strongly suggests a greater sensitivity to the anticipated responses of their online audience – which also generated a widespread disinclination to post about politics. Yi Yongrui was among the few critics of the Party-State among the elite students. He denied fearful self-censorship, explaining the lack of political posts on his WeChat as follows:

Yi Yongrui: *"I'm not worried about posting sensitive stuff. And I don't worry about what other people think about it, it's just… it's not my style."*

Thomas Flavel: *"In Britain, I feel like some young people often post news and content about politics. But in China, it doesn't seem to be common. Why do you think that is?"*

Yi Yongrui: *"The way I see it, the main reason people post is to get likes from other people, to show off and get other people's admiration and approval. And sending news, that's about your own political viewpoint, and that kind of thing… Chinese people don't really like to discuss it. It's not going to get other people's approval. Even if you send it, people won't even read it. So, people generally won't choose to send it."*

A style, in the sense that Yi Yongrui uses the term, is inherently intersubjective when self-consciously adopted – something which anticipates the way it will be perceived by others. In adopting an online style that precludes the posting of sensitive political content, Yi Yongrui inevitably considered his audience. The style he adopted in his online self-presentation was apolitical because he felt that this would be received more positively. For the most influential member of the elite-student group – who had amassed several hundreds of thousands of followers across three social media platforms during her time as an undergraduate student – this orientation towards audience reaction was more explicit:

Meng Zongying: *"I used to share posts about politics when I was an ordinary internet user, but now I have a lot of attention I don't.*

Thomas Flavel: *"Is that because you're worried that they might be too sensitive?"*

Meng Zongying: *"No, it's not that I'm scared, it's to maintain my fan base."*

Thomas Flavel: *"What do you think your fans' reaction would be?"*

Meng Zongying: *"They would unfollow me. They would probably think… I was meddling in other people's business."*

Here we the self-reinforcing dynamics of social self-censorship: it is not the actual distribution of opinions that constrains political communication, but perceptions of that distribution. Critical views, such as those held by Yi Yongrui, may not be widespread among elite-student groups, but it is telling that one would not know, from his social media output, that he holds them. This points, in turn, to how political, fear-based self-censorship serves to reinforce social self-censorship in China. Perceptions of the non-dominance of dissenting views are reinforced by the absence of high-status role models who publicly express such views. Unlike bohemians, elite students do not encounter such individuals in their offline lives. But nor do they encounter such figures online, because of how the censorship system, and the fear-based self-censorship it induces, is targeted on individuals with large-scale online followings and predispositions towards sensitive politics. For most elite students, even the highly influential among them, culture, celebrity role models, perceived peer-sentiment, and self-interest all combine in channeling their communicative lives in an apolitical direction, whereby state sanction need never be considered or feared. In this sense, they are free.

6.12 Elite-Student and Bohemian Contention

The divergent political worldviews and information environments of the elite-student and bohemian groups generated considerable differences in their contention. By contention, I mean collective actions bringing 'ordinary people into confrontation with opponents, elites, or authorities' (Tarrow, 2011: 7); I follow Liu (2020) in identifying online communication as an important form of such contention in contemporary China. In fact, engagement with critical

online discourse constitutes the only form of contention reported or observed among the elite-student group. Here, the chief difference between the two groups derives not from the extent of this contention, but its form. Elite-student discontents were pragmatically reconcilable with the authoritarian status quo, while bohemian discontents were idealistic – expressed in moral terms that framed the interests of broad swathes of Chinese society as irreconcilably opposed to those of the Party-State and the authoritarian system that sustains it. This difference was also reflected in the groups' distinct political orientations at the global level where, in addition to a cosmopolitan focus on the interests of ethnically Chinese people worldwide, the elite students pragmatically supported the Party-State as the champion of their own interests in the international arena. By contrast, idealistic bohemians saw the international order in moral and emotional terms, feeling ashamed of China's status as an authoritarian nation, and extending their sympathies to subaltern and oppressed peoples, irrespective of ethnicity or locality.

6.13 Online Contention

During interviews with both groups (elite-student N=16, bohemian N=9), I enquired as to whether they had previously engaged in various forms of online political activity; the results are illustrated in Figure 64. Bohemians were more likely to have engaged in every form of online politics, apart from signing online petitions. However, the petitions signed by elite students were overwhelmingly related to issues of perceived racism against Asian Americans in the United States.

Dissemination of humorous material concerning politicians or political issues was universal among the bohemians, though reported by only 62 percent of elite-students. Humorous content concerning political leaders is common on the Chinese internet (Yang, 2009; Han, 2018); Jiang Zemin, in particular, has spawned a host of comic memes that are collectively referred to, in an allusion to his appearance, as 'toad worship' (*moha* – 膜蛤) culture. Content of this kind is light-hearted, and sufficiently common as to not be considered sensitive. Nonetheless, a considerable minority of elite-students reported never engaging with

Figure 64: Proportions Reporting Participation in Various Forms of Online Politics

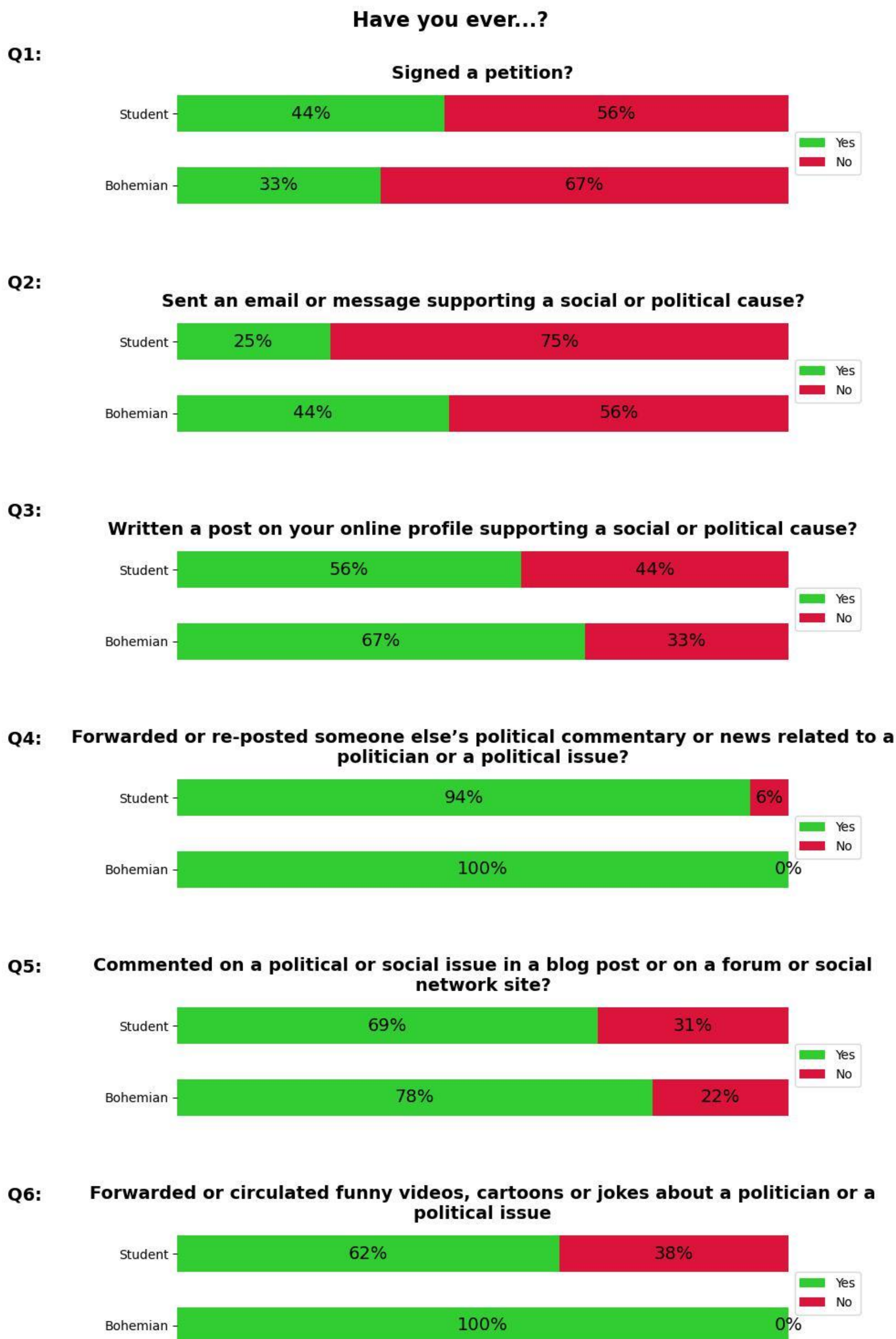


Figure 65: Detail from Elite-Student WeChat Post

comic political content; among those who had, these posts were more likely to be concerned with foreign leaders, such as Barak Obama, Donald Trump or Angela Merkel, than with the Chinese leaders on which bohemian humorous content was focused. This reflects elite students' greater engagement with international news, but also their greater immersion in a field of state-controlled national and public discourse in China where domestic leaders are accorded respect. Consider one elite-student WeChat post, detail of which is presented in Figure 65. The participant writes in commentary:

'I've seen The Economist slander China for three weeks in a row. This week they've slandered Papa Xi [xidada – 习大大][32] again. This is unbearable. It's [expletive] fictitious. How can they give Papa Xi such an ugly plateau red [gaoyuanhong – 高原红][33] face?'

In this post we see the 'interweaving of nationalism and cosmopolitanism' that Tyfield and Urry (2010: 279) argue is typical in China. Its author emphasizes her foreign travel through a picture taken while abroad – The Economist website is censored in China, and it is not distributed in the paper form she has photographed here – while reasserting her

[32] This affectionate nickname for Xi Jinping has been extensively promoted in state media (Hatton, 2015; SCMP, 2016).

[33] A ruddy complexion stereotypically associated with the Tibetan people.

nationalism in a form in which China's prestige is inextricable from that of the authoritarian Party-State that rules it, as well as that of the regime's leader. This nationalist cosmopolitanism is reflected in other examples of elite students' outward-directed online contention.

One participant reported signing a petition, on the US White House survey platform, We the People, in support of the Chinese-American police officer Peter Liang, who was convicted of the manslaughter, later downgraded to criminally negligent homicide, of Akai Gurley, an unarmed black man. This event led to protests in New York, both from the Black Lives Matter movement, and from the local Chinese-American community, who saw his prosecution as racially motivated. This partly reflects how the online contention of cosmopolitan youth is indirectly diverted outwards by domestic Chinese internet control; equivalent petition platforms are not permitted in China and, while much of the online mobilization on this issue among the Chinese-American community occurred on WeChat, 'very few of the WeChat posts were censored' (Chen, Mao and Qiu, 2018: 88), quite unlike outcomes for equivalent events in China (King, Pan and Roberts, 2013). However, elite-student support for Peter Liang indicates a rather more cosmopolitan attitude than that of a typical Chinese nationalist, extending solidarity globally along ethnic lines; this also contrasts with the cosmopolitan attitudes of bohemians, who would be much more likely to sympathize with the victim of a police shooting than its perpetrator, irrespective of ethnicity.

Elite-student engagement with the 2017 United Express scandal, which involved the forced removal of an Asian-American passenger from an airplane, also reflects this global ethnic solidarity. This incident was the focus of almost all other reported petition signings among elite students – also on We the People – as well as numerous WeChat posts, including that from which Figure 66 was drawn; it also generated the elite-student social-media keyword, 'overbooking' – the airline's stated reason for the forced removal. Although the passenger in question, Dr. David Dao, had some Chinese heritage and was described as Chinese-American in many early press reports in China, he was of Vietnamese origin, as elite

Figure 66: Elite-Student Reposted Image Concerning the United Express Flight 3411 Incident

students were aware. In the extent of their online engagement surrounding this event, we therefore see elite students' cosmopolitanism reflected in a different way – their engagement with discourses of race in, especially, American media, where different Asian identities are typically conflated, and their concern with how they might themselves be treated in that country. It also suggests the importance for this group of their identity as members of an internationally mobile elite, with which the perceived racism underlying the treatment of the victim in this incident sharply conflicted.

In comparison with such examples of outward-focused, ethno-nationalist-tinged contention, domestic online political contention among this group was focused on two main areas – feminism, and issues affecting LGBT communities. Feminist online contention

Figure 67: Student-Posted Image of an Anti-Sexual Harassment Protest

resulted in the elite-student social-media keywords of 女权主义 (*nüquanzhuyi* – feminism) and 女权主义者 (*nüquanzhuyizhe* – feminist), deriving from numerous posts on the topic such as that from which Figure 67 is drawn. Though Chinese feminist activism is sometimes globally articulated, as in the limited intrusion of the #MeToo movement into the country discussed in the next chapter, it is not inherently cosmopolitan; communist China made substantial, early steps in the move towards gender equality. Nonetheless, the historical Confucian tradition placed women in a subordinate position. In a system both patriarchal and filial: 'men officially dominated women; the old dominated the young' (Stacey, 1983: 31). Accordingly, even when internally focused, critical feminist content in elite students' online output often implied an external, cosmopolitan perspective. Consider the following passage from an article on feminism widely shared among this group:

'Vulgar topics about women are also discussed among British boys, but not in the presence of female friends … In China … we are still at the stage where a group of educated people enjoy themselves making dirty jokes in front of the girls at the dinner table and are proud of making them blush.'

Feminist critique of Chinese culture does not necessarily imply opposition to elitist hierarchies rooted in the Confucian tradition; note the use of the word 'educated' in the above quotation. Rather, here we see a cosmopolitan perspective, itself a marker of elite status, leveraged in rhetorical reconfiguration of Chinese cultural hierarchies, under which women have traditionally been subordinated. This is possible because of the Party-State's own rhetorical commitment to gender equality, in which 'Communist party leaders measured women's liberation under socialism as an indication of their own contribution to historical progress' (Rofel, 2007: 66-7). While depictions of feminism as 'foreign' have played some role in Party-State critique of feminist activism (Fincher, 2018), feminists remain free to draw on cosmopolitan legitimation, even in critique of Chinese cultural tradition, because the Party-State's own commitment to gender equality shields them from nationalist accusations of disloyalty. LGBT activism is not equivalently shielded.

Numerous elite students evinced an interest in LGBT issues, and reported having signed petitions, sent messages, written posts or forwarded posts on such topics. Such advocacy is reasonably sensitive in China, where depictions of 'effeminate men' and 'abnormal aesthetics' have recently been banned from television (Gao, 2021), while regulations issued in 2016 banned depictions of homosexuality on television and streaming media (Ellis-Petersen, 2016). In China, non-normative sexuality is frequently approached through a cosmopolitan lens; elite students tended to employ the English acronym 'LGBT' – a statistically significant keyword beyond the top the 100 in this group's social media output – as well as terms such as 'gay' and 'bi'. Rofel has argued for the powerful if disputed influence in China of 'transcultural gay identifications', under which 'the models of what it means to be gay emanate from outside China' (2007: 94, 110). This cosmopolitan association has also left LGBT communities open to accusations of subjection to decadent foreign influences. Accordingly, elite-student contentious discourse surrounding such issues tended to rely less on cosmopolitan legitimations than on framings of LGBT rights as consistent with both Chinese tradition and socialist ideology. This is reflected, for example, in an elite-

student-posted article concerning a homophobic banner held up by students at a local university:

'It is completely wrong for the slogan to oppose homosexuality to the traditional ethics of the Chinese nation ... The traditional Chinese ethics did not take such activities as a crime, but rather tolerated them ... The slogan that pits homosexuality against socialist core values is also completely wrong ... It is even more baffling that the slogan equates homosexuality with corrupt Western thinking ... It stands to reason that some ideas in the West are "rotten", but they certainly do not include the idea of equal rights for homosexuals.'

In both feminist and LGBT online contention among elite students, we do not see a significant rupture between their values and those of the hierarchical Confucian tradition in its contemporary form. The prevalence of tolerant attitudes on LGBT issues at Liangshan University was frequently depicted by elite students as rooted in an openness that could only be found at elite institutions. Rather, in this contention, elite-students defended their position as elite, by renegotiating a value hierarchy that threatened to render them subordinate. When evoking cosmopolitanism in feminist critiques of Chinese culture, these individuals engaged in a strategy of legitimation within a contemporary Confucianism-influenced hierarchy where cosmopolitanism has cachet as a form of refinement. Conversely, when downplaying the cosmopolitanism of LGBT lifestyles but emphasizing their coherence with traditional culture and socialist ideology, a similar legitimation is sought using different tactics that are suited to the distinct discursive landscape surrounding these issues. Their cosmopolitanism does not itself drive their engagement in such contentious discourse, but rather fundamental interests that derive from elements of their identity which are more-or-less irreducible. For female participants, or those with non-normative sexual or gender identities, these elements of identity cut across their elite status, and potentially call it into question. Because almost every member of the elite-student group fell into one or more of these categories, their contention on feminist and LGBT issues can be seen as pragmatically focused on those issues which concern them most directly, even though such features of identity are socially cross-cutting. Such contention remains compatible with the authoritarian status quo in principle, if not perhaps in practice.

While not every bohemian was involved in explicitly contentious online discourse, even for those who were not, the hallmarks of a dystopian worldview are clear. One such post was comprised of a series of images captioned *'This is life in Liangshan. [English expletive]!'*, evincing a sense of moral turpitude and urban decay. Several of these images captured the horrific aftermath of local street violence; these cannot be reproduced for reasons of de-identification, because this incident gained national notoriety. Other images in the series show concurrent local incidents: an accident involving construction equipment in Figure 68; dockless hire bikes abandoned in a body of water in Figure 69. This post reflects bohemians' greater focus on the local urban environment, in which elite students evinced little interest, as well as an idealistic critical perspective. Consider this exchange in the comments to this post:

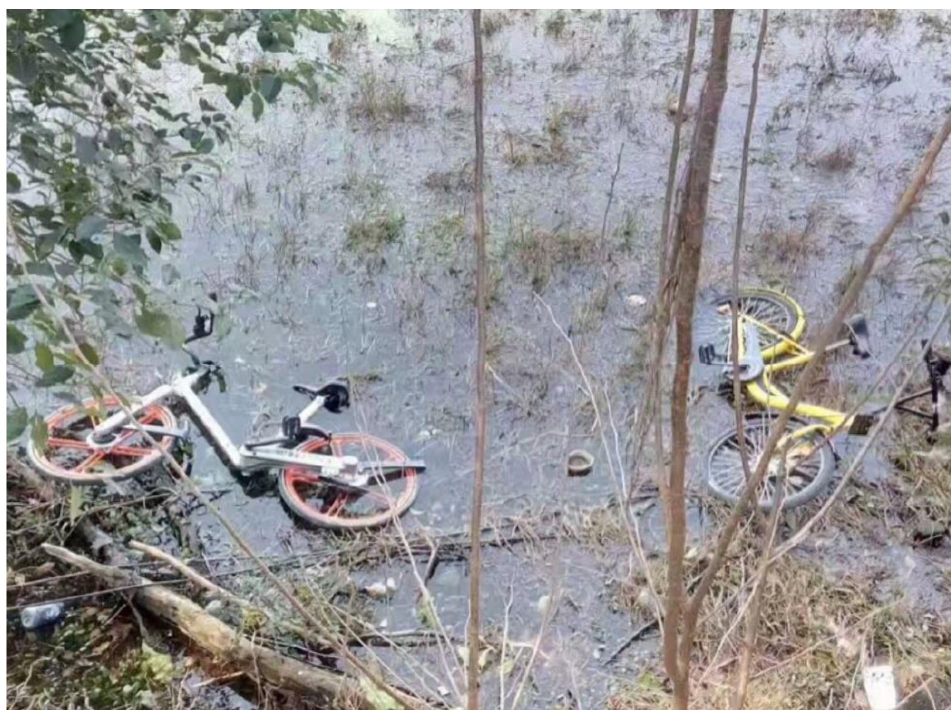
Fang Xiaobo: *'The pressure is too great'*
Zhu Lanfen, Reply to **Fang Xiaobo:** *'The pressure that society gives is too great.'*

Here we see, even for a depoliticized bohemian such as Zhu Lanfen, an attribution of local problems to structural or systemic conditions. Similarly with other more explicit forms of online contention among bohemians, even when focused on local incidents, general causes and principles are inferred. Bohemians reported engaging in online politics concerning incidents of forcible eviction-and-demolition, deaths in Chinese prisons, environmentally hazardous industrial developments – in each case, not issues that affected them personally, but with which their concern was idealistic and generalized. This tendency was also reflected in online contention concerning police misconduct, particularly surrounding the death of Lei Yang.

Lei Yang died in the custody of Beijing police in May 2016, having been detained on suspicion of soliciting prostitution. The police initially denied responsibility, leading to accusations of a cover-up. Following online attention to the case, five police officers were found to have fabricated facts and attempted to obstruct the investigation, though none were prosecuted. This case attracted widespread attention among bohemians, as did subsequent

Figure 68: Image from Bohemian WeChat Post

Figure 69: Image from Bohemian WeChat Post



developments concerning the investigation. From an article shared on WeChat shortly after the incident:

'Regardless of whether the "autopsy" report is true or false, we all know that the young man Lei Yang was killed by the Beijing Changping police illegally! ... They should immediately apologize to Lei Yang's family members and apologize to the public, to seek forgiveness!'

For bohemians, this case reflected a much wider pattern in China, reflected in several other posts concerning different examples of police brutality. Here, we see the idealistic and diffuse anti-systemic character of this concern:

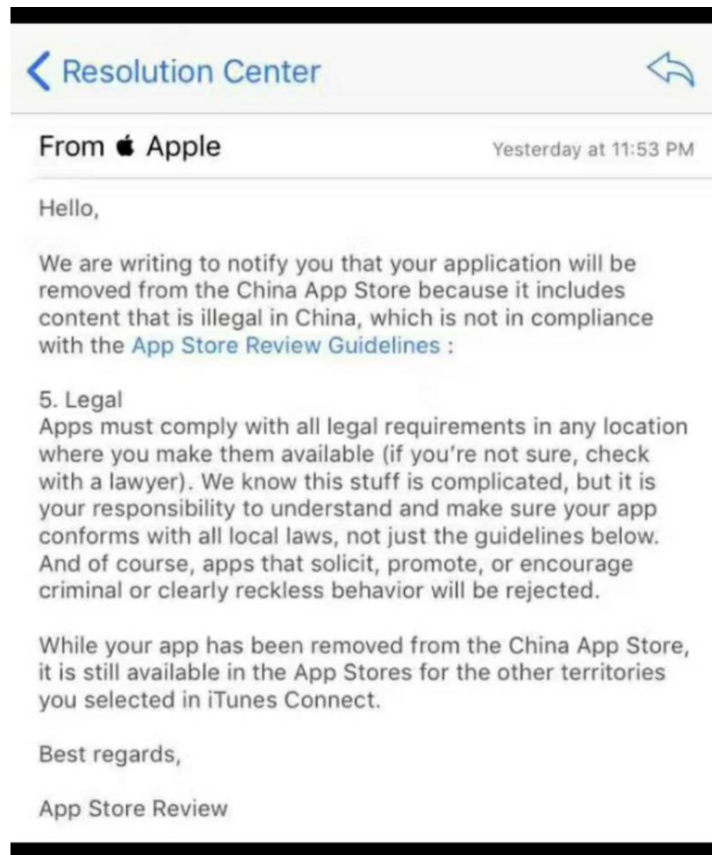
'Coercive measures taken by the police are restricted by law, not unrestricted arbitrary measures. If the power of the police and the implementation of coercive measures are not limited, then this country will not be a country ruled by law, but a police state, and even the king will be afraid.'

A further set of specific contentious issues that cropped up repeatedly in bohemians' online output concerned censorship and cultural control. Figure 70, for example, shows a screen capture of a message received by a popular VPN operator, indicating the removal of their app from Apple's Chinese app store. More explicit idealistic and diffuse anti-system critique is evident in an article posted to WeChat concerning cultural censorship:

'The CCP does not want any works of modern civilization with the spirit of freedom and democracy to affect the Chinese people. It only wants to make China an environment of pure party culture'

Other examples of bohemian anti-system online contention were symbolic, rather than explicit, as in content pertaining to the 1989 Tiananmen protests. Several participants reported signing online surveys, as well as forwarding and authoring posts, on this topic; one had his account closed on Sina Weibo for this reason. Contention related to this topic was especially prominent on the anniversary of the crackdown, when bohemians often gathered in remembrance. Figure 71, from an image posted to WeChat of such a gathering, shows how the date of this anniversary – 6.4 in Chinese convention – serves as a none-too-subtle signifier of dissenting views.

Figure 70: Image from Bohemian WeChat Post



Resolution Center

From Apple Yesterday at 11:53 PM

Hello,

We are writing to notify you that your application will be removed from the China App Store because it includes content that is illegal in China, which is not in compliance with the App Store Review Guidelines :

5. Legal
Apps must comply with all legal requirements in any location where you make them available (if you're not sure, check with a lawyer). We know this stuff is complicated, but it is your responsibility to understand and make sure your app conforms with all local laws, not just the guidelines below. And of course, apps that solicit, promote, or encourage criminal or clearly reckless behavior will be rejected.

While your app has been removed from the China App Store, it is still available in the App Stores for the other territories you selected in iTunes Connect.

Best regards,

App Store Review

Figure 71: Image Detail from Bohemian WeChat Post

The most outspoken bohemians, however, saw no need to for symbolism in conveying their anti-system contention. Consider the following passage from an article posted to WeChat:

‘I would like to propose to the National People's Congress as a citizen that the two crimes of "subversion” and “incitement to subvert state power" in the Criminal Law shall be abolished, to protect citizens' right to participate in political affairs, the right to criticize and supervise, the right to freedom of speech, and the right to assembly.’

Bohemian contention did not lack an international dimension, but this tended to leverage foreign media content or institutions as a critique of conditions within China. Here we see a certain degree of integration between bohemian contentious discourse and a universalist, human-rights-based perspective that is common in certain strains of Chinese anti-system dissent such as the rights-defense (*weiquan* – 维权) legal movement (He and Su, 2018), itself characterized by links with international organizations advocating on similar principles (Nesossi, 2015). Figure 72, for example, was posted with an obscenely punning caption: *‘On world Human Rights Day (ri – 日), China fucks (ri – 日) human rights’.* Similarly, Figure 73 also deploys a screen capture of foreign media to highlight an issue excluded from Chinese mass media – the illness of the dissident and human-rights activist Liu Xiaobo, who was released from prison shortly before his death.

The post shown in Figure 74 is especially telling – a screen capture from the White House survey platform, We the People, with which many elite students also engaged. However, while elite students employed this platform exclusively for contention related to affairs in the United States, here we see it deployed in domestic Chinese contention. Wukan is a village in the east of Guangdong province from which, in 2011, residents expelled local officials to protest their sale of village land to real-estate developers, without compensating the villagers. Besieged by police, a détente was reached, resulting in some concessions. Accusations of continued corruption in 2016 resulted in another uprising which was more swiftly suppressed; the petition concerns this later incident. Engagement with this

Figure 72: Image from Bohemian WeChat Post

What happened to China's arrested rights lawyers?

6 hours ago

Human Rights Day is observed every year on 10 December

But in China, it's proving a sensitive anniversary as experts from the UN demand answers from the government about the recent disappearance of a well-known human rights lawyer.

Jiang Tianyong went missing three weeks ago after attempting to investigate the detention of a colleague.

Human rights groups fear that Mr Jiang himself may now have been detained.

Our China editor Carrie Gracie has this update on Beijing's sweeping crackdown on its human rights lawyers.

Figure 73: Image from Bohemian WeChat Post

Liu Xiaobo: China frees jailed dissident after cancer diagnosis

14 mins ago | China

Chinese Nobel peace laureate Liu Xiaobo has been released from prison on compassionate grounds after being diagnosed with terminal liver cancer.

Figure 74: Image from Bohemian WeChat Post

geographically distant local issue reflects the idealistic character of bohemian contention, but also its cosmopolitan quality, given the use of an overseas petition platform, and the caption to this post: *'This is a punk city, Wukan!'*

Among bohemians, including those with little interest in politics, an interest in traditional cultures and indigenous religious practices was widespread, encompassing Chinese ethnic minority groups and foreign peoples. Figure 75, for example, depicts Tibetan prayer wheels, from a post about the poetry of the 6th Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso. Much of this engagement was focused on shamanic practices throughout Asia and the Americas: Figure 76 shows an example from the Kulung people of Nepal; Figure 77 from the Inuit of Alaska; Figure 78 shows a contemporary Ayahuasca ceremony from the indigenous Amazonian tradition. However, this engagement with traditional or indigenous cultures also underlay a prominent case in which bohemian online contention pertained purely to overseas affairs. Figure 79 shows an image from a widely shared article concerning the protests in the US

Figure 75: Image from Bohemian-Shared Article on WeChat

Figure 76: Image from Bohemian-Shared Article on WeChat

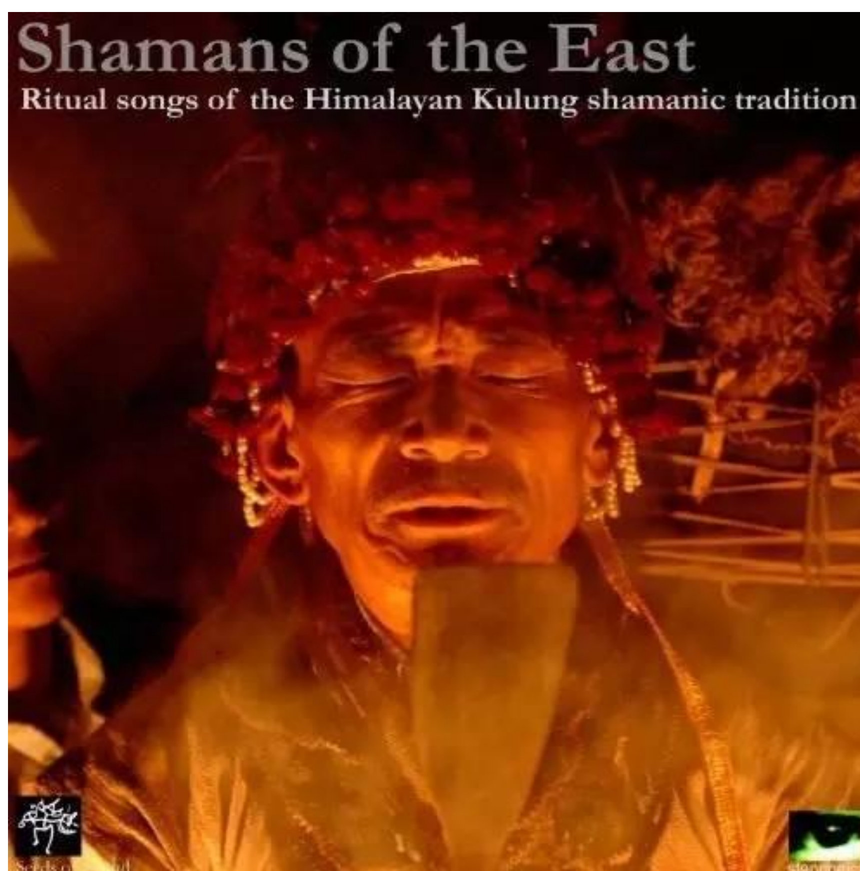


Figure 77: Image from Bohemian-Shared Article on WeChat

Figure 78: Image from Bohemian-Shared Article on WeChat

Figure 79: Image from Bohemian-Shared Article on WeChat

against the Dakota Access Pipeline, led chiefly by members of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, which were ongoing during my fieldwork period.

The article moves beyond the protests themselves to introduce the history of oppression to which Native Americans have been subject. Noting the involvement of a Chinese state bank in the funding for the pipeline, the author argues for the universality of the issue: *'This is an issue that is closely related to each of us.'* More implicitly, a domestic political point is made. In evoking sympathy with the Standing Rock Sioux among his Chinese readers, he also invites them to draw comparisons in the opposite direction, to see in this tribe something about their own situation. He calls on them to:

'Take a look at the world outside the Great Firewall, at this flesh and blood world that is not measured by economic statistics… Wake up, put aside the concepts of "you" and "us" that divide each other, and become a citizen of the world. One day, we will be fed up with these political lies, these lies that try to divide us and make us fall into absurd hatred against another group for no apparent reason.'

Here we see that bohemians' idealistic political worldview, which serves domestically to generate support for protests by oppressed groups throughout China, is extended through their heterodox cosmopolitanism in support of subaltern groups globally. However, the popularity of this article also reflects a bohemian tendency to borrow symbolic resources from global subaltern groups to articulate their own locally subordinate position. We see this in the text which one bohemian participant appended to this article on their WeChat profile – *'Stand up, people who refuse to be slaves'*. Politically irreproachable – this is the first line of the PRC national anthem – it nonetheless retains a subversive ambiguity that, in the context of this individual's persistently dissident online output, parallels the oppression of Native American and contemporary Chinese people.

6.14 Offline Contention

Little evidence of offline contention was discerned among the elite-student group, with only one possible exception. One elite student reported participating in an informal group within the university, involving both academics and students, centered on discussion of

issues in gender and queer studies. Formal LGBT organizations are not permitted in Chinese universities; in most less-permissive institutions, this group would have been prohibited. Its activities were tolerated – and monitored – by university authorities. Despite its potential sensitivity, given its semi-official status and purely academic focus, participation in its activities can hardly be described as contentious. I depict two examples of bohemian offline contention in de-identified form: a nascent and swiftly suppressed trans-group protest, and a longer-term experiment in collective social life and political activism. Though dissimilar, both reflect the idealistic character of bohemian politics.

To the south of the district where both Liangshan University and the epicenter of the city's bohemian cultural scene are located, rises a small, solitary mountain that assumes an outsized symbolic significance for the city's residents. Mount Liang is densely forested and quite steep in places; the outward expansion of the city in recent decades has passed it by, in favor of the flatter land that surrounds it, leaving it a rural idyl surrounded by suburban sprawl. This incongruous situation is not uncommon in China. The expansion of a city involves the conversion of land from rural to urban status which, when it proceeds haphazardly, results in 'villages-in-the-city' and associated socio-spatial inequalities (Chung, 2010, 2013). The original residents of these villages remain tied to land that, legally rural, is collectively or state-owned and cannot be sold or converted to non-agricultural uses, while lacking the rights and entitlements of urban residents. Proximity to the surrounding urban area allows some residents to rent their property to those willing to commute, though the absence of a commercial market for rural property ensures that rents are low. Bohemian association with villages-in-the-city on Mount Liang stems from this residential market. Cheap rents are highly appealing to impoverished musicians and others working for little remuneration in the nearby scene; village life also provides opportunities for loud rehearsals and social gatherings that would be excessively disruptive in dense urban areas.

Rural populations in China have little recourse when their property is targeted for redevelopment – which can be highly profitable at the fringes of urban areas. This process

represents an important source of income for local governments, as well as for corrupt officials personally, and often involves considerable state violence against rural residents (Hsing, 2010; Sargeson, 2013). Accordingly, 'the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city becomes the battlefield on which villagers defend their immediate rights and livelihoods' (Chung, 2013: 2463).

Some years before my fieldwork, the city government announced a plan to incorporate a large section of Mount Liang for redevelopment. The centerpiece of this plan was Liangshan Scenic Area – a large, enclosed, ticketed nature park, as well as several associated hotel, leisure, and shopping complexes. Yangying, the village on the mountain where most bohemians lived, was not to be redeveloped; it remained a village-in-the-city at the time of my fieldwork. In villages that were slated for redevelopment, the response was furious – the offered compensation for their property was desultory. However, following menacing visits from *heishehui* enforcers, on behalf of the local government, and some violent incidents, this opposition took on a more furtive character.

At the core of the protest that emerged were those rural residents who were most directly affected. However, it was the bohemian presence in Yangying that breached the compartmentalization of these protests by mobilizing groups throughout the city, including large numbers of university students. The symbolic significance of Mount Liang, as the namesake of the city, served to frame the protests as involving the common interest of all its residents. An environmentalist framing was also important, especially among bohemians who had long taken to the wild forested areas for social gatherings. A further factor was the rumored illegality of the development – pursued without public consultation, environmental impact assessments or central-government permission. This allowed for a powerful mobilizing frame that pointed to the injustice of local officials arbitrarily expropriating a poor rural community without meaningful compensation, in the interests of corrupt self-enrichment and shadowy financial interests.

Once mobilization surrounding the planned redevelopment moved into wider groups beyond the directly affected villages, it inevitably took on an online dimension, which may have been what brought it to the attention of authorities. After an initial 'stroll[34]' through the area planned for redevelopment, involving small numbers of villagers, bohemians, and students, a much larger event was planned for the following weekend. Before this could happen, the authorities acted. Within local universities, political counsellors made it clear that students participating in the planned protest would face severe sanctions. Numerous organizers were visited by police for questioning, and to warn them against continuing the protest. Consider one bohemian's account of this visit:

"I pretended that I didn't know what they were talking about, but they had all the text of my emails, online messages, even SMS messages with people who were organizing the thing. They already knew everything."

These warnings were effective, especially among students; the planned stroll was called off. The wider movement petered out, villages were demolished, and Liangshan Scenic Area was enclosed. This abortive mobilization nonetheless reveals a bohemian tendency towards trans-group, compartmentalization-breaching contention – here facilitated both by their structural position in connecting affected rural communities with wider student groups, as well as their idealistic politics that helped to generate powerful mobilizing frames that facilitated this trans-group connection. The same attribute was also reflected in a less explicitly contentious, yet nonetheless subversive, example of offline bohemian collective action – the village-in-the-city commune.

Liangshan's village-in-the-city commune was established, in Yangying on the slopes of Mount Liang, by an individual who appears in bohemian social-media keywords as <mao fan>. It was modelled directly after Eastern European anarcho-punk squat communities; squatting is not viable in China, yet Yangying's cheap rents allowed Mao Fan – highly educated, with a successful career – to rent a large property and provide free lodging on an

[34] Going for a 'stroll' is a common form of collective action in China that, because it does not involve obvious signs of protest such as banners, is less risky for participants, retaining a degree of deniability.

equivalent basis. Though this community was unusual for China, Corlin has documented a broadly similar case of a socially engaged art commune in rural Anhui, reflecting a 'utopian ideal of an alternative way of life far away from Chinese society and authorities' (Corlin, 2020: 1); in my own fieldwork I encountered a similar community in rural Yunnan based around the psytrance subculture, and learned of another in a remote rural area, also connected with Liangshan's punk scene. Each of these cases echoes the movement of members of the US counterculture of the 1960s to rural communes, which 'were not aimed at cultural confrontation, but simply were a turning away to build a new society apart from the old' (Miller, 2011: xviii).

Nonetheless, the village-in-the-city commune remained contentious because of its interface with Liangshan's broader bohemian scene, with activist and dissident groups and, to a lesser extent, elements of the city's student, academic and intellectual communities – as well as networks that extended globally through the punk subculture. The space served as a conduit through which radical ideas, especially those associated with anarchism and the alter-globalization[35] movement, were introduced to young bohemians who participated in the social life of the commune. Regular discussion workshops and documentary screenings were held on a wide range of political and social topics; the commune also maintained a library of zines and pamphlets, in Chinese as well as various European languages, many of which had a radically political slant. In addition, the commune's members organized volunteer work to improve shared spaces in the local village, solidifying links between commune members and the surrounding rural community.

As a site beyond the purview of the Party-State, in which radical political ideas were discussed and disseminated to local youth, and in which a model of collective living quite unlike the competitive materialism of mainstream society was pursued, this community was remarkable in the Chinese context. Here we may see evoked the reconfiguration of dominant

[35] Referred to as 'alter' globalization to emphasize its distance from nationalist or protectionist opposition to globalization.

hierarchies inherent to the heterodox cultural tradition, but simultaneously, a cosmopolitan interconnection in this subcultural community that allowed the effective yet surreptitious flow of foreign ideas and perspectives, while facilitating political interest-aggregation at the global level. As Dunn writes of the networks that comprise the global DIY punk subculture: ‘these informal and independent flows and horizontal networks are significant sites of what some scholars call counter-hegemony. The mere existence of alternative, uncontrolled flows and networks can represent a challenge to … state power’ (Dunn, 2016: 98).

The village-in-the-city commune proved too radical; its workshop and activist activity had ceased prior to my fieldwork, following Mao Fan’s brief detention by the police. Faced with a large increase in rent, the community closed early in my fieldwork period. However, over the years of its operation, it contributed considerably to the politicization of Liangshan’s bohemian scene, well beyond its large number of former residents. Mao Fan himself, whose locally high status and prestige derived in part from the selfless contribution to the scene implied by his maintenance of this communal resource, exerted a wide and powerfully subversive influence akin to that of Zhou Longwei.

6.15 Conclusion: Elite-Student and Bohemian Politics

The elite-student and bohemian groups diverged sharply in their political worldviews, information environments and attitudes to information control, and dispositions towards contentious political action, whether online or offline. The elite students combined support for economic and cultural freedoms with authoritarian attitudes towards politics and the maintenance of social order. They were trusting of highly credentialled professionals and political elites. They supported state surveillance and censorship, by which they felt personally unconstrained, when it was directed against non-elite groups. Their positive and optimistic views of China’s current and future conditions generated distrust in negative perspectives they encountered in foreign news sources, but trust in official sources of news information. This integration with mass-media discourse supported a perceived pragmatic

alignment between their own interests, China's national interests, and those of the CCP. However, their nationalism remained distinctly cosmopolitan. They saw themselves in the world as part of an internationally mobile elite, which generated considerable interest in the affairs of foreign countries – especially surrounding how they would be treated, as ethnically Chinese, in such societies.

In the substance of their online contention, their concern over anti-Asian racism abroad cohered with their engagement with feminist and LGBT issues domestically. At the root of their concerns are attributes – non-normative ethnic, gender, or sexual identities – that threaten to compromise their own elite position, or those of their friends. Similarly, their concerns over censorship focused on its impact on media professionals – an occupational group they envisaged themselves joining – rather than ordinary Chinese people. Indeed, their broader concerns often pertained to the cultural shortcomings of China's lower social echelons; in this sense, their politics was not only reconcilable with the authoritarian status quo, but relied on the hierarchy of merit and virtue by which this system is legitimized.

This combination of progressive and elitist views is not surprising. Progressives' desire to change society for the better implies a critique of norms and opinions that are currently widespread, resulting in their pursuit of 'projects of social improvement … that the peoples that they claim to serve rarely support' (Yack, 2019: 445). The same tendency is evident in the socialist tradition, in Lenin's (1988) concept of the revolutionary vanguard, or in Trotsky's insistence that 'not a single progressive idea has begun with a mass base, otherwise it would not have been a progressive idea' (1977: 112). Elite students' combination of progressive identity politics with support for authoritarianism might seem more incongruous. Progressivism in the West, despite an elitist tendency, retains a countervailing commitment to the egalitarianism of the liberal tradition. However, under a hierarchical perspective in which civility, wisdom and virtue are unequally distributed, it is perfectly coherent to exclude social echelons that lack such qualities from political participation – based not on a lack of concern for their welfare, but a lack of regard for their capacity to

discern and pursue their own interests. Bell and Wang have recently elaborated just such an argument, in favor of a technocratic authoritarianism that they term 'political meritocracy' (2020: 18). Such ideas are encountered even within the liberal tradition; as John Stuart Mill writes, in *On Liberty*, 'Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement' (2003: 81).

Bohemian politics differed starkly. Supportive of both participatory democracy and redistributive economics, while distrustful of professional and political elites, they disapproved of measures to maintain order and stability, as well as controls on the online communications of ordinary people. They spurned mass media perspectives strongly dissonant with their dark view of the social order, placing their trust instead in unsanctioned information that flowed along localized networks of trusted acquaintance. Their view of their own and China's places in the world was one in which the interests of both stood directly opposed to those of the Party-State; their sentiments towards the authoritarian status quo were of moral condemnation and shame. This idealistic and emotional quality to their politics underlay tendencies for symbolic opposition, for dissent expressed in universalistic terms, and for the finding of common cause with diverse social groups whose discontents had no direct bearing on their own interests. This tendency for compartmentalization-breaching sympathies was reflected at a local level in the trans-group mobilization of the Liangshan Scenic Area protest, and intellectually in the ferment of anarchist ideas, and the 'subaltern cosmopolitanism' (Santos, Nunes and Meneses, 2008: xl) of alter-globalization perspectives, in the village-in-the-city commune.

This stark political divergence between the groups is not a direct product of the orthodox Confucian and heterodox traditions; rather, these traditions facilitate the confluences of social and cultural factors in which this divergence is rooted. For the elite students, the pragmatic and elitist perspective of the orthodox Confucian tradition is reinforced by their own elevated position in its hierarchies, as well as a pattern of social organization that, while fragmented and dispersed, remains homogeneous, connecting them solely with other elites.

The limited extent of their contention is a product of their satisfaction with their current circumstances and prospects; its focus on those irreducible elements of identity that might impinge on their elite status, whether domestically or in their envisioned international mobility, is a product of their social segregation from those subordinate groups most disadvantaged by China's contemporary social order. They are among those who benefit most from the current system. They trust the Party-State and have no reason to fear its mechanisms of control; insofar as they are politically constrained in their communicative lives, it is chiefly by the perception that others around them feel the same.

Among the bohemian group, the valorization of self-sacrifice for the group and righteous heroism in the heterodox *jianghu* tradition imbues their politics with an idealistic dimension. Furthermore, the egalitarianism of that tradition combines with the ritual intensity afforded by participatory physical practices localized from a range of global subcultures to facilitate, through their extensive, free-wheeling, face-to-face social interactions, a high degree of solidarity in dense and multiplex yet heterogeneous networks. Through close affective bonds that cut across socioeconomic and cultural hierarchies, they synthesize the discontents of diverse social groups into generalized systemic dissent that is powerfully moral, though unsophisticated and largely divorced from practical concerns. They are insulated from mass-media discourse, but integrated into an alternative information environment that is predicated on their dense community bonds, which are chiefly localized, but also articulated with national and global dissident publics through their subcultural networks. The perspectives they encounter in this environment – though constrained by fear of the state – cohere with and reinforce their experiences of a dark and unjust social order, and their attribution of these qualities to the predations of a self-serving political elite.

At the same time, however, they possess a quality that is largely absent among the intellectually sophisticated elite students – the capacity to imagine radical change to this social and political order. This idealist imagination reflects the influence of a heterodox tradition 'permeated with magical possibilities' (Pye, 1988: 63), but also the relativism

produced by their social cosmopolitanism (Collins, 2009), and a utopian tendency drawn from global subcultures: the ‘short-run utopias’ (Davis, 2010: 79) of social autonomy in anarcho-punk squat communities, the ‘radical utopian imagination’ (St John, 2012: 5) of the psytrance subculture, or the ‘millenarian and utopian aspects of Rasta theology’ (Veal, 2013: 15). Such utopian visions may seem absurd to the pragmatic Confucian, or indeed the objective observer. But systemic dissent in China requires a leap of the political imagination that strains credulity; the hegemony of the Chinese Party-State is measured precisely by the apparent absurdity of any alternative to its ongoing rule.

7 Analysis

Youth groups are subject to constant turnover in their composition. Insofar as the political worldviews of such groups remain consistent over time, this consistency is generated through ongoing processes of social and cultural reproduction. While some elements of these processes are more specific to the groups compared in this study – the journalism and communications education received by the elite-student group, or the subversive influence of local high-status figures on the bohemian group – others are much more general. As I have argued, the influence of China's orthodox Confucian tradition, in its realist orientation, hierarchical cultural values and constraints on cross-cutting social interactions, combines with a cosmopolitanism focused on global intellectual and high cultures to imbue elite-student groups with a political worldview that predisposes them towards pragmatic politics that are reconcilable with the authoritarian status quo, though often of a more national or global scope than localized bohemian political concerns. Conversely, the influence of China's heterodox cultural tradition lends itself to the capacity to imagine transformative change unconstrained by current circumstances. Along with its egalitarian cultural ideals and affordances for free-wheeling social interactions, this combines with a cosmopolitanism focused on oppositional global subcultures to imbue bohemian groups with idealistic politics that, while often local in focus, are irreconcilable with the authoritarian system.

7.1 Elite-Student Orthodox Cosmopolitanism

A key difference between elite universities and bohemian cultural scenes as sites of sociocultural reproduction is the radically divergent forms of cosmopolitanism they inculcate into Chinese youth. I employ the term cosmopolitanism in two distinct senses in this thesis – firstly as employed by scholars of globalization as diverse as Appadurai (1996) and Norris and Inglehart (2012), to denote patterns of engagement with global cultures, cultural content and media, and secondly in a sense employed by Collins (2009), to denote diverse social communications.

The university environment inculcates elite students with a state-authorized version of cultural cosmopolitanism that helps to sustain their support for the social and political status quo. Formally trained in foreign languages and – in the case of my participants – required by their studies to evade border-level internet censorship to familiarize themselves with foreign news and social media, these cosmopolitan capabilities support their self-image as members of an intellectual elite. Strongly influenced by a Confucian tradition that emphasizes the superiority of the well-educated, they either draw on global high cultures that serve as further form of cultural distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), or on foreign mass-market commercial entertainment with a sheen of cosmopolitan prestige. This content offers little challenge to existing hierarchies, while also serving a mollifying function. The massive profusion of entertainment options freely available on one's smartphone makes the constrained life of a university student more tolerable, in the same way that 'exposure to West German television increased support for the East German regime' (Kern & Hainmueller, 2009: 378; see also Morozov, 2011) during the Cold War. Their engagement with foreign news media, moreover, rather than encouraging critical attitudes towards the CCP, fosters a perception that such outlets exhibit a strong anti-China bias that reflects popular sentiments in many Western countries, while also furnishing them with a sophisticated understanding of the shortcomings of alternative political systems.

Elite students are proud of their own cosmopolitanism as a reflection of their place towards the apex of the *suzhi* hierarchy through which they understand the Chinese social order. This Confucian vision of society helps sustain their support for meritocratic political hierarchy – for rule by a technocratic elite with the wisdom and virtue to exercise power in the common interest. Their politics are therefore pragmatically concerned with incremental reforms within the existing system, generally over issues affecting them personally – as women, as members of LGBT communities, or at an international level, as ethnically Chinese travelers. They see the chief impediments to such progressive reforms as either the backwards traditionalism of Chinese people less civilized and cosmopolitan than themselves, or the

prejudice of foreigners; in both cases, their champion is the CCP, or rather the principle of enlightened and meritocratic authoritarianism that it imperfectly represents.

Likewise, the university environment ensures that elite students who remain within its bounds develop a social cosmopolitanism that does not challenge the compartmentalized structure through which the Party-State's manages Chinese society. On the one hand, their social networks are often extensive, though relatively dispersed – low in density and transitivity compared to those of the bohemians. This is because elite students typically bridge multiple cliques that are not directly connected, many of which are geographically dispersed around the country, or even abroad. The structures of elite-student networks are conducive to diverse communications, and because these networks are made up of individuals as highly educated as themselves, the information that flows through them tends to be complex and sophisticated. They are, in Collins's (2009) sense of the term, highly cosmopolitan. Yet their social networks are also homogeneous in their composition, because they are structured by their passage through a series of elite educational institutions, generating cliques of peers from their middle schools, high schools, university departments and university associations. However extensive and wide-ranging, their networks are largely composed of people similar in age, interests, socioeconomic background, academic specialism, level of educational attainment and, consequently, elite social position.

This homogeneity is not imposed upon them, though it is strongly supported by the constraints on independent social activity in high-school (Hansen, 2015) and university (Yan, 2014) environments alike. The Party-State could not compel such restricted patterns of social interaction if this tendency was not firmly supported by the Confucian tradition, which simultaneously inhibits the formation of social bonds with unconnected strangers (King, 1991), and bestows a hierarchical view of society that discourages interaction with those less well-educated than themselves. The Party-State nonetheless benefits from this pattern; it allows them to manage elite-student groups as a discrete population, rewarding their political quiescence with especial freedoms and privileges (Yan, 2009) while insulating them from

subversive external influences and conversely strengthening the influences of political counsellors and other university cadres upon them. Their compartmentalized social homogeneity is combined with a pragmatic realism rooted in various factors: the influence of the Confucian tradition, a sophisticated grasp of practical political possibilities and constraints derived from their educations and wide-ranging consumption of globalized academic and news content, as well as a normative relativism stemming both from the diversity of this communicative content (Collins, 2009) and dissonance in the ideals to which it exposes them (Repnikova, 2017). The combination of pragmatism and compartmentalization leads to a focus on political claims concerning areas of identity that intersect with their own social echelon, and are amenable to resolution within the authoritarian system.

The dispersed, fragmented structure and sophisticated communicative content of elite-student networks embed them within a public sphere – not one that is all-encompassing in Habermas's (1989) idealized sense, but rather a 'minoritarian…public sphericule' (Cunningham, 2001: 113; Gitlin, 1998; see also Lagerkvist, 2007 for the concept's application to Chinese online discourse) composed of people very similar to themselves. While this sphericule does not lack critical discourse, as in elite-student stances on LGBT or feminist issues, it is composed of people who benefit from the current system and are subject to careful political oversight in their respective university environments. This embedding thus exposes elite students to a quasi-public consensus in which idealistic or systemic dissent is seen as foolhardy and unfashionable – self-evidently injurious to online popularity and social prestige. For the minority of elite-students with such dissenting views, this perception drives social self-censorship.

Furthermore, the closing off of student populations from the wider urban environment helps to sustain a high degree of physical co-presence, and by extension mutual surveillance, among student groups within the same institution, and indeed department and class-group, which encourages conformity (Collins, 2009) to the orthodox Confucian norms that dominate student culture. This constitutes social density of a constrained kind that is structured and

overseen by the educational institution of which they are part, inhibiting social interactions and the generation of broader solidarity with other less-advantaged groups. Contented in an elevated social position that derives from their membership of an elite academic institution, they tend to accept and internalize political structures that govern that institution, and which serve as a microcosm for society at large. The manageability of such groups reflects a vertical structure of social organization that supports the effectiveness of compartmentalized strategies of social management.

7.2 Bohemian Heterodox Cosmopolitanism

Like universities, bohemian cultural scenes inculcate their members with cosmopolitanism, but of a deviant form that tends to generate opposition to the social and political status quo. Strongly influenced by a heterodox tradition that challenges the very basis for social and political hierarchy while emphasizing the power of symbolic rebellion, bohemians draw on global subcultures that provide a rich repertoire of symbols, unavailable within Chinese mass-market cultural production, with which to express and legitimize their oppositional identities, while allowing them to forge egalitarian fraternity in the face of mainstream stigma. Global flows of digital media are integral to these scenes; the great majority of bohemian participants, like all elite students, used VPNs. However, the cosmopolitanization of bohemians occurs informally and chiefly through face-to-face interaction. While they are much less likely than elite-students to engage with online textual content in foreign languages, they are much more likely to socialize face-to-face with foreigners, who constituted up to 20 percent of some bohemian participants' social circles, by their own estimates. This interaction, with locally resident bohemian foreigners who lack the hostility towards Chinese people that elite students see as widespread in the West, grants them a very different window onto the world.

For young entrants to bohemian scenes, exposure to subcultures of foreign origin occurs through engagement with their localized forms, which remain rich in symbols and

practices that are variously oppositional – from anti-materialist or millenarian spirituality, environmentalism, a valorization of raucous defiance, or the DIY ethos. Indeed, these subcultures are locally popular in part because of their oppositionality, which coheres with the heterodox tradition that suffuses bohemian cultural scenes in China. Bohemians, like elite students, are not passive objects of cosmopolitanization, but reach out to the world in to fulfil their own needs, in accordance with their own cultural and political logic.

Just as bohemian scenes inculcate their members with cultural cosmopolitanism, they also encourage social cosmopolitanism which cuts across the compartmentalized structure of society. An elite student who enters a bohemian scene necessarily becomes more cosmopolitan, interacting with individuals from a much wider range of socioeconomic, educational, ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds than they would have encountered within the university. This diversity is sustained partly by the formative influence on Liangshan's bohemian scene of the punk subculture, with its inclusive social norms (Dunn, 2016), though these echo a general tendency for deviant musical subcultures to obfuscate the hierarchies of mainstream society (Thornton, 1995).

Throughout China such scenes are also rendered more inclusive by the influence of the heterodox cultural tradition, which has generated social dislocation from time immemorial (Perry, 2002). Dislocation is also inherent in the related concept of *jianghu*, which 'evokes mobility, fluidity, and movement, life in a shadow society populated by thieves, gamblers, prostitutes, highwaymen, itinerant swordsmen, drifters, and entertainers' (Boretz, 2011: 33). Yet the heterodox tradition incorporates an egalitarian and cosmopolitan mode of association that supports the formation of community bonds in such conditions of sociocultural diversity. The honor accorded to selfless commitment to the interacting group (Boretz, 2011) legitimizes connections between individuals hailing from diverse groups in wider society, against resistance from both the dominant Confucian culture and the Party-State's strategy of compartmentalized social management. The political worldviews that emerge in such tightly bound yet diverse groups must necessarily accommodate a wide variety of structural positions

and perspectives; they must be simplified, along a 'logic of equivalence' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 144) that renders all conflicts part of the same great struggle. In combination with the valorization of selflessness, righteousness, and symbolic dissent inherent to the heterodox tradition, this lends itself to an egalitarian idealism that cuts across social boundaries. In this way, the heterodox tradition magnifies the tendency for bohemian social cosmopolitanism to breach compartmentalization, heightening the potential for the kinds of trans-group or anti-system contention that this strategy is intended to prevent.

These local scenes are also widely networked at national and global levels, as in connections between Liangshan and Cuban punk scenes, Jamaican reggae scenes, psytrance scenes in South-East Asia or Europe, or in the connections between the village-in-the-city commune and anarcho-punk communities in Eastern Europe. Generated through face-to-face interaction, such networks are sustained through ongoing online interaction, and constitute vectors for the kinds of oppositional anti-status-quo symbolism and political ideas that cohere with bohemian heterodoxy and its reductively idealistic politics. This coherence contrasts sharply with the normative dissonance to which elite-students are exposed in their intellectual lives. Furthermore, in structural terms, these distinct trans-local and global subcultural networks overlap extensively at the local level, due to the way in which the heterodox tradition helps bind together adherents of diverse genres and subcultural styles to form coherent local scenes, membership of which supersedes subcultural affiliation. These composite networks are not purposefully political, but latently so, insofar as they constitute a large-scale pattern of social organization that is autonomous of the state, and cuts horizontally across the compartmentalization of Chinese society by locality as well as occupational and socioeconomic group. Such patterns are a politically sensitive but inevitable property of bohemian scenes throughout China.

Nonetheless, the face-to-face interaction within local bohemian scenes produces networks that, despite their heterogeneous composition, tend to be dominated by single, dense cliques with multiplex connections. This makes bohemian networks, though interconnected

trans-locally and globally, more intensely local than those of elite students. This attribute of bohemian scenes renders their social networks reminiscent of those found in small, remote, local communities of an earlier historical period, but bohemian interactions differ markedly from such pre-modern communities. Quite unlike the elite students, who spend a considerable portion of their lives, in both educational and residential settings, in the physical co-presence of their classmates, face-to-face interaction among bohemians is more episodic. This lessens the extent of mutual surveillance among bohemian groups, and accordingly weakens the pressures for conformity that their social density might otherwise have generated. However, bohemian networks are so densely structured because they are formed through a social and cultural life that is characterized by considerable ritual intensity, to which their episodic physical co-presence is integral. Here the egalitarian mode of the heterodox tradition, which facilitates the formation of affective bonds across sociocultural divides, and the subcultural cosmopolitanism of bohemian scenes, which provides cultural forms for performances and events, are mutually reinforcing, intensifying the formation of dense yet diverse local community while enhancing its accessibility and wider appeal.

The close community of local bohemian scenes, and the intensity of ritual interaction that underlies it, have political implications. As Crossley (2007) argues, a preexisting structure of dense, multiplex connections supports political mobilization by generating trust among community members and facilitating connections between politicized individuals, as well as their recruitment of further participants. Similarly, he argues, the rational-choice argument that ‘small groups’, such as mining communities, ‘can better provide themselves with collective goods than large groups’ (Olson, 1971: 67) can be reinterpreted as pertaining to network structure, rather than scale, as it is the network density of small groups that allows them to overcome the collective action problem through the generation of norms of participation and sanctioning mechanisms that enforce them. These factors of structure aside, the ritual intensity of bohemian scenes – in their performances and the much wider range of social activities that make up their day-to-day social activity and bind individuals with distinct

subcultural affiliations together – serve to generate solidarity within the whole community, and especially within sub-groups of that community who interact most frequently.

This solidarity facilitates the finding of common cause with other bohemians, trans-locally or globally, particularly along lines of affiliation with the various subcultures that are intermingled in the local scene. However, bohemian solidarity is chiefly local in focus, and a wide range of locally represented social groups – ethnic or religious minorities, the poor, dissident activists, disaffected intellectuals, foreigners – are represented also within the scene. Bohemian solidarity, combined with the tendency for idealistic politics, thereby facilitates the finding of common cause with these diverse communities. Quite unlike elite students, bohemians are primed to identify with disadvantaged groups, given the influence upon them of a heterodox tradition that spurns social hierarchies and divisions, as well as the influence of oppositional global subcultures redolent with opposition to the status quo and sympathy for the oppressed. The egalitarian quality of bohemian culture serves to render the emotional solidarity generated within such scenes especially politically potent because, like the diverse networks of scenes themselves, and the idealistic perspectives that tend to proliferate within them, it has the potential to cut horizontally across the divisions within Chinese society.

The intense ritual interaction that generates this solidarity also underlies the high status of certain bohemian figures, who are accorded such positions by merit of their central involvement and personal contributions to the scene over many years. Many are cultural producers who, as the repeated focal point of performances that constitute the scene's apex of ritual intensity, come to symbolize the scene itself. In social terms, such individuals impart further cohesiveness onto the local scenes of which they are part, coordinating and resolving disputes within the sub-groups that represent their own domains, as well as coordinating with other sub-groups. In cultural terms, such figures act as adjudicators of authenticity within their chosen field and, where contemporary cultural production moves beyond that field, as with punk in Liangshan, their persistent involvement provides a form of institutional memory. With reputations that verge on the heroic, they passively contribute to sociocultural

reproduction as role models for new entrants. When high-status bohemian figures harbor radically idealistic views, their local influence becomes politically significant. The relative autonomy from the Party-State of such high-status dissidents has no parallel within the university.

7.3 Pragmatic and Idealistic Politics

While the political worldviews of elite-student and bohemian groups diverge in various ways, the distinction that offers greatest insight into their contentious proclivities is their respective pragmatism and idealism. Elite students' pragmatic orientation is rooted most fundamentally in the influence of 'ideals of reason and realism', focused on 'the realities of social relations and concrete institutional concerns' that Pye (1988: 64) associates with the orthodox Confucian tradition; here their outlook hews closely to Roshwald's definition of the political realist, who 'is very much impressed by present reality, by facts as he sees them, and is affected by reality, or what he conceives as such, more than by his ideas, wishes, [or] ideals' (1971: 102). This realism is combined with a certain self-serving dimension in the Confucian tradition, which valorizes the 'aggrandizement of a more limited group, or even one's self' (Pye, 1988: 58); I use the term pragmatic to denote both realism and this tendency for in-group or self-aggrandizement. Pragmatism supports an elite-student tendency towards the hardheaded calculation of practical political possibilities, and the advocacy of changes that are feasible, incremental, and advantageous: accommodative of the authoritarian status quo, enhancing their own elevated social position, and supporting the hierarchy of merit and virtue that legitimizes both.

By contrast, bohemians are influenced by a heterodox tradition 'permeated with magical possibilities', in which the 'power of symbols' creates the potential that 'even the most hopeless rebellion might suddenly triumph' (Pye, 1988: 63-5). This echoes Roshwald's definition of the political idealist who 'dreams of his desirable goal almost independently of the surrounding facts … his range of dreaming may carry him very far from present reality'

(1971: 102). This attribute is combined with a valorization of heroism, in the 'idealizing of sacrifice' and the 'obligation of being ready to suffer for a larger group' (Pye, 1988: 58) similarly rooted in the heterodox tradition; I use the term idealistic to denote both selflessness and disregard for factual reality. Bohemian idealism supports a tendency towards stances of morally righteous dissent to which the calculus of risk and reward is largely immaterial, and which range over issues that cut broadly across the hierarchies and divisions of Chinese society.

This divergence in traditional culture is only one influence on the two groups' politics. It is strongly reinforced by the two groups' orthodox and heterodox cosmopolitanisms – their distinct engagements with global cultures, exposures to political information, and patterns of social interaction that are congruent with or cut across the compartmentalized structure imposed by Party-State social management.

The pragmatism of elite-student politics is supported by their intellectual sophistication and wide-ranging exposure to political information, whether through their educations or their independent consumption of academic writing and news content. The diversity of this exposure extends to idealistic visions of political principle, as in their mandatory ideology classes, or their engagement with foreign scholarship and news media. However, as Repnikovka has argued, many students 'view the different visions to which they are exposed as being in conflict with one another, and so attempt to resolve their inner conflicts by foregoing the political domain altogether' (2017: 416). For groups such as the elite students, this dissonance generates an aversion to idealistic politics; their understanding of realpolitik remains complex. They are attentive to the practical constraints imposed by existing circumstances, interdependence, path dependence, and negative externalities. This supports a utilitarian approach to public policy that reduces the normative to the descriptive and the general to the specific, lessening the need for idealistic or universal principles. Their support for authoritarianism is justified in such practical terms, whereby the obvious solution to any pressing political question becomes that which accommodates the objective reality and

entrenchment of this system. But their stance towards authoritarianism is not merely accommodative; their hierarchical view of society supports the belief that a non-participatory system is likely to bestow power on those (like themselves) with the greatest capacity to pursue a public interest that is defined in descriptive rather than normative terms.

At the same time, this pragmatic authoritarianism is supported by their own elite position and, just as importantly, their homogeneous social connections with other elites. Authoritarian hierarchy appears to be in the public interest because they are considerably less likely, compared to the bohemian group, to interact with members of social groups who have experienced its more egregious ramifications. Though they are likely to doubt accounts of injustices that are excluded from the state-controlled mass media, whether they encounter them on social media or in the foreign press, they remain aware that such events occur. However, because they occur to the kinds of people with whom they do not interact, it is easy to dismiss such events: perhaps as isolated incidents, or as a product of local-state malfeasance that the central authorities are diligently working to correct, or as the unfortunate costs of a modernization process that is, ultimately, to everybody's benefit. Rather, their pragmatic politics is focused on issues that affect members of the elite echelon with whom they interact, such as those affecting women, members of LGBT communities, media workers, or ethnic Chinese travelling overseas.

These concerns, predicated on areas of identity that cut across localities and social hierarchies, are not purely self-serving or 'interest-oriented', in the sense in which He and Su (2018: 401) characterize much contention in China. They embody ideals of equal treatment by gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, or concerning the relationship between politics and the media. However, insofar as these ideals also directly concern members of the interacting group of which the elite students are part, they are shaped by the compartmentalization to which such groups are subject. For example, having negligible contact with the rural poor, they evince little concern over the ideal of equal property or civil rights between rural and urban citizens. These concerns are pragmatic in the sense that they are, in principle, amenable

to resolution within the existing authoritarian system. They are also pragmatic in the sense that they are guided by sensitivity to the practical ramifications of extending rights on a universal basis, as indicated by their concern for the communicative freedoms of media workers, but not ordinary Chinese people. Given their view of the social order, and the especial freedoms they enjoy as members of an elite educational institution, they are likely to sympathize with a perspective under which the common interest is served by a hierarchical distribution of certain privileges and, by extension, to be satisfied by limited resolutions of their political concerns, as they impinge on their own social echelon rather than throughout society. In this sense their politics is accommodative of the Party-State's inclination to avoid binding constraints (Heilmann and Perry, 2011) and to deal differentially with the political demands of different social groups (Tomba, 2014); such capacities are among the chief benefits of compartmentalized social management.

The bohemian group, in the main, lack the elite-students' extensive engagement with political information. Their understanding of political reality is less sophisticated and, accordingly, there is a reductive quality to their idealism. Imbuing political questions with emotional and moral weight can serve to reduce them to Manichean binaries – right and wrong, justice and injustice, freedom and control – to which practical constraints and ramifications are largely irrelevant. We see here the influence of the heterodox tradition, in its valorization of selflessness, righteousness, and symbolic dissent, but also its egalitarianism, and the social heterogeneity that it fosters among the bohemian group. This group was characterized by much greater socioeconomic and cultural variation than the elite-students. The common political worldview that emerges from such an interacting group, to accommodate its diversity, will tend towards matters of broadly applicable principle, rather than specific practical detail.

Ideals of justice or freedom for all, or moral condemnation of China's authoritarian system, would seem naïve to a sophisticated and pragmatic elite-student. Meng Zongying –

the only member of the elite-student group with experience of Liangshan's bohemian scene – described her encounter with bohemian political opinions as follows:

Meng Zongying: *"They're all just radical. I used to listen to them but... Their political opinions are not cultured. It's all just "not good". All opposition. I think they haven't come to thoroughly understand these things, and then made a judgement, they just have these preconceived concepts. It's not realistic.*

There is a certain truth to this assessment, but what it ignores is that such ideals, in their simplicity, are amenable to being shared among heterogeneous groups, comprised of individuals with diverse material and cultural interests, as well as varied levels of political knowledge. And when such groups are densely interconnected and bound together by interactions of a high ritual intensity, the ideals they share, however reductive, can be imbued with a powerful moral force. A moral politics of this kind is unlikely to be guided by a hardheaded evaluation of political opportunities; it is, accordingly, less effective than the pragmatic politics of the elite-student group. However, the simplicity of such politics allows all conflicts between the powerful and powerless to be conflated regardless of context. Just as it can be shared among diverse groups, it also underlies a proclivity to find common cause with other social groups engaged in contention over specific interests that do not concern bohemians directly. Under such circumstances, the moral force of idealistic politics can motivate participation in risky contention, even when personal interests are not at stake.

In this sense, the idealistic politics of bohemian groups are inherently resistant to compartmentalized social management. The cross-cutting heterogeneity of such groups exposes them to a diversity of political concerns from all echelons of Chinese society, while their subcultural divergence from mainstream society embeds them in an alternative information environment where online rumors of injustice proliferate. Only through idealistic politics can all such diverse concerns be accommodated into a coherent, shared political worldview. Moreover, the tendrils of bohemian information environments extend globally, through extensive personal interactions with foreigners likely to advocate alternatives to China's authoritarian politics, as well as integration into horizontal, global subcultural

networks that are redolent with oppositional symbolism and radical ideas. All this supports the tendency for bohemian political ideals to revolve around condemnation of the Party-State and its authoritarian system.

These distinctions, between the hardheaded pragmatism of compartmentalized elite-student groups and the moralistic idealism of compartmentalization-breaching bohemians, shape their politics at every level from local to global. They pattern their relationships to other forms of internet and smartphone-enabled contention within China and across the globe. They also stand in markedly different relationships to the organizational structures through which the Party-State enacts its social management and, in principle, resolves competing claims that emerge from different sectors of society. Simply put, the Chinese Party-State monopolizes the process of interest-aggregation in a quasi-corporatist form in which the interests of all groups within its jurisdiction are aligned and harmonized under its leadership (Oi, 1992; Unger and Chan, 1995; Dickson, 2000; Pieke, 2012). Just as this is the case for all Chinese people, to whom the CCP stands as a champion of its vision of unified national interests, it is also the case at every level of geographical scope and corresponding state administration, down to the neighborhood committee or enclosed residential community organization. Similarly, each recognized sectoral interest group has its appointed state body, from the All-China Women's Federation to the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, and the five officially sanctioned religious organizations under the auspices of the United Front Work Department – each operating at every level of administration from national to local. This compartmentalized pattern of administrative organization, to which the very structure of Chinese society is obliged to conform, is the context that any pragmatic political claim must accommodate, but to which idealistic politics are broadly oblivious. Pragmatic politics accommodate this corporatist, compartmentalized structure because only by working within it does any political claim stand a reasonable chance of success. Accordingly, this structure does not preclude contention, but rather channels it into particular forms.

7.4 Chinese Local Contention

The great majority of popular contentions – 'mass incidents' – that regularly occur throughout China are resolutely local and focused on group-specific material interests. While such protests are met with relative tolerance (Perry, 2002), which helps to correct information asymmetries between central and local officials (Lorentzen, 2013) while channeling contention into forms that support the stability of the central regime (Chen, 2012), this tolerance is largely extended by central authorities – protestors may well face punitive suppression from agents of a local state that is subject to very different incentives. Nonetheless, He and Su argue that in this kind of 'parochial and personal interest-oriented' contention, 'protestors often do not question, and even voice support for the Chinese political system, thus showing no fundamental conflict with the system' (2018: 413).

As Liu contends, mobile communication, especially the internet-connected smartphone, is inextricably woven into such protests, not least because these technologies, as a 'direct interpersonal means of communication on the basis of strong ties' (2020: 82), tie into existing intra-group *guanxi* networks suffused with an ethos of reciprocity that plays an important role in the processes of recruitment and micro-mobilization. Because such protests pragmatically accommodate the Party-State's compartmentalized, corporatist structure for the resolution of political claims, they are often highly effective. Liu argues on this basis that 'the use of mobile phones makes it possible for ordinary people to project their interests onto the political agenda, thus enhancing their ability to influence politics and promoting the process of *substantial* democratization in the context of China' (2020: 150), in contrast to the procedural democracy favored in the West. Insofar as this is true – this capacity for influence varies widely by socioeconomic class and is largely denied certain ethnic and religious minorities – it does not conflict with the role of such local mass incidents in supporting the stability of China's authoritarian status-quo and the authority of the central Party-State.

The effectiveness of such contention in China stems from its pragmatic accommodation of a political opportunity structure that renders unviable all other strategies than the pursuit of interest-oriented goals among bounded groups at a local scope. As Liu observes in his discussion of the 2011 Wukan protests, over the sale of village land without compensating villagers, a crucial factor that contributed to their relative success was the framing of contention as directed exclusively against an illegal land-grab, rather than the leadership of the Communist Party. By ensuring that the only effective method of pursuing collective goals is to escalate claims within compartmentalized boundaries and to appeal to higher levels of the state for recourse, rendering such pursuit localized and differentially manageable, the system ensures that the interests of ordinary people coincide with those of central authorities – a strategy that Yan has described as 'railroading with interests' (2002: 40).

The pragmatic politics of elite-student groups and the idealistic politics of bohemians stand in markedly different relationships to such localized mass incidents. Elite students share the pragmatic orientation of interest-oriented protestors, in their accommodation of practical political constraints and focus on limited, achievable goals within the current system. Elite students, though their politics have a 'value-oriented' dimension that He and Su (2018: 401) contrast with such interest-oriented mass incidents, are part of a homogeneous group with broadly aligned interests. Because their interests are aligned, they are more likely to engage in contention in their defense – though because they are pragmatic, any such contention is likely to accommodate compartmentalization and corporatism, constraining the scope of their claims and leading them to seek recourse from higher-level authorities. Similarly, this pragmatism, combined with their segregation from other local groups, ensures that their local concerns pertain overwhelmingly to their own circumstances and university environment.

Because heterogeneous bohemian groups have less clearly aligned interests, they are less likely than elite students to engage in interest-oriented contention; similarly, Mutz has shown that in the US, being embedded in 'cross-cutting', socially diverse networks tends to

'discourage political participation' (2002: 838). And yet, it is this heterogeneity that generates their extensive connections with a wide range of local groups. Though bohemians lack the pragmatism shared by elite students and localized interest-oriented protestors, they are nonetheless more likely to be connected to, and mobilize in support of, the latter. Their idealistic outlook, rooted partly in their own heterogeneity, sustains mobilizing frames that position localized, interest-based contention as part of a larger struggle; this generates broadly cross-cutting sympathies and a proclivity for trans-group, compartmentalization-breaching mobilization, regardless of its efficacy.

Pragmatic elite students are less likely to support interest-oriented contention among other social groups, given their awareness that such support would be immaterial or inimical to its success. However, exceptions to this tendency do exist. For example, in 2018 a labor protest in a Shenzhen welding factory drew support from loose organization of students and recent graduates – chiefly individuals from elite institutions who had been extensively involved in their universities' Marxist theory associations (Chan, 2020). This is idealistic politics, involving the kind of cross-class mobilization that the Party-State's compartmentalization strategy is precisely designed to prevent. Accordingly, this incident resulted in a strict crackdown, which extended to left-wing student groups throughout China, that lasted into 2019. However, while the insight I can offer is limited by the small scale of my study, my research suggests that the number of students with an idealistic commitment to the Marxism they are taught is very small. I also suspect that most elite students who are committed Marxists are also elitist and pragmatic in a sense that would preclude engaging in sensitive activism in support of members of the working class, at some risk to their place at university and social position.

7.5 Chinese National Contention

Compartmentalization, along with the Party-State's corporatist organizational structure that monopolizes the vertical aggregation of political claims, ensures that contention

is scant in China at the national level. Nonetheless, local injustices form part of a national critical online discourse that the censorship apparatus of the Party-State works to suppress. Much of this discourse involves specific events that are excluded from mass media news reporting; such information thereby becomes rumor irrespective of its factuality. Liu observes that Party-State is unsuccessful in efforts to quash 'rumoring' in China – the 'communicative act of forwarding and circulating rumors' through the mobile phone – and that these efforts are counterproductive, as 'rumors and rumoring persist and intensify in the face of authoritarian surveillance and harsh suppression, even flaring up after official rumor rebuttal' (Liu, 2020: 112).

Rumor is an 'elastic term' in China; its use by the state has long denoted 'any information or opinion at variance with the official construction of reality' (Smith, 2006: 408). Given this broad usage, the shrill Party-State discourse opposing rumor dissemination and, since 2013, its explicit criminalization (Huang, 2015), chiefly represent an effort to defend the Party-State's monopoly on the depiction and interpretation of China's social order, while dissuading the public from engaging with competing political perspectives. The effectiveness of this effort varies widely – as we have seen, for groups like the elite students, high levels of trust in the Party-State and an elitist ethos of journalistic professionalism support a skeptical attitude towards information from non-official sources. The bohemians, by contrast, are considerably more likely to believe such rumors; as Liu observes, 'feelings of suspicion and distrust towards the authorities undergird the necessary basis of rumor proliferation' (Liu, 2020: 125). Tragedies, scandals and injustices occur in every country, but the Chinese Party-State's efforts to suppress information on these events – especially those with 'collective action potential' (King, Pan and Roberts, 2013) – generate inevitable backlash among groups emmeshed in alternative information environments where the official narrative resembles a Panglossian distortion of social reality.

Participation in rumoring at this national level is less likely to involve those personally affected by the injustice in question than those whose altruistic concerns are

framed and legitimized in terms of values or ideals. This idealistic quality to rumoring contention also underlies its sensitivity, because 'value-oriented …. claims are very hard to be satisfied by the regime without making fundamental concessions regarding the political system' (He and Su, 2018: 404). Accordingly, though the censorship system serves to localize dissident publics by suppressing online rumor dissemination more strictly on public platforms, this contention remains national in scope by merit of the anti-system dissent that suffuses it. Overlap between dissident networks and bohemian groups provides a conduit through which contentious rumors exert an outsized influence over the alternative information environments that surround bohemian scenes – especially when dissidents also have high status within those scenes. For more politicized bohemians, the online output of rumoring dissidents is likely to be considered much more credible than the official narrative. Even the political worldview of bohemians with negligible interest in politics, themselves entirely uninvolved in the practice of rumoring, is likely to be strongly influenced by the dissident rumor that they are passively exposed to through their social media feeds, by merit of their strong ties to its disseminators. By contrast, elite students are not only less likely to believe online rumors, but less likely to be exposed to them within an online public sphericule composed of other geographically dispersed elites, who are considerably more engaged with Party-State-dominated mass media from which such rumors are largely excluded.

China's national rumoring publics may be contrasted with another form of contention, by which the bohemians are also influenced – the national human-rights movement which, by merit of its idealistic universalism, places China's national conditions in a global frame. In much of the West, this movement is non-contentious, given its association with institutions such as the United Nations and the European Court of Human Rights. Within China, the situation is very different. Formerly, a small yet highly active community of rights-defense lawyers, often deeply engaged with a discourse of universalistic human rights, were able to withstand considerable official hostility by pursuing a form of rightful resistance (O'Brien, 1996) – relying upon Chinese law, as Nesossi observes, in their 'assertion of the

rights of the weakest parties within society, very often against the interests of the Chinese State'. Typically, 'the significance of the causes they represent extends far beyond the mere gains of an individual case to larger issues of social justice and equality'; for this reason, rights defense lawyers have 'become associated with 'foreign' ideas concerning human rights, mainly promoted by the Western organisations they cooperate with' (2015: 962-3).

Under the Xi Jinping administration, especially since 2015 when more than 200 lawyers were arrested in the '709 crackdown' (Green, 2018; see also Gaer, 2018), this movement has been sharply curtailed. Despite operating within existing Chinese law, rights-defense lawyers constitute a threat to the Chinese Party-State because the universalist ideal of human rights challenges the differential treatment of social groups. Equal protection under Chinese law is an ideal that cuts across the hierarchies and divisions between all Chinese people; universal human rights, however, cuts across divisions of national jurisdiction, legitimizing the interest of foreigners and supranational institutions in the treatment of Chinese citizens, while generating unfavorable comparisons between the Chinese system and those of liberal-democratic states. China is a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but its universalistic implications have, in practical terms, been consistently subordinated to the preservation of national sovereignty. 'On many occasions', as Zhao Jun observes, 'the Chinese government has objected to the use of human rights as a pretext for interfering in its internal affairs' (2015: 45). Oversight by supranational institutions over the treatment of its subject population is anathema to an organization keenly concerned with the maintenance of its own unquestioned authority.

Nor does the individualism implicit in a rights-based framework sit well with a Party-State that sees its historical mission in utilitarian terms, as the generation of prosperity for the whole Chinese people. In line with this mission, we see in China 'a broad academic and official consensus that the right to subsistence and development takes precedence over other aspects of human rights'. Considerable deprivation of rights from recalcitrant individuals and groups is thereby justified, on the basis that 'political and social stability is indispensable for

sustainable economic development' (J. Zhao, 2015: 48). In quite a different context, Santos depicts a tension within the alter-globalization movement, discussed further below, between the individualistic 'western concept of human rights' and other conceptions of human dignity such as 'the Islamic concept of *umma* (community), and the Hindu concept of *dharma* (cosmic harmony involving human and all the other beings)' (2005: 17). This association between human rights and the West adds rhetorical force to the accusations of collusion with hostile foreign forces levelled against advocates of this universalist framework.

As we saw in chapter six, the bohemian group were considerably more well-disposed towards China's human-rights movement than the elite students. Not only does the idealism of this perspective cohere with their own, but its universalist ideals also mirror the egalitarianism inherent to their political worldview. Elite students evinced little interest in such ideals; their hierarchical worldview supports the differential allocation or denial of rights and privileges between different social echelons, as well as the view that elites possess the wisdom and virtue to manage this differential allocation in the common interest. What is more, elite students are likely to recognize far more clearly than bohemians the fundamental incompatibility between the universal protection of rights at the individual level and China's current authoritarian system, which withholds rights both systematically and selectively, on the grounds of contingent expediency. Given this recognition, their pragmatic political orientation leads to the dismissal of Chinese human-rights contention as an irrelevancy.

For the idealist, it is the constraints of existing circumstances that are irrelevant. Many bohemians lack the sophisticated understanding of political possibilities that such practical considerations require; others, influenced by the heterodox capacity to imagine that things might be radically different from how they are, and to believe in the power of symbolic protest and acts of heroic self-sacrifice to achieve such transformation, would simply refute the obligation of constraining their demands in such a way. Accordingly, where bohemian politics extends to the national level, it is in broad strokes – demands for equality in legal rights or political participation that cohere with the universalism of the human-rights

perspective but, because they challenge China's authoritarian system, are extremely unlikely to be met. One might think of this as a Chinese cultural framing for a common tendency in radical politics; Ferrara argues that a similarly non-pragmatic orientation was key to the 1968 évènements in France, when 'politics had come to signify a reappropriation of the ability to shape one's life against the strictures of perceived reality: 'Be realistic: demand the impossible' was a popular slogan' (2011: 38).

In contrast, elite-student syntheses of political concerns from Party-State dominated domestic mass media and the identity politics of the liberal-democratic West were informed by the shared interests of their own social echelon and moderated by their grasp of the constraints imposed by the authoritarian status quo. Accordingly, their pragmatic advocacy of progressive yet incremental reform was likely to be much more effective by merit of remaining accommodatable within the existing system.

7.6 Chinese Global Contention

Most popular contention in China is focused on the interests of bounded local groups, becoming highly sensitive when it crosses boundaries of class or locality. However, a notable exception to this is nationalist protest which, insofar as it is directed against foreign enemies, constitutes a rare form of partly state-sanctioned trans-group and trans-local contention in China. As Gries notes, 'the Chinese Communist Party has long rooted its legitimacy in its nationalist credentials' (2004: 124); the propagandistic teleology of the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' (Xi Jinping, 2013), as contrasted with the encounter with colonialism during the 'Century of National Humiliation' (Callahan, 2006: 188), plays an important role in generating regime support. Nonetheless, because of this importance, critical discourse surrounding China's place in the world must be carefully policed. Nationalist sentiment can act as a constraint on the Party-State's freedom to enact foreign policy, especially in relations with Japan (Gries, 2004). Such sentiments have also repeatedly given rise to large-scale demonstrations – against Japan in 1985, 2005, 2010, and 2012 (Zhou and Wang, 2016),

against the United States in 1999 (Zhao, 2013), and against France in 2008 (Gries *et al.*, 2011). The state response to these incidents has been mixed, combining initial tolerance with efforts to de-escalate tensions without generating an appearance of opposition to protestors' nationalist sentiments; Stockmann (2011) has shown how mass-media controls, especially over commercial publications, were employed effectively in lessening negative public sentiment towards Japan surrounding the 2005 protests. The use of such indirect measures reflects constraints on the Party-State's capacity to freely quash nationalist protest imposed by the importance to its legitimizing narrative of the sentiments that underlie them.

While nationalist contention generally leads to support for the CCP, it remains dangerous – even when directed exclusively against foreign powers – because it cuts across social classes and groups; if it is seen as failing to fulfil legitimate nationalist demands, 'popular nationalism can [also] threaten the Party's legitimacy' (Gries, 2004: 125). This cross-cutting quality to nationalist discourse, and the danger that it represents to the Party-State, reflects the idealism inherent to the very concept of a nation which, as Anderson reminds us, is 'imagined' – 'because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (2006: 6). The ideals implicit in nationalism are very different to the universalist ethos of, for example, human-rights contention. However, an immeasurably diverse population is bound together under a unified 'national interest' through emotionally powerfully ideals, rather than hardheaded pragmatism. Pye contends that 'the most severe constraint on the flexibility of the Chinese's pragmatism is their passion of patriotism' (1988: 104); recent examples of nationalist protest in China support such an interpretation. The personal interests of protest participants are tenuously affected by continued Japanese sovereignty over the Diaoyu islands, for example, or the French government's stance towards supporters of Tibetan independence. Nor can such protest be considered an efficacious method of influencing the policies of foreign nations. However, despite its inherent idealism, nationalism is also highly amenable to framing in pragmatic,

realist terms. Particularly for a nation that has experienced colonial invasion in living memory, depictions of national interests as the objective cumulation of personal interests have an intuitive, commonsense appeal.

In this study, neither elite-student nor bohemian groups were inured to the emotional force of nationalist sentiment; they nonetheless stood in different relationships to it. Elite students, both pragmatic and cosmopolitan, were swayed less by nationalism in its idealistic and emotional aspect than its framing as a pragmatic matter of individual and collective interests. They recognized their position as Chinese citizens, pragmatically associated their own international status with the power and prestige of the Chinese nation, and supported the Party-State as the champion of both. This was based on a strongly realist view of international relations as a zero-sum competition that is common in China, stemming as much from Confucian pragmatism as from the humiliating experience of colonialism and the conception, partly derived from the early influence of the evolutionary theorist Herbert Spencer, of a 'world order based on the principle of survival of the fittest' (Xu, 2012: 184). Elite students remained closely integrated with a national mass-media discourse pervaded with ideals of national wealth and power that have dominated Chinese intellectual life since the early 19th century (Schell and Delury, 2013). Accordingly, despite the chiefly pragmatic framing of their nationalist sentiments, they evinced interest in areas of policy with which typical nationalists are also concerned, such as the maintenance of national unity through the suppression of unrest in peripheral territories including Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, as well as reunification with Taiwan – by persuasion, if possible, but by force if necessary.

At the same time, their pragmatism, combined with a cosmopolitan self-image as members of a globally mobile elite, led to a certain divergence in their sentiments from those of a typically parochial, China-against-the-world nationalist; they saw themselves as Chinese in the world – as they would be seen by foreigners. They were therefore concerned with racism against Chinese people in foreign countries, but also against Asian people in general, as reflected in their extensive involvement with online contention concerning the 2017 United

Express scandal, which involved the forced removal of a Vietnamese-American passenger from an airplane. While this concern should not be conflated with pan-Asian solidarity, it does reflect a cosmopolitan engagement with discourses of race in, especially, American media, where different Asian identities are typically conflated, and their concern with how they might themselves be treated in that country.

Bohemian sentiments were simultaneously closer to those of a typical nationalist, in their idealistic and emotional qualities, yet more distant in their substance. The cosmopolitan bohemians also saw themselves as Chinese in the world, but strongly refuted the Party-State's status as a champion of their interests on the international stage. While elite students would be more likely to see China's authoritarianism as a pragmatic asset in a realm of great-power competition to which morals and emotions are irrelevant, bohemians understood the international order precisely in those terms, wherein China's status as an authoritarian – by extension, second-rate – nation was a source of considerable shame. In the emotional and idealistic quality of this sentiment, we can see a link to the populism that so concerns the Party-State in its policing of Chinese nationalist contention – the risk that protests against China's perceived foreign enemies might transform into protests against the Party-State itself, for failing to uphold China's interests. While I suspect that populist nationalism of this outward-facing kind may be common among some elements of bohemian scenes, I have little insight into this tendency, as those with such sentiments are inherently less likely to contribute their views to research conducted by a foreigner. Among my own participants, this sense of Chinese interests as directly opposed to those of other nations was largely absent; bohemians also evinced little interest in national unity or reunification, tending to see such projects as self-evidently injurious to those brought under the authority of a predatory Party-State. In place of these typical nationalist preoccupations was a concern for how China was seen by other nations. Under this universalistic cosmopolitan perspective, which internalizes the value system of individual legal and political rights common among liberal democracies, China's authoritarian single-party system was rendered at best an embarrassment and, at

worst, an abject national humiliation – sentiments imbued with as much emotional force as those of the most jingoistic conventional nationalist. Opinions of this kind, if they were to become widespread, would entail even greater risk to the stability of the regime than the perception that it was failing to uphold China's interests in international competition with hostile foreign powers.

A distinct tendency apparent among bohemians was global solidarity with subaltern groups. Among those with little interest in politics, this was reflected chiefly in emotive terms; bohemians' online output was replete with examples of sympathy with such groups, often along lines of cultural taste or subcultural affiliation, including the indigenous peoples of Siberia or the Americas, Rastafarian or African-American communities, or punk scenes in other authoritarian states. For other more politicized bohemians, this engagement involved the equation of oppression experienced in other societies with that produced in China under the single-party system. Though such comparisons can be radical in a domestic political context, this cosmopolitan sympathy is not pragmatic; it is even less likely to effect change among the global subaltern than it is within China. It reflects, rather an attitude towards politics in which efficacy is immaterial; an almost endearingly naïve view of world affairs in which symbolic assertions of moral righteousness might serve as a model for transformative change.

The understandings of world affairs that underlay such aggregations of interest were not always especially plausible, as with one participant's view that the Chinese Party-State and other global elites were part of a single Masonic and possibly extraterrestrial conspiracy. Others simply saw exploitative relationships between the powerful and the powerless as globally pervasive. While positively disposed towards democratic institutions absent in China, such as universal suffrage or equality before the law, bohemians did not see the presence of such institutions as sufficient to guarantee fairness or justice in foreign societies. Those of a more intellectual bent, often under the influence of ideas disseminated through global networks of the punk subculture, tended to see such exploitation as a product of untrammeled capitalism, whether in China or abroad, while advocating global solidarity

among its victims. Views of this kind, evoking the 'subaltern cosmopolitanism' (Santos, Nunes and Meneses, 2008: xl) of the alter-globalization movement, were by no means pervasive throughout the bohemian group, but were at least as widespread as contention predicated on liberal discourses of universal rights and participatory democracy. Subaltern cosmopolitan perspectives were absent among elite students, who did not see themselves as oppressed, and would have strongly refuted any parallel between themselves and global subaltern groups.

7.7 Global Contention: #MeToo

These forms of Chinese contention may be contrasted with recent movements beyond the border-level firewall. Many such contentious movements are global in scope but remain focused on the interests of specific social groups, such as the #MeToo movement; Black Lives Matter is another such example. Because of how social categories such as gender and race are externally imposed, group-specific identity politics of this kind may differ somewhat from others at the global level that are predicated on aggregated identities, such as the LGBT+ movement. While described as the quintessential identity movement (Melucci, 1989), the identity around which it is focused is inherently composite, harboring from its outset 'a vast diversity of identities or communities' (Peterson, Wahlstrom and Wennerhag, 2018: 9), and further subject to an ongoing process of aggregation whereby the identities of distinct groups are brought into its coalition. Identity-based global contentious movements have a strongly idealistic element – both in the imagined community (Anderson, 2006) implied by a common identity that transcends national borders, and in the advocacy for the interests of that community irrespective of cultural context. Nonetheless, participation in global contention of this kind may be motivated by pragmatism, as the symbolic and organizational resources of a globalized movement are brought to bear in specific local struggles. What is more, focus on the conditions of specific social groups tends to constrain the claims of identity based-contentious movements and render them more pragmatically achievable than contention

based on universalist perspectives such as human rights. This is especially the case when campaigns, such as #MeToo or Black Lives Matter, are directed against failures in the implementation of existing law.

#MeToo came to prominence in the US in 2017, following widely publicized incidents of sexual abuse in the entertainment industry, as part of a campaign against sexual violence that encouraged women to share their own experiences to highlight the magnitude of the problem. It swiftly sparked similar social media campaigns in other national and linguistic contexts, as well as a host of organizations and campaigns (Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019). This movement, and others like it, contrast sharply with the forms of contention encountered in the Chinese context. Their capacity to expand at a global level, and further to attract support from outside directly affected groups, is strongly facilitated by the affordances of public online communication, such as through the dissemination of hashtags that serve as markers of identity and movement participation. However, it is precisely this form of or nation-wide or transnational online mobilization that is precluded by the internet censorship system in China (King, Pan and Roberts, 2013).

7.8 #MeToo in China

Consider the limited intrusion of the #MeToo movement into Chinese public discourse. China is rife with incongruities that might seem to render that society ripe for the emergence of a popular feminist movement. It is ruled by a party that has historically championed the rights of women (Stacey, 1983), yet under which women are overwhelmingly excluded from high-level positions at every level of government (James, 2021). While in China sexual violence is disproportionately directed against women from poor rural backgrounds, whether in rural areas or, in cities, against rural-to-urban migrants (Chan, 2009), reports suggest that its prevalence among female university students is nonetheless high (Kang, 2016; Guangzhou Gender and Sexuality Education Center, 2017). Academic staff are often the reported perpetrators within universities, enabled perhaps by the power distance

associated with the Chinese university system (Zeng, 2019) and the heightened status of teachers in Confucian culture; elite-student participants in this study were keenly aware of allegations against a professor at the prestigious Beijing Film Academy, initially posted to Sina Weibo before being censored (Lai, 2017). Though my fieldwork occurred shortly prior to the global prominence of the #MeToo movement, my elite-student participants – interested in feminism and engaged with mass- and social-media beyond China's great firewall – were exactly the kind of group most likely to be exposed and receptive to this global movement.

Insofar as the elite-student group were representative of wider populations, such attributes offer insight into why #MeToo initially emerged in China within universities (Fincher, 2018; Zeng, 2019; Liao and Luqiu, 2022), generating a string of accusations against academic staff at prestigious institutions. The Party-State response has been mixed, combining prompt condemnations of inappropriate teacher behavior and commitments to reform (Kan, 2018) with the widespread suppression of terms and hashtags connected with the movement on Sina Weibo and WeChat (Lim, 2018; Zeng, 2019). While online activists have employed evasive language to circumvent these controls – the term *MiTu* (rice bunny – 米兔) was initially created to evade censorship of the English #MeToo – this censorship has been largely successful in restricting the spread of this movement beyond student and elite groups. As Zeng observes, it produced 'little media and public attention … to commonplace sexual harassment in the workplace or that inflicted upon more marginalized social groups, such as those based in rural China or low-income workers' (2019: 78; see also Vogelstein and Stone, 2021).

The Party-State is not opposed to the reduction of sexual violence, or indeed to the reporting of sexual violence by its survivors – as long as the process of redress and discipline occurs in a compartmentalized form. The threat of MiTu is that it risks framing these incidents in idealistic terms, as part of a broader pattern of wrongdoing that affects women throughout Chinese society, potentially generating a broader social coalition that cuts across barriers of class and locality. The pragmatic politics and homogeneous networks of the elite-

student group offers insight into why the Party-State has succeeded in preventing such an outcome. While firewall-jumping elite students were those most exposed to the global #MeToo movement, the homogeneity of elite-student networks will have constrained the spread of their own MiTu contention beyond their own social echelon, despite its relevance to the conditions facing all Chinese women. If we see MiTu as a form of contention chiefly pursued among pragmatic elites, this also explains why specific measures enacted by the Party-State, such as the sacking of prominent perpetrators and the improvement of accountability mechanisms in universities, have taken much of the steam out of the movement. Similarly, the suppression of (limited) efforts to mobilize other social groups, as with the detention of the student activist Yue Xin for efforts to combat sexual harassment against factory workers (Vogelstein and Stone, 2021), generated little backlash. The compartmentalization and pragmatic orientation of elite-student groups allows their contention to be managed differentially, without necessitating broader systemic change, even on issues of a national or global scope, pertaining to areas of identity that cut across Chinese socioeconomic and cultural hierarchies.

7.9 Global Contention: Alter-Globalization

Contentious movements may seek to mobilize at a global scale based on a shared identity, as with gender in the case of #MeToo. Alternatively, they may seek to mobilize a high diversity of different social groups along more abstract grounds of commonality – as with the alter-globalization movement. While both approaches are idealistic, they differ in the scope of their universalism. In a former era, the obvious candidate for an example of globally universalist contention would have been the international socialist movement, as in organizations such as the Industrial Workers of the World (Henry, 2017), Socialist International (Imlay, 2013) or the Trotskyite Fourth International (Chilcote, 2009). The starkly opposing ideology of neoliberal market globalism has similarly universalist attributes, except that given its dominance, from the emergence of the 'Washington Consensus' (Yergin

and Stanislaw, 2008: 237) in the aftermath of the Cold War to the pervasive global reach of market forces today, one could scarcely characterize this ideology as contentious.

The annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF), in Davos, Switzerland, has come to symbolize neoliberal globalism and, as Steger and Wilson argue, play an important role in the dissemination of this ideology to a global audience. The World Social Forum (WSF) stands opposed to this ideology; held annually since 2001, it constitutes 'one of the chief production sites of … ideological and policy alternatives' (2012: 439) to market globalization. This has granted it a prominent place in the wider movement referred to as alter-globalization, to emphasize its distance from nationalist or protectionist opposition to globalization. Conway depicts the WSF meeting as avowedly cosmopolitan, representing the 'pre-eminent site for the encounter, transformation and agglomeration of movement knowledges arising from subaltern struggles rooted in specific social and geographical locations and identities' (2011: 217). In contrast to critiques of this movement as lacking a 'coherent agenda for assisting the poor' (Friedman, 2005: 390), Steger and Wilson have argued that it is 'not simply calling for an end to market-driven, neoliberal economic globalization but is proposing a coherent *global* alternative to this model' (2012: 452).

The alter-globalization movement's ambitions are vauntingly idealistic and largely untethered from calculations of practical political possibility: challenging the world system of neoliberal market globalization by the aggregation of interests among those it negatively affects. This is to be achieved through, as Santos, Nunes and Meneses have it, the formation of 'counter-hegemonic global public spheres' to realize an oppositional form of global interconnection and shared identity that they term 'subaltern cosmopolitism' (2008: xl). This idealistic perspective was appealing within Liangshan's bohemian cultural scene, where ideas associated with the alter-globalization movement were explicitly disseminated, particularly through the village-in-the-city commune and the broader punk subcultural networks with which it was connected. At a wider and more diffuse level, ideals of subaltern sympathy were encountered throughout the scene, rooted also in the influence of Rastafari reggae and

psytrance subcultures. This bohemian focus on the subaltern implies a lesser degree of universalism than human-rights discourse; the latter, with its implications for international law and the oversight of supranational institutions, echoes the normative cosmopolitanism advocated by Beck (2006), implying that the global application of political institutions modelled at a national level in the liberal-democratic West promises to resolve problems that transcend national borders, to the mutual benefit of all concerned. Bohemian subaltern cosmopolitanism is not incompatible with this universalist perspective focused on individual-level rights and political participation, which many bohemians also share, but it has an oppositional quality that renders it distinct. Bohemians may envy certain aspects of liberal-democratic systems such as participatory democracy and equality under the law, but this does not imply an uncritical acceptance of those systems, especially the economic and social inequalities with which they are perceived to be associated. While this partly reflects the influence of the alter-globalization movement, bohemian oppositionality also embodies a distinctly Chinese logic – one that directly parallels the 'iconoclast-nativist synthesis' which Levenson (1968: 140) identifies in the intellectual history of early 20th-century Chinese communism.

As Levenson argues, for those wishing to challenge China's Confucian status-quo, but whose nationalist sentiments rendered them unwilling to simply ape the imperialist Western model of scientific-empiricist, classical liberalism that was its direct competitor, communism had enormous appeal as a system of thought that seemed modern and scientific but stood opposed to the status quo both in China and the imperialist West. Similarly, for contemporary Chinese bohemians, a subaltern cosmopolitanism that stands opposed to dominant socioeconomic and political hierarchies throughout the world allows them to express opposition to China's authoritarian system without giving the appearance of an uncritical preference for an alternative system inextricably associated with the West. Not only does this insulate them from the nationalist critique that is often levelled at dissidents in China, but it also bestows a cosmopolitan form of radical cachet. Just as early Chinese

communists could see themselves as even more radically modern and scientific than the West, so too can bohemians find in their subaltern cosmopolitanism a form of distinction, which renders their politics more idealistic, egalitarian, and oppositional than Western liberalism, with its complacent commensurability with the neoliberal global order. Accordingly, the oppositional cosmopolitan politics that emerges from bohemian scenes in China is often quite distinct from that advocated by the so-called 'Davos man'.

7.10 Conduits of Contention in Chinese Youth Culture

Comparing elite-student and bohemian politics with other forms of global and local contention is also useful as way to illustrate the various conduits of influence between them. While the barrier of China's border-level censorship insulates these groups to some degree from engagement with global contention, both groups' censorship-evasion capacity limits this insulation. However, the two groups' receptivity to the influence of global contentious movements is shaped by the pragmatism or idealism of their own political proclivities. Accordingly, we see a greater influence of identity-based contention among the elite-students, such as discourses surrounding gender, sexual and ethnic identities that are also represented within their own socially homogeneous group, which imply limited claims that are not fundamentally incompatible with China's authoritarian system. By contrast, idealistic forms of contention such as the human-rights or alter-globalization movements, with broader or more universalistic scopes that are irreconcilable with the authoritarian system and its compartmentalized social management, exert a greater influence on the bohemians. For the latter group, however, because of the sensitivity of idealistic anti-system contention in China, public online communication plays a lesser role in the local influence of these discourses. Interpersonal connections with a global reach, typically through alternative networks such as that of the punk subculture, play a correspondingly greater role. Furthermore, in the case of the village-in-the-city commune, printed materials, such as the pamphlets and zines associated with the anarcho-punk scene, helped to disseminate ideas associated with the alter-

globalization movement, while avoiding the constraints imposed by online censorship and surveillance.

Within China, the greatest degree of interconnection is among distinct forms of idealistic contention, with anti-system implications that render political claims and discontents more compatible, facilitating greater connections between different groups and publics than among forms of contention that are pragmatically compartmentalized. The universalistic claims of human-rights activists, often integrated into global networks, are themselves articulated to national-level rumoring and dissident networks. Similarly, local elements of these networks often influence the alternative information environments that surround local bohemian scenes. Even non-politicized members of bohemian groups are strongly influenced by the alternative information environments in which they are immersed; often, as in Liangshan, this implies passive exposure to various forms of idealistic online contention with which those environments are connected.

The important structural role played by bohemian groups is reflected in their local-level connection with, and potential influence over, elite-student groups and other culturally mainstream youth. The various forms of idealistic politics with which bohemian scenes are suffused are systematically excluded from mass media; they are ordinarily never encountered within the cultural mainstream. However, the dependence of bohemian scenes on wider youth populations, as customers and recruits, ensures a level of connection between their corresponding networks – established through face-to-face interaction, sustained online, and subsequently allowing the flow of information from one to the other. The orthodox Confucian culture of elite-student groups often renders them resistant to the kinds of egalitarian, idealistic politics that proliferate within bohemian scenes, as does their own elite position and interest in the maintenance of existing hierarchies. This conduit of influence between bohemian and elite-student groups is therefore tenuous. However, as will be discussed in the conclusion to this thesis, the implications of ongoing economic development, and limitations inherent to the Party-State policies through which the segregation of such groups is

maintained, suggest that the strength of this influence is likely to increase over the longer term.

The potential political significance of this local-level connection between bohemian and elite-student groups is further enhanced by elite students' connections with wider spheres of Chinese public discourse. Enmeshed as they are in geographically dispersed networks of similarly elite students, their communicative reach is greater than that of localized bohemian groups. As consummate and sophisticated online communicators, lacking the stigma of bohemian deviance and possessing considerable cultural capital that, quite unlike the subcultural capital on which status and prestige in local bohemian scenes is predicated, is accepted throughout mainstream Chinese society, their capacity for wider influence is high. Should the public sphericules of which such groups are part come under the influence of bohemians' idealistic, anti-system contention, the potential for such ideas to spread further, across barriers imposed by the fragmentation of the Chinese public sphere, would be far greater than their current localized reach among largely segregated dissident and bohemian networks. This threat resides not merely in the proliferation of opposition to the single-party system, which the Party-State's sophisticated toolkit of authoritarian control grants it a considerable capacity to suppress. It is in the idealistic logic underlying such contention – which can potentially result in the aggregation of perceived interests between diverse, compartmentalized social groups – that the greater threat resides.

Consider, by comparison, the powerful, lasting impact on American society, culture, and politics of the 1960s counterculture. This impact is made more apparent if we consider the counterculture as not only comprised of the 'hippies', who 'came from a prosperous, white, male-defined segment of society', but also a host of other groups and movements with whom their interests were aligned, often self-consciously – the New Left, including both radical student activists and 'ethnic revolutionaries and activists, most notably African Americans, Chicanos, and Native Americans' (Miller, 2011: xxiv, xx), the civil rights movement, anti-war activists, feminist activists, the emergent LGBT movement and more.

Idealistic politics that could cut across the state-imposed compartmentalization of Chinese society, encompassing a non-trivial proportion of the population and aggregating their perceived interests in opposition to those of the Party-State, would presage the emergence of a true Chinese counterculture – one that could pose a greater threat to the regime than the disturbances of 1989, the failure of which largely stemmed from the 'inability of students' – elitist and pragmatically focused on the interests of their own social echelon – 'to forge alliances with other social elements: entrepreneurs, workers, or peasants' (Perry, 2002: xxix; see also Kelliher, 1993). The aggregated politics of any such Chinese counterculture, in the broad sense of a large-scale movement of mutually supportive movements, would little resemble those of either the bohemian or elite-student groups compared in this study. Nonetheless, both bohemian and elite-student groups would likely play an important and interconnected role in the process of trans-group mobilization through which any such counterculture emerged.

8 Conclusion

8.1 The Relationship between Bohemian and Elite Youth

Bohemianism in the narrow sense describes various groups in Europe and North America with roots in a subculture that emerged in France, in the early 19th century. However, in the broad sense with which the term is used in this thesis to describe Liangshan's bohemian cultural scene, bohemianism is a general phenomenon. In any society with sufficient social freedom, wherever large numbers of young people have congregated for the purposes of higher education, a creative underbelly of local youth culture will also have emerged in which institutionally unsanctioned artistic, intellectual, and recreational activities flourish. Matza's depiction of American bohemianism can be seen as capturing a general attribute: 'bohemian enterprise consists of two interrelated features, unconventional art and unconventional personal experience' (1961: 114). While such a broad definition of bohemianism must necessarily gloss over significant regional and historical dissimilarities, certain structural features will tend to reoccur.

Bohemian groups are likely to be more heterogeneous in their composition and wider interconnections than culturally mainstream or elite youth groups. Matza argues that the commitment to expressive authenticity in the American bohemianism of the Beat generation took on a 'peculiar style of populism in which authentic life coincides with … life as it is lived in the lowest orders of society and the underworld'; at the same time, while a bohemian's artistic and intellectual proclivities are often the product of a privileged upbringing, he underwent a 'descent into the lowest orders, resulting from his dedicated poverty' (Matza, 1961: 115). Similarly, Brooks notes that the original French bohemians 'identified with others they saw as victims of the bourgeois order: the poor, the criminals, the ethnic and racial outcasts' (Brooks, 2000: 68). We can discern here a general process at work; while a disdain for the bourgeois materialism of mainstream society is common among bohemian groups in the narrow sense, some degree of poverty is common to bohemians

defined broadly. Unconventional creative pursuits, lacking commercial marketability or the sanction of formal institutions, are not remunerative. Struggling artists, poets, musicians, and writers require inexpensive accommodation, sustenance, and venues for their unconventional or disreputable recreations. They cluster in less-affluent, densely populated neighborhoods – particularly those which are demographically mixed, where their own eccentricities are likely to go unremarked. In the American case, bohemian and subsequent Beat and hippie communities were drawn to New York's Greenwich Village because 'it had a reputation for tolerance, a proliferation of cheap rooming houses for single persons, the possibility of creative (although not well paid) employment and a lively social scene' (Parker, 2004: 145). Bohemian life, in such places, encourages a broad diversity of social connections[36]; in 1950s America, still subject to strict racial segregation, this social heterogeneity contributed towards the considerable influence that the bohemian Beat generation and their contemporaries drew – or appropriated – from popular African-American culture (Gair, 2007; Miller, 2011).

While bohemian groups tend to be diversely interconnected with subordinate groups across boundaries of social segregation, they also stand in varying degrees of interpenetration with elite-student groups, depending on the degree to which the local bohemian subculture is deviant or has been absorbed into the cultural mainstream. In America, it was the closing of this distance between bohemian and student groups that presaged the rise of the 1960s hippie movement, when the 'countercultural 'centre' shifted from Greenwich Village to the University of California's Berkeley campus' (Gair, 2007: 93). Bohemian influence on elite youth can introduce social heterogeneity to groups that would otherwise be characterized by a scarcity of cross-cutting social connections. More prominently, this influence can expose elite groups that remain homogeneous – as with the chiefly white, privileged hippies – to political values and ideas formed within and fitted to the heterogeneous social environments of subcultural bohemian scenes. Such ideas synthesize discontents from a diversity of

[36] Scholars have also noted, in a countervailing trend, that bohemian presence in mixed neighborhoods serves as a catalyst in a process of gentrification that, over the longer term, tends to render them homogeneously affluent (Florida, 2012).

subordinate positions, tending therefore towards broadly applicable and often egalitarian or universalistic ideals. I have emphasized in this thesis the association between such ideals and China's heterodox tradition; this culturally specific influence may simply reinforce a tendency inherent in bohemian groups defined broadly, derived from their cross-cutting structural positions.

In America, bohemianism broke into the cultural mainstream only in the 1960s with the hippie movement and its subsequent commodification. While the mainstream absorption of this movement resulted in the 'crass commercialization of its ideas and values', largely denaturing its countercultural threat, it was precisely through this absorption that it 'made a lasting impact on the whole American ethos' (Miller, 2011: xiiv). In contemporary China, as in racially segregated America, bohemian scenes expose elite youth to connections that cut across a divided society. However, the bohemian-elite distance remains high; in this respect contemporary China superficially resembles 1950s America, when the Beat generation introduced bohemian heterogeneity and idealism to a small minority of young people, leaving the cultural mainstream untouched – until the emergence of a full-fledged youth counterculture some few years later. It is safe to say that the leadership of the CCP would prefer to avoid the repetition of such a development among Chinese youth. But what are the prospects of a true, broad-based counterculture emerging in China, where contemporary conditions – including pervasive internet use and the cultural influence of an authoritarian Party-State – differ markedly from 1960s America? In the remainder of this chapter, I will bring to bear on this question insights drawn from the comparison of the elite-student and bohemian groups in this thesis, while also drawing out implications for the ongoing resilience of the Party-State's influence on sociocultural change in China, and the impact of internet use and communicative control on this process.

8.2 Implications for Party-State Control over Youth Culture

Let us assume that the perspective on cosmopolitan Chinese youth evinced in this thesis – that the orthodox cosmopolitanism and pragmatic politics of elite-student groups constitute little threat to the political status-quo, whereas the heterodox cosmopolitanism and idealistic politics of bohemian groups are considerably more threatening – is shared by elements of the Party-State with responsibility for the maintenance of social stability. It would not be possible to simply suppress bohemian scenes without resorting to the kinds of totalitarian measures that have, in recent decades, been reserved for ethnic and religious minorities in provinces such as Tibet and Xinjiang. Many of the activities that make up bohemian social and cultural life fall within the private recreational realm; attempting to suppress such activities would violate the 'social contract' at the heart of Party-State's reform-era legitimacy, that 'provided for wide economic and social freedoms in return for political fealty' (Gilley, 2004: 21). Any effort at suppression would therefore be counter-productive, generating considerably more resistance than it eliminated. The question therefore becomes how to minimize the political threat posed by bohemian groups and their heterodox cosmopolitanism.

Any solution to this conundrum will take one of two forms. The authorities might seek to depoliticize bohemian culture by absorbing it into the cultural mainstream, coopting its creative energies and identifying specific bohemian practices that can be usefully repurposed, whether for political or economic ends. This depoliticization routinely occurs, as with the US counterculture of the 1960s, in liberal-democratic societies where commercialized cultural industries are not prevented by strict political controls from 'appropriating and institutionalizing a deviant subculture's primary means of differentiation' (Wood, 2000: 32; see also Dotter, 1994). The benefits of such a strategy may be considerable, as indicated by scholarship emphasizing the considerable prosperity generated by bohemian creatives in post-industrial economies (Florida, 2012), the constraining impact on China's

global influence of strict controls over domestic cultural production (Zhou, 2015), and indeed long-standing arguments concerning the distracting and depoliticizing effects of mass entertainment in general (Kern and Hainmueller, 2009; Morozov, 2011) and popular music in particular (Adorno, 1990). Though attitudes of idealistic anti-system dissent were widespread in Liangshan's bohemian cultural scene, their proliferation may be driven, in part, by pragmatic factors – not least the perception that authoritarian control runs contrary to bohemians' strong inclinations towards cultural and social autonomy. Should the Party-State relax its control, such dissent would likely become attenuated.

However, the absorption of subcultural forms into the cultural mainstream necessarily involves their popularization; acceptance of the large-scale influence of formerly deviant subcultures, even in safely commercialized and depoliticized forms, may seem too great a risk to take. Conversely, then, the authorities might seek to compartmentalize and contain, insulating mainstream youth from the irredeemably subversive influence of bohemian groups, thus constraining their scale by diminishing the influx of subsequent cohorts of prospective young bohemians. The risk to this latter strategy is that it may prove unsuccessful, simultaneously magnifying the subversively idealistic politics of bohemian groups by driving them further underground, without preventing their burgeoning influence over Chinese youth. Despite formidable social management capabilities, many of the factors that influence the proclivity for young Chinese people to engage with local bohemian scenes are either beyond the control of the Party-State, or impossible to adjust without disproportionately negative repercussions.

These strategies of cooptation and containment are not mutually exclusive; at the time of my fieldwork, they were being simultaneously pursued by different levels of government. Pinball Bar, on my first arrival in Liangshan, was locally important for both hip-hop and skateboarding – but also for the bohemian drug trade, as a site in which cannabis was openly sold and consumed with the corrupt complicity of law enforcement. By the time I left the city, it was a state-funded center for the promotion of skateboard culture, with the explicit remit of

developing the next generation of adolescent youth in the sport. Individuals once prominently involved in the cannabis trade were now abstemious, regularly drug-tested members of the provincial skateboard team and prospective Olympic athletes. This indicates not only the flexibility of the local Chinese state in turning elements of bohemian culture to its advantage, but also the effectiveness of such measures, which transformed a drug den into a youth center of sporting excellence over a few short months. It also reveals how the criminality that characterizes certain elements of bohemian scenes, focused on the drug trade, renders those elements particularly susceptible to cooptation by the state. At a sufficiently high level, criminality of this kind relies upon either direct connections with the local state, or indirect connections mediated through local *heishehui*. This provides not only a point of contact through which pressures of cooptation may be exerted, but also the leverage to overcome potential resistance to such pressures; it also shows how the framework of the heterodox tradition facilitates heterogeneous interactions for elements of the state, just as it does for bohemians.

At a national level, the launch of the wildly popular *China Has Hip-Hop* (*Zhongguo You Xiha* – 中国有嘻哈) reflects the commercial incentives within cultural industries for the marketing of subcultural styles to a mass-market audience – especially hip-hop, by far the most popular of such genres in China. Bursting onto the Chinese airwaves toward the end of my fieldwork in 2017, or rather the streaming service iQiyi, this rap competition suddenly projected into the cultural mainstream a genre that I had only encountered locally in underground, subversive form. It was impossible to miss its cultural impact. Respectable, middle-aged people suddenly started dropping English terms like ‘freestyle’ into their everyday conversation. Suffice it to say, the show was insufficiently bowdlerized for state authorities; depictions of hip-hop subculture were banned from mass media shortly after the conclusion of the first season (Sina, 2018), several of the most popular contestants were blacklisted, and the show, when it returned ‘went to great lengths not only to adhere strictly to nationalism and cut out any mention of sex, drugs, or cops but to overcompensate by

encouraging contestants, including several Uighurs, to adopt a "Chinese style" (*zhongguofeng*) in their raps' (Teixeira, 2020). The name, too, was changed, eliminating its original reference to the hip-hop (*xiha* – 嘻哈) subculture, which 'implies that the forms of hip-hop have integrated into Chinese culture', in favor of the specific practice of 'new Chinese rap' (*shuochang* – 说唱), which suggests an effort to 'conform to party censorship lines and rebrand the culture of the show as distinctly Chinese, erasing the origins of hip-hop and all that hip-hop stands for' (K. Lu, 2021). Similarly, the Party-State itself has made persistent efforts over recent years to dissociate the musical technique of rap from the broader subculture of hip-hop, and deploy it for propaganda purposes (BBC News, 2016; Li, 2018; Zhou, 2021).

My fieldwork was conducted at a point of flux, where the tension between strategies of co-opting and containing bohemian subcultures was yet to be resolved. The subsequent ban from mass media seems to indicate a decision that relying on mainstream absorption to commercialize and depoliticize such deviant subcultures was too risky to countenance. This risk partly resides, as the Sinification of *The New Rap of China* indicates, in the global character of such subcultures; their absorption into the Chinese mainstream would introduce vectors of global cultural influence beyond the control of the Party-State, potentially popularizing heterodox cosmopolitanism among Chinese youth. This policy shift, then, reflects the Party-State's commitment to containing the influence of bohemian subcultures by constraining their connections with elite-student groups and other culturally mainstream youth, through a conventional strategy of compartmentalized social control. This strategy has proved effective thus far, as reflected in the comparatively small scale and limited influence of bohemian groups in China. And yet, the popularity of hip-hop indicates that this influence may be burgeoning, driven by factors the Party-State has limited capacity to modulate. To explain why this may be so, it is helpful to consider connection between mainstream and bohemian groups in terms of careers.

As a form of youth culture, local bohemian scenes are characterized by a high degree of turnover in their composition, and therefore rely upon recruiting new entrants from each cohort of young people who arrive or come of age within the city where they are based. For students, who make up the bulk of such recruits, connections with their local bohemian scene are a matter of degree. Some students merely foray into their local scene as a site of nightlife entertainment and subsequently lose interest; others participate more consistently while also pursuing their studies, likely drifting away on graduation; others still – like many members of the bohemian group – may abandon their studies entirely in favor of a full-time career within the scene.

This variation in trajectories is familiar from scholarship on deviance. As Becker suggests through his concept of 'deviant careers' (Becker, 1963), those who become engaged with deviant subcultures encounter certain inflection points which result in either their withdrawal back into conventional society, or their further immersion into an 'organized deviant group' with a 'self-justifying rationale' that 'solidifies a deviant identity' (1963: 25, 38). For older bohemians, as with Becker's jazz musicians, starting a family, with the consequent necessity to generate a stable income, often catalyzes a withdrawal from participation in the scene in favor of a conventional career. Conversely, bohemians who drop out of university, acquire substantial tattoos or even a criminal record may have closed off those conventional opportunities which might otherwise have seemed attractive alternatives to continued bohemian life.

A bohemian career has certain key inflection points that determine the trajectory of potential bohemians within their local scenes, and therefore strongly influence the scale of those scenes and their capacity to spread within the local youth population. The first and most important of these is the point of entry, at which young people decide whether to visit bohemian sites and participate in bohemian activities, thereby falling under the influence of China's heterodox tradition and the deviant cosmopolitanism of the global subcultures represented in their local scene. The second of these is the point of commitment, which

surrounds the decision as to whether to seek a livelihood within such scenes, or to pursue a conventional career, most likely rendering their bohemianism a youthful foray. While every prospective bohemian is different, their decisions at both stages are systematically affected by factors that are generalizable.

The secular trend of increasing prosperity among the Chinese population drives increasing participation of young Chinese people in local bohemian scenes, particularly in its effects on the inflection point of entry. Firstly, this prosperity has been associated with ever-greater educational attainment and participation in higher education for Chinese youth, expanding the pool of potential recruits for local bohemian scenes by increasing the student population in large Chinese cities. Enrollment in tertiary education 'among 18–22 year-olds increased from 9.8% in 1998 to 24.2% in 2009' (Che and Zhang, 2018: 2285); this proportion had grown to 42.7 percent by 2016 (Sun, 2017), when my fieldwork commenced, and subsequently rose to 57.8 percent in 2021 (Xinhua, 2022). Increased prosperity also bestows greater disposable income, allowing students to afford the cultural consumption on which bohemian scenes depend, and other costs associated with bohemian lifestyles such as travel and the consumption of alcohol or cannabis. In addition, the strictures imposed by residing in university dormitories constitute a major limiting factor on students' capacity to participate fully in bohemian life. Increasing affluence, by allowing greater numbers of students to rent out-of-campus accommodation at commercial rates that are considerably higher than the subsidized cost of accommodation in the heavily controlled university environment, weakens controls that inhibit students from participating in bohemian scenes.

These same factors played an important role in fostering connections between culturally mainstream youth and the emergent US counterculture of the 1960s. As Gair notes, 'the permeability of the culture/counterculture divide was facilitated by the prosperity of post-war America' (2007: 4). A key factor fostering connections across this divide was the 'expansion of the college and university sector [that] resulted in large numbers of relatively highly educated young people living in close proximity to one another on and around

campuses, with considerably more freedom than they had experienced at home'. This student population had 'high disposable incomes, which could facilitate … activities not necessarily endorsed by parents', as well as 'more leisure time than was the case for earlier generations, where a higher percentage of the school-leaving population would move straight into full-time work' (2007: 4). This historical example suggests that these factors may increase the bohemian influence over elite-student groups in China over the longer term.

Of course, even if ever-greater prosperity renders participation in bohemian life increasingly appealing for elite-student groups, the Party-State may nonetheless seek to constrain their tendency to enter bohemian scenes through its command over the university environment itself. Currently, universities chiefly rely on discouragement and incentive, rather than explicit prohibition, to prevent students from leading the kinds of 'independent lifestyles' (Yan, 2014: 503) that bohemianism implies. A wide range of potential measures could strengthen this discouragement; students might be obliged to live in campus housing throughout their studies or forbidden from leaving the campus for purely social purposes. The latitude for political counsellors to affect students' scores based on non-academic factors, such as social and cultural activities or political reliability, might be expanded. Measures of this kind might, however, provoke a backlash, undermining the currently widespread voluntary compliance with university strictures on social activity among student groups.

The Party-State's capacity to strictly enforce the compartmentalization of elite-student groups is likely to be eroded by ever-greater prosperity but, at the same time, the contrary outcome presents an even greater threat to the manageability of Chinese youth. A substantial and prolonged economic downturn would have a strong impact on the career opportunities available to young people, especially at the crucial juncture of graduation from higher education. China has long had a problem with youth unemployment (De Kloet and Fung, 2017), and the rapid expansion of higher education has generated an especially severe shortage of graduate-level opportunities (Dian, 2014). The problem was severe in 2022, when 'unemployment for those aged between 18 and 24 was 16% in March, and the outlook may

have worsened since' (Ren, 2022) due to the widespread effects of lockdowns imposed due to a resurgence of COVID-19 in the country.

The inability of graduates to find work commensurate with their level of education affects the inflection point of commitment to bohemian life. While prosperity increases the appeal of bohemian scenes to mainstream youth over the long term, a short-term paucity of opportunities for conventional success will heighten the relative appeal of the non-economic rewards offered in bohemian scenes, expanding their scale and influence. Despite its impressive track record on overseeing persistent economic growth, the Chinese Party-State, like any government, has only a limited capacity to prevent a domestic downturn in the face of global economic forces, and only a limited capacity to restructure that domestic economy to ensure sufficient graduate-level opportunities for those torn between conventional and bohemian careers. However, should the Party-State prove unable to maintain the economic development and burgeoning standards of living that have characterized the past few decades, the greater recruitment of culturally mainstream youth into politically subversive bohemian scenes may be the least of its concerns, given that its high level of political support among wider youth groups, as with the population as a whole (Wright, 2010), is rooted in 'legitimacy based on performance indicators' which are chiefly economic (Rosen, 2009: 366). Should youth unemployment remain persistently high in China, this could serve to politicize broad swathes of the youth population beyond bohemian scenes; an increase in 'blocked social mobility' in Hong Kong over recent decades coincided with a considerable growth in youth discontent and activism (Wong and Koo, 2016: 516).

While in this study I have emphasized the widespread support for the Party-State among its elite-student participants, this support is not produced by ideological commitment to the authoritarian system that sustains its rule, but by a pragmatic belief that this system is meritocratic and therefore generates government that is more competent, capable of more effective, long-term policy design and implementation, in comparison to alternative liberal-democratic systems. However, in the face of incontrovertible evidence of circumstances with

strongly negative ramifications for their own elite echelon, their support for the Party-State would undoubtedly crumble. Elite students' pragmatic politics lend support to the current system – but only while that system continues to demonstrably serve their interests.

8.3 External Validity: Analytical Generalization and Transferability

In this thesis, I have argued for relationships between Chinese cultural traditions, the elite cultures and deviant countercultures of cosmopolitan Chinese youth, the social organization and mediated communications of such groups, and their distinct political worldviews that lend themselves to pragmatic and idealistic politics respectively. The strength and wider implications of these arguments depend in no small part on the external validity of this research, which must be considered in light of the limitations imposed by its small scale and non-representative sampling methods.

Firestone identifies three distinct arguments for the external validity of qualitative research: 'sample-to-population extrapolation, analytical generalization and case-to-case transfer' (1993: 16). Sample-to-population extrapolation, given its reliance on statistical methods and the representational sampling of clearly delineated populations, cannot support the external validity of this study's findings. Analytical generalization – generalizing to a theory, rather than a population – seems a stronger argument for the external validity of a multiple-case study. The selection of two groups of cosmopolitan Chinese youth based on their distinct cultures constitutes theoretical replication, predicting contrasting results for anticipatable reasons: 'multiple cases, in this sense, resemble multiple experiments' (Yin, 2009: 38). This research was initially conceived in such terms, testing the proposition that integration with or divergence from China's mainstream culture strongly shapes the political implications of communicative cosmopolitanism. Interdependencies uncovered during its course – not least that between the cultures of the two groups and their patterns of social organization and interaction – introduce further areas of asymmetry between the cases that render the theoretical implications of their comparison somewhat less than clear-cut. It is

precisely these complex interrelations, uncovered inductively during the research rather than tested deductively through its multiple-case design, that constitute its chief theoretical contribution; these wider theoretical implications are discussed further below. However, whereas these interrelations or mechanisms cannot be straightforwardly extrapolated to larger populations, they may also offer productive insight in other settings through case-to-case transfer.

Tracy positions transferability as one way to achieve resonance – a key criterion for the quality of qualitative research – suggesting that that 'transferability is achieved when readers feel as though the story of the research overlaps with their own situation … [or] that they have experienced the same thing in another arena' (2010: 845). While transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and the related notion of naturalistic generalization (Stake, 1994) are rooted in an interpretivist-constructivist epistemology that challenges the validity of axiomatic generalization altogether, they remain nonetheless 'well accommodated within already established ways of thinking about the extension of generalizing statements from one setting to another' (Hellström, 2008: 335). The 'burden of proof for transferability', Firestone suggests, 'lies less with the investigator than with the reader. The investigator's responsibility ends with providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgements possible' (1993: 18). It is for the reader to judge whether the cases I have outlined in this study resonate with their own experiences of contemporary youth groups, Chinese or otherwise, or indeed whether I have provided sufficiently 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973b: 6) of these cases to sustain such resonance. Some discussion of these cases' potential transferability is nonetheless warranted.

A reader whose experience of Chinese youth is chiefly derived from encounters with international students in western universities will likely find my depiction of the elite-student case considerably more transferable than that of the bohemians. While China has been the largest source country for overseas students since 1998 (Liu, 2022), with around 703,500 leaving the country for this reason in 2019 alone (Textor, 2022), the requisite educational and

socioeconomic underpinnings for such international study are available to only a small minority of China's youth population. The backgrounds and experiences of these students will likely resemble, in important ways, those of the elite-student group. Insights drawn from this case, quite apart from their relevance to similarly elite youth groups in China, may also shed light on the widely observed nationalistic support for the CCP among Chinese students abroad (Hail, 2015; Jiang, 2021; Yu, 2021). Such sentiments, this case suggests, are not merely produced through indoctrination, nor stand in tension with these students' cosmopolitanism and international mobility, but are rather an entirely natural and coherent response for a socially segregated, elite echelon who are 'the direct beneficiaries of the current regime' (Dong, 2017: 562).

Circumstances have changed since this research was conducted. The resounding sense of optimism encountered among the elite-student group, concerning both personal and national futures, may no longer similarly characterize comparable groups today. Since the time of my fieldwork, an economy that had grown at breakneck pace for decades ground almost to a standstill, driven by a crisis in the housing market (Farrer, 2022), a wide-ranging Party-State crackdown on 'disorderly expansion of capital', particularly in the tech sector (Che and Goldkorn, 2021), and restrictions necessitated by the lengthy maintenance of a zero-COVID strategy (Hale and Yu, 2023). The severity of these restrictions generated the most widespread expressions of public dissent since 1989 – not least from students at elite institutions, such as Beijing's Tsinghua University (Davidson, 2022).

I cannot say whether such developments indicate a fundamental shift in the political worldview of China's contemporary elite youth groups; my intuition, given the highly distinctive qualities of COVID-19 public health measures as a source of discontent, is to the contrary. During the prolonged maintenance of the zero-COVID strategy, the emergence of unrest spanning highly varied areas of society, from migrant workers to urban elites, may have resembled coordinated opposition to unpopular Party-State policy. However, because COVID-19 is largely blind to the compartmentalized structure on which the Party-State's

social management strategy typically relies, the egregious consequences of the COVID-zero strategy were almost uniquely cross-cutting in terms of how they affected the interests of different social groups. However widespread, collective action over an issue that directly affects *every* social group may remain interest-oriented, in He and Su's (2018) terms, rather than indicating an idealistic politics that cuts across social divisions. Nonetheless, it was the perceived risks of such trans-group interest aggregation that likely prompted the sudden abandonment of the COVID-zero strategy in late 2022 (Yuan, 2022). Absent such a cross-cutting impetus that affects them personally, it is hard to imagine that privileged, socially segregated, culturally elitist youth groups will maintain the stances of systemic dissent that some have recently adopted.

As I have emphasized, the elite-student group in this study supported the CCP on pragmatic and implicitly self-interested grounds. The support of groups such as this would undoubtedly be undermined by national circumstances that deprived them of the material and status rewards to which they feel entitled as educational and cultural elites; such circumstances might arise in a prolonged economic downturn. And yet, it is hard to imagine a section of the youth population likely to benefit more from the widely anticipated economic resurgence associated with China's post-COVID reopening (Li, 2023). What is more, an economic downturn lacks the cross-cutting ramifications of a highly infectious virus. Scholars warning of long-term economic stagnation, with China stuck in a middle-income trap due to education-based labor polarization, concede that even in this scenario 'China's elites … will continue to do well' (Rozelle and Hell, 2020: 49). Absent the social and cultural foundations for idealistic sympathy for the less-advantaged, elite youth with realistic prospects of prestige and material prosperity are likely to continue to support the CCP. The continued prosperity and status-dominance of elite groups seems likely; combatting inequality is a considerably greater public policy challenge than maintaining it. Moreover, in qualifying a return to the rhetoric of 'common prosperity' in recent years, state media have been keen to downplay its

redistributive implications: 'Common prosperity is not egalitarianism. It is by no means robbing the rich to help the poor' (Xinhua, 2021).

Though I have emphasized that the elite-student group represents a considerably more typical case than the bohemians, they are nonetheless chiefly typical of an elite minority. The bohemian case, though highly distinctive, also has certain attributes which may also be broadly transferable to other social contexts. Considered as a subcultural or even countercultural phenomenon, the bohemian group represents a counterreaction to mainstream Chinese culture and the status hierarchy it comprises – driven both by structural exclusion from its materially defined aspirations, and the unsatisfying emptiness of those goals themselves. Recent developments in Chinese youth and popular culture suggest that counterreactions of this kind, albeit in distinct or attenuated forms, may extend far beyond such flamboyantly subcultural face-to-face communities.

Diaosi (屌丝 – loser) culture, which first emerged online in 2011 among football fans before spreading much more widely, is a term that implies the embrace of qualities stigmatized in the cultural mainstream. Sum depicts *diaosi* culture as a product of the structural exclusion of second-generation rural-to-urban migrants by *suzhi* discourse and the *hukou* system. Male *diaosi*[37] often 'self-deprecate as 'poor, short and ugly', with strong implications for their position in the marriage market, and in explicit contrast to social elites characterized as 'tall, rich and handsome'. Yet this 'latent hostility towards social elitism' (2017: 303-304) is juxtaposed, in its self-deprecating quality, with a reaffirmation – quite unlike the bohemians – of the same hegemonic norms by merit of which *diaosi* are rendered subordinate.

However, other scholars interpret the demographics of *diaosi* culture quite differently. Cohen (2013) points out that '*diaosi* … has gone on to become an almost

[37] The term, which has phallic implications, was initially used to describe men before being adopted by both genders.

universal identity among Chinese web users'. Yet despite being embraced at almost every level of socioeconomic and cultural hierarchies, it retains an oppositional implication 'that the prosperity of the last 20 years has gone mostly to a small group of well-connected people'. Others have depicted those who adopt the *diaosi* identity as motivated precisely by this expansive, socially cross-cutting community, as a 'device through which they could achieve virtual feelings of bonding, communion, and fraternity in a context where they have been structurally deprived of such feelings' (Yang, Tang and Wang, 2015: 210). In this sense, online *diaosi* communities can be seen as providing comparable socio-emotive rewards to bohemian communities predicated on face-to-face interactions, which similarly cut across the compartmentalized structure of society.

While the widespread appeal of *diaosi* identity implies the unattainability of socially desirable goals, the recently modish concept of involution (*neijuan* – 内卷) denotes the intensely competitive pressure imposed even on those individuals considered affluent and successful. The anthropologist Xiang Biao describes the concept, in its contemporary popular usage in China, as denoting a 'never-ending circular trap' produced by social and professional competition, involving 'an endless cycle of self-flagellation, feeling as if you're running in place and constantly having to motivate yourself' (Wang and Ge, 2020). Arguably a response to this relentless competition, particularly in the '996' work culture[38] common in China's tech industries, are a variety of developments falling under the umbrella of *sang* (丧) culture, which denotes melancholic disaffection and a reduced work ethic. Emerging online through various memes from 2016 onwards, *sang* culture often draws on expressions of disillusionment from Japanese culture (Zeng, 2017); it can also be considered as a response to the 'political buzzword' of 'positive energy' (*zheng nengliang* – 正能量) promoted by the Xi Jinping administration (X. Lu, 2021).

[38] Working from 9am to 9pm, six days a week.

Zeng (2017) depicts sang culture, insofar as it represents a reaction to long hours and cutthroat competition in the work lives of the contemporary Chinese middle class, as ‘a first world problem: Its adherents wallow in grievances that contrast starkly with the much more pressing problems faced in most other developing nations’, or indeed in other socioeconomic strata within China. Yet *sang* culture can also be seen as a product of blocked mobility, as even the most diligent and gifted young people from less privileged backgrounds are increasingly unable to meet social expectations of home ownership or urban *hukou* status. Related online buzzwords emerging more recently, such as ‘lie flat’ (*tangping* – 躺平) (Bandurski, 2021) and ‘let it rot’ (*bailan* – 摆烂) (Ni, 2022), imply not merely disillusionment with mainstream social expectations but their rejection, in favor of non-diligence construed positively as, in the words of one adherent ‘prioritizing peace and tranquility of the body and soul’ (Zhang and Liu, 2021).

The practical implications of choosing to 'lie flat' can be compared to recent developments in western labor markets, such as the limited commitment to one’s employment duties implied by the term ‘quiet quitting’, or the rejection of employment altogether in the widely noted post-COVID ‘great resignation’ (Formica and Sfodera, 2022). Yet there are crucial differences. As Weinstein and Hirsch (2022) argue in the case of the US, recent unprecedented rates of resignation have occurred without a corresponding increase in rates of job dissatisfaction or unemployment, because the great majority of those quitting have immediately taken positions with other employers. This implies that many resigning workers in the US are simply taking advantage of an extremely tight labor market to find employment with better conditions; in contrast, young Chinese people choosing to ‘lie flat’ do so in the context of high youth unemployment, particularly for graduate-level positions (Dian, 2014; Ren, 2022). This economic context suggests that disillusionment with employment among Chinese youth constitutes a sharper break with the hegemonic norms of diligent socioeconomic advancement.

S*ang*, along with subsequent lie flat and let it rot phenomena, lack the socially cross-cutting propagation of the *diaosi* identity, which resembles this study's bohemian case; they are likely chiefly constrained to a middle-class demographic who can afford non-diligence. However, like bohemianism, *sang* and related phenomena constitute a considerably more abrupt break with China's mainstream culture, lacking the self-deprecating *diaosi* identity's reaffirmation of hegemonic ideals. Yet *diaosi* and *sang* remain distinct from bohemianism as I have depicted it in this thesis, insofar as their collective cultural life is chiefly manifested online. While a movement such as lie flat can propagate counterhegemonic values widely, it lacks the proactive qualities of bohemian cultural life. The latter is associated with a wide range of physically embodied activities, including but not limited to cultural production, from the voluntaristic to the nakedly entrepreneurial. Not only are such activities fundamental to the ritual intensity which sustains bohemian scenes' divergence from the cultural mainstream, but they also constitute an informal economy that renders such scenes persistently viable, bestowing a relative self-sufficiency that Roberts (1978) positions as among the distinctive features of a counterculture. Young Chinese people cannot choose a *sang* career in the same sense that they can choose a bohemian one.

Nonetheless, *diaosi*, *sang*, lie flat and let it rot each comprise an air of oppositionality to hegemonic status norms that echoes the more clearly explicit oppositionality in the global subcultures through which bohemianism finds its local expression in Liangshan. Given that depictions of such subcultures have been banned from the Chinese airwaves (Sina, 2018), it is little surprise that these various online phenomena have also been met by stances of disapproval from cultural and political elites. Sum notes wide-ranging efforts to 'disrupt, de-politicize, and re-hegemonize' *diaosi* identity, including through condemnations in state media. (2017: 304). The lie flat movement has been similarly condemned as 'shameful' in state media and, unlike with *diaosi*, strictly censored online, while the sale of merchandise bearing the phrase has also been banned (Chen, 2021).

The widespread online propagation of *diaosi* and *sang* cultures supports the wider transferability of this study's bohemian case. Despite their inherent differences from the bohemianism I encountered in Liangshan, the appeal of these online cultures at various levels of the socioeconomic hierarchy points to a malaise within the Chinese mainstream, rooted in a diversity of causes: blocked social mobility, relentless competitive pressure, ever-inflating standards of material affluence and the unrewarding emptiness of status defined through consumption. The propagation of the disaffection these online cultures represent can only enhance the relative appeal of the heterodox moral universe and alternative status hierarchy embodied in a local bohemian scene. While the great majority of disaffected youth will not be drawn into bohemianism, an increasing tendency towards disaffection in each youth cohort will undoubtedly generate a range of subcultural or even countercultural formations to which the insights of this study's bohemian case may well be transferable. At the time of my fieldwork, the elite-student group were far closer to the cultural mainstream of urban Chinese youth than the bohemians. Yet given the entrenchment of inequalities in the Chinese system, disaffection with the hegemonic values of that mainstream – and by extension bohemianism and the idealistic oppositional politics with which it is associated – have considerably greater room to grow than the optimistic elite-student worldview, with its pragmatically self-interested support for the systemic status quo.

8.4 Wider Implications

Just as insights derived from the elite-student and bohemian cases compared in this thesis may be transferable to other settings among of China's youth population, so too may they have theoretical implications that apply beyond this cultural context. One such implication pertains to the social and political impact of online communication. It has long been assumed, from scholarship focused on early iterations of the internet onwards, that online communication opens people up to the world, exposing them to new ideas, information, people and perspectives, thereby driving tendencies towards increasing diversity of social connections (Rainie and Wellman, 2012) and democratization (Rheingold, 1993;

Clinton, 2000; Gilley, 2004; Xiao, 2011). This thesis offers suggestive evidence that those assumptions concerning the socially diversifying and democratizing effects of internet-use should be moderated and refined.

The elite-student group, on which this study is partly focused, scarcely fulfils such expectations at all. Technologically sophisticated, as much a product of the internet age as any in the world, their social connections are structured in the 'looser, more fragmented networks', which Rainie and Wellman see as characteristic of the 'networked individualism' that has been 'powerfully advanced by the widespread use of the internet and mobile phones'. And yet, contrary to this interpretation, elite students lack the 'more diverse personal networks' (2012: 8, 11) that Rainie and Wellman predict; rather, they maintain those connections among their own social echelon, drawing on patterns of face-to-face interaction that are structured by a hierarchical logic.

Similarly, in this group's pragmatic politics that are reconcilable with the authoritarian status-quo, they also fail to fulfil the expectations of democratization rooted in an earlier, more optimistic era of scholarship on the impact of internet use. They are not unaffected by the information control to which the domestic Chinese internet is subject, which shields them from the kinds of individuals whose examples might challenge their perception that stances of idealistic or systemic dissent are unfashionably incompatible with public prestige. And yet, their tendency towards pragmatic support for authoritarianism is not explicable purely in terms of domestic information control that they routinely circumvent in their extensive engagement with the global internet. The elite students are precisely the kind of elite group that Roberts depicts as permitted to evade border-level censorship through VPNs, in a purposeful strategy of avoiding further alienation among individuals already highly politicized and distrustful of their government. As she writes, 'the types of citizens in China who use VPNs are potentially threatening to the government … [because they are] well-endowed in terms of financial standing, education, technological sophistication, political and international connections, and political interest and knowledge' (2018: 172).

The elite-student group undoubtedly possessed such endowments, but notably lacked the distrust in government that Roberts identifies among VPN users in general. The most likely explanation for this discrepancy is that the slightly higher evaluations of the extent of government corruption among VPN users, which Roberts equates to a distrust in government, does not imply the wholesale disapproval of the authoritarian system. Elite students may well be more aware of government corruption than those who do not leap the firewall. Yet it does not follow that such factors translate into a preference for democracy over authoritarianism.

At the root of purported associations between internet use and democratization is often a confidence that liberal democracy is not only superior to the Chinese brand of technocratic authoritarianism, but that this superiority is self-evident. In an unsophisticated form this assumption implies that if only Chinese people had unfettered access to information about the wider world, were exposed to foreign reporting on the flaws of their political system and the merits of its Western alternatives, they would undoubtedly choose to adopt liberal-democratic ways and abandon their own. The elite students' political worldview conflicts sharply with such assumptions because it is produced not by an uncritical acceptance of Party-State propaganda, nor by lack of access to global information, but by its very profusion. Their support for technocratic authoritarianism is entirely coherent, rooted in a sophisticated and well-informed understanding of global and domestic politics. Though shaped by the intellectual elitism of the Confucian tradition and supported by their elevated position within the social hierarchy that tradition informs, their lack of interest in liberal democracy stems chiefly from the fact that, to an outside observer with a pragmatic perspective focused on collective societal interests, the relative merits of that system are often far from obvious. If anything, increased exposure to information on the workings of actual liberal democracies, and indeed exposure to foreign reporting which represents conditions within China in an unrelentingly negative light that conflicts sharply with the lived experience of privileged and sheltered elites, tend to lessen rather than enhance the appeal of systemic political change. A preference for democracy over authoritarianism should be understood as a normative stance,

following an idealistically moral logic – not one that follows inevitably from exposure to a profusion of descriptive information or explanatory theory. Indeed, Chinese elite-student groups' engagement with diverse domestic and global academic and news content implies a dissonance in the normative perspectives to which they are exposed, which generates a tendency towards relativism in the normative realm; they are unlikely to support democratization in the absence of clear evidence for its pragmatic benefits and practical viability in the Chinese context.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that Chinese culture lacks the requisite normative foundation to support procedural democracy or universal suffrage. Firstly, that culture is not monolithic and, as the example of the bohemian group shows, support for procedural democracy readily finds a moral basis in the egalitarianism of China's heterodox tradition. My intention is rather to challenge the assumption that support for democratization is inevitably generated by unfettered access to global information through the internet, or indeed by the more general process of economic development and modernization of which such communicative diversification is one element. This is not because the values which underpin a preference for liberal democracy exist in some independent cultural realm that is causally unconnected from the underlying social environment and its structure of mediated communications. It is perfectly possible to accept, for example, Inglehart and Welzel's claim that the modernization process generates cultural change in the form of burgeoning 'self-expression values' (2005: 1) that privilege individual autonomy, while rejecting their argument that democratization inexorably follows from this development.

This argument, that economic development generates an impetus towards democratization, should be distinguished from the association of online communication with this outcome. Inglehart and Welzel's claim is that as prosperity gives young people sense of existential security at a formative stage of youth, this generates a cohort-specific shift away from materialistic survival goals, towards self-expression values, which creates ever greater pressure for democratization. This thesis offers insight into why, in the Chinese case, this

expectation may be unwarranted. As we have seen, the elite-student group is more liberal, following Pan and Xu's operationalization of the term, than the typical respondent in the survey data on which they draw. They are a product of the 'strong relationship … between liberalism and common features associated with modernization' in China that Pan and Xu observe (2015: 24). They value self-expression and personal autonomy, but these values do not generate opposition to an authoritarian system by which they feel almost entirely unconstrained, given the especial freedoms they are accorded by merit of their elite status (Yan, 2009). The argument of modernization theory for the inexorability of democratization relies upon the assumption that authoritarian systems are unable to accommodate autonomous self-expression and fulfilling lives of individual flourishing; the example of the elite-student group indicates that, at least for relatively privileged individuals under the Chinese system, this is incorrect.

Research in cross-cultural psychology offers some support for this perspective. Schwartz has elaborated a model of variation between national cultures based on seven value orientations, one pair of which, between autonomy and embeddedness, coheres closely to Inglehart's self-expression/survival axis. He distinguishes this dimension of cultural variation from an egalitarian/hierarchy axis: 'egalitarian cultures urge people to recognize one another as moral equals who share basic interests as human beings', whereas 'hierarchy cultures … define the unequal distribution of power, roles, and resources as legitimate and even desirable' (Schwartz, 2014: 551-2). This model leads to rather different conclusions concerning the relationship between development and democratization. Egalitarian and autonomy values are correlated in cross-cultural comparison, and both are correlated with socioeconomic development. However, 'despite the substantial correlation of the autonomy/embeddedness dimension with socioeconomic development, it did not contribute to explaining change in level of democracy. This probably reflects its substantial association with egalitarianism/hierarchy' (Schwartz, 2014: 571).

What is more, though egalitarianism is associated with democratization and economic development, the chief factors that underlie its cross-cultural variation are non-economic. Religious and cultural traditions generate persistent effects; Schwartz finds that while countries with a dominant Protestant or Catholic tradition tend to be high on egalitarianism, countries with a Confucian tradition tend to be high on hierarchy. Furthermore, 'societal fractionalization … is an ecological variable inimical to cultural egalitarianism' (Siegel, Licth and Schwartz, 2013: 1176). Although scholarship establishing this relationship has focused on historical divisions in ethnicity, language, or religion, the same effect presumably applies to societal divisions that are bureaucratically imposed through the strategy of compartmentalization by which I have characterized the Chinese Party-State's social management, particularly such manifestations of this strategy as the 'differential citizenship' (Wu, 2007) of the hukou system. Solinger has argued that urban and rural sub-groups, demarcated by this system, tend to perceive each other as, in effect, 'ethnically distinct' (1999: 456). This offers insight into why 'Chinese culture … is very high on … hierarchy' (Schwartz, 2014: 558), but also more specifically, why the influence of the orthodox Confucian tradition and the homogeneous social networks of the elite-student group contribute to their hierarchical values and, conversely, the absence of these factors supports the greater egalitarianism of the bohemians. This suggests that, even if prosperity is associated with egalitarianism in cross-cultural comparison, while the Party-State retains the capacity to compartmentalize culturally mainstream Chinese youth, economic development in China may not generate the proliferation of egalitarian values which, as among the bohemian group, are associated with support for democratic change.

If societal fractionalization is inimical to egalitarianism, this also offers further insight into the social and political effects of communication technologies. Early utopian visions of the democratizing impact of online communications stressed their capacity to revitalize a public sphere – an abstract space in which public opinion is formed through a participatory process of rational deliberation among individuals with diverse perspectives –

that has been corroded through the commercialization of mass media (Rheingold, 1993; Shirky, 2011). And yet, as critics of the concept have noted (e.g. Calhoun, 1992), Habermas's (1989) original formulation of the public sphere is drawn from the bourgeois and exclusively male coffee-house society of 18th century Europe – a deliberative sphere from which such a large majority of the population were excluded as to strain the commonsense use of the term 'public'. One suspects that the consensus which emerged through deliberation among such homogeneous and affluent groups would have focused on the shared interests of a small elite but left the interests of other societal groups unarticulated. Likewise, with the elite students on which this thesis is partly focused, their internet-mediated social networks may be loose and fragmentary in the way that Rainie and Wellman (2012) predict, but they are nonetheless composed of similarly elite individuals whose interests are broadly aligned, and who benefit from the current political system. With a public sphericule composed of individuals whose own elevated social status is rooted in past academic accomplishment, deliberation is naturally inclined to favor a hierarchical system dominated by a credentialed technocratic elite.

Contrary to a tendency in scholarship on the internet to construe 'global cyberspace [through] … a flat, classless social imagination' (Qiu, 2009: 7), the formation of non-instrumental, affective social bonds is strongly influenced by the 'pervasive fact of homophily' (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001: 416) – the tendency to form relationships with people similarly positioned within the social divisions and hierarchies that pattern society. The hyperconnected elite students, with their loose and fragmented yet homogeneous social networks, reflect the extent to which online communication does not undermine, and may even reinforce, this basic human proclivity for homophily. This suggests that, regardless of whether inclusively diverse, truly public rational deliberation on the political issues of the day has ever occurred historically, it seems unlikely to be facilitated by online communication. As Dahlgren observes, 'the Internet facilitates an impressive communicative heterogeneity, [but] the negative side of this development is of course

fragmentation, with public spheres veering toward disparate islands of political communication' (2005: 152). This process of fragmentation and the segregation of discursive publics is familiar from scholarship on the emergence of 'echo chambers' on social media (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008; Colleoni, Rozza and Arvidsson, 2014; Sunstein, 2017; Xiao, Borah and Su, 2021).

In China, this process of fragmentation has been further reinforced through the shift from the earlier popularity of public-facing platforms including BBS sites and Sina Weibo, to the current dominance of the semi-private WeChat, with emphasis on strong-tie connections chiefly between prior offline acquaintances (Wu and Wall, 2019). This development, though undoubtedly beneficial to the Party-State in its tendency to support social compartmentalization, was not chiefly driven by direct state intervention, but rather the powerful appeal of that platform and the semi-private communications it facilitates (Custer, 2014). Nonetheless, the homogeneity of elite-student networks is further reinforced by deliberate Party-State policy, such as controls within universities that discourage students from leading independent social lives beyond the campus walls, and prohibitions on state-autonomous organizations that might similarly undermine social compartmentalization. Here we see how the affordances of online communication and social management policy act in synergy to compartmentalize groups such as the elite students, helping to sustain the influence upon them of hierarchical values inherent to the orthodox Confucian tradition, which in turn generate pragmatic support for technocratic authoritarianism.

Nonetheless, as reflected by the bohemian group in this study, societies in general remain replete with sociocultural practices that run contrary to a general tendency towards greater homogenization of social bonds and the potential for online communication to magnify that homogenizing process. I have placed much emphasis on how the culturally specific attributes of the bohemian group inform their political worldviews, with the influence of the egalitarian heterodox Chinese tradition contributing to idealistic support for equal rights under the law or equal participation in the political process. While these ideals are also

supported by the heterogeneous composition of bohemian social networks, this heterogeneity is rooted in relations that apply more widely. Close affective bonds with people from different socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds generate an egalitarian recognition that the distinct perspectives of others are equally valid to our own. This egalitarianism, by supporting solidarity among dense yet heterogeneous groups, tends to generate emotive commitment to idealistic politics that can render commensurate a broad diversity of discontents and political claims. The chief reason why bohemians are more idealistic than elite students is that their networks are more diverse, because they spend far more time in public face-to-face social interaction with individuals hailing from different social groups.

Group interactions, even those with random strangers, are perfectly possible online but, as Wellman notes, 'these are always deliberate choices'. The social affordances of face-to-face interaction in certain public places, by contrast, generate an almost Brownian motion in encounters, wherein the inclusion of others is resistant to the tendency towards homophily because it occurs 'by happenstance as well as deliberately' (2001: 243). Moreover, face-to-face interaction not only implies a greater randomness in social interaction that potentially cuts across social divisions, but it also lends itself to a heightened ritual intensity in those interactions, because of the potential for rhythmic entrainment that is associated with physical co-presence (Collins, 2004). Bohemian cultural life constitutes a powerful source of intense ritual interactions, but comparable intensity is generated in quite different cultural contexts. It is the combination of these two social affordances of public face-to-face interaction – random encounters and heightened ritual intensity – that generate network heterogeneity, by facilitating the formation of affective bonds with people different from ourselves, who one might not have chosen to interact with deliberately. This diversifying effect is heightened in a subcultural context, where heterogeneous individuals are drawn together by their sense of distance from mainstream society. But still, in mainstream societies throughout the world, especially those that lack the Confucian inhibition against interaction with unconnected strangers (King, 1991), an enormous variety of associational practices undoubtedly exist that

bring people together, in public and face-to-face, in a manner that serves a similar function. Oldenberg argued for the importance of public sites that support such informal face-to-face sociality in his concept of the 'third place', outside the realms of home and work. Among the virtues of such sites, which 'counter the tendency to be restrictive in the enjoyment of others by being open to all and by laying emphasis on qualities not confined to status distinctions current in the society' (1989: 37), are the fostering of diverse, cross-cutting social connections within a local community. Unlike Liangshan's bohemians, the elite-student group did not visit such sites in person, nor did they interact in online settings that serve such a socially cross-cutting function. In general terms, the affordances of online communication may not lend themselves to the creation of third places in this sense.

Contrary to Wang's argument concerning the way that young Chinese people use social media, I found that participants in this study did not invest a great deal of their time online in 'talking to strangers' (2013). Rather my findings conform with evidence concerning young people in other cultural contexts, who chiefly 'use social networking sites to connect … with people known from offline contexts'. (Reich, Subrahmanyam and Espinoza, 2012: 356; see also Duggan *et al.*, 2015; Hofstra *et al.*, 2017). This does not imply that online communication has no effect on the structure of social networks – as I have argued, particularly for members of the elite-student group, social media allows them to engage in 'persistent contact' (Hampton, 2016: 111), sustaining close affective bonds with former classmates across considerable distance, expanding the geographical reach of their networks and rendering them looser and more fragmentary. And yet, though modified by mediation through the internet, online interactions nonetheless trace and reinforce the patterns of association established through face-to-face interactions. The face-to-face interactions of elite-student groups do not occur among diverse networks, so nor do their online interactions, despite the complexity and intellectual sophistication of the communicative content conveyed. Conversely, because they interact online so extensively within their existing networks, they are less inclined to engage in the kinds of public face-to-face sociality that might diversify

those networks. Bohemian networks are similarly shaped by their patterns of face-to-face interaction, but because those interactions are among a much more diverse range of contacts – in age, religion, educational credentials, socioeconomic, cultural, national, and linguistic backgrounds, indeed along almost any imaginable axis of variation – so their online networks are also more diverse, albeit considerably more focused on the dense and multiplex bonds of solidarity in their local community.

One potential implication of these finding would be a perspective on the structure of Chinese domestic online communications that parallels Taneja and Wu's account of the determinants of clustering in online communications at a global level. They argue that the effects of the China's border-level firewall are of limited use in explaining the extent to which the geolinguistic cluster of websites associated with mainland China are segregated from others, as this cluster is not 'particularly isolated compared with other geolinguistic clusters that take shape on the "open" Internets'. They suggest rather that 'cultural proximity' offers a more general explanation for the patterns of website access that are observed at a global level, pushing back against the assumption that 'Internet users would use all websites if given access' (2014: 297). Similarly, evidence presented in this thesis might seem to suggest that explanations of the compartmentalization of elite-student groups' online social communications need not rely on interventions by the Party-State, such as domestic internet censorship. As I have argued, a general tendency towards homophily in the formation of social bonds is reinforced by the influence of the orthodox Confucian tradition on such groups, in both its hierarchical values and inhibitions on out-group interactions. This might seem to suggest that, in the unlikely event that the Party-State were to cease intervening in domestic online communications through censorship, such cultural factors, combined with the affordances of online communication for sustaining and prolonging contacts established through face-to-face interactions that remain patterned by those factors, would continue to sustain the homogeneity of elite-student social networks. Accordingly, we might expect the

pragmatic support for authoritarianism among such groups, which I have argued is partly generated by their social homogeneity, to persist even in the absence of domestic censorship.

However, the considerably greater impact of Party-State internet censorship on bohemian groups in China offers support for a contrary perspective. In this thesis I have emphasized the fundamental dependence of bohemian cultural life on physical gathering and face-to-face interaction which, combined with an egalitarian mode of socially cross-cutting association rooted in the influence of the heterodox tradition, generates solidarity in dense and localized yet heterogeneous networks. The structural and socio-emotive properties of such communities provide an impetus that underlies the bohemian tendency towards reductive idealism, as shared political worldviews fitted to such environments must synthesize the discontents of diverse social groups. The Party-State's regime of internet censorship and communicative sanction reinforces this tendency by – through direct suppression and fear-based self-censorship – driving bohemian communications from public platforms onto the semi-private WeChat, which is less strictly controlled. While this constrains the reach of bohemians' online output to networks that correspond closely to their patterns of face-to-face interaction, it also reinforces the divergence of their online information environment from the cultural mainstream, and their corresponding exposure to sensitive rumors and dissident political perspectives. We might therefore expect a withdrawal of communicative control to render bohemians' idealistic politics less intensely subversive, by integrating them more closely with culturally mainstream communications. However, this would necessarily involve a diminution of their already tenuous compartmentalization from culturally mainstream youth. The solidarity generated in dense yet heterogeneous bohemian scenes by the ritual intensity of their face-to-face interactions would likely persist under such a circumstance, continuing to generate idealistically egalitarian political worldviews while raising certain central figures to positions of high prestige. However, if such figures were able to reach out to a larger audience, disseminating their heterodox cosmopolitanism and idealistic politics through public online communication, their subversive influence would no longer remain localized.

Many elite students, subject to factors quite independent of Party-State internet censorship that render their social networks homogeneous and compartmentalized and their politics hierarchical and pragmatic, would remain resistant to bohemian influences in the absence of this censorship. And yet, as I have argued, such groups engage in a social form of online self-censorship that is strongly shaped by their perceptions of prevailing opinions among their peers. They are thereby indirectly influenced by a censorship system that renders the espousal of dissident views – such as bohemian egalitarian idealism – incompatible with the public prestige of large-scale online followings. Exposure to online role-models who combine dissent with popularity would likely embolden the minority of elite students, and culturally mainstream youth more generally, who share such dissident perspectives. This might serve to undermine the current perceptions of consensus surrounding pragmatic support for authoritarianism within the broadly homogeneous elite-student online public sphericule.

While most elite-students are unlikely to be swayed by such radical perspectives, the demonstrated viability of online contention as a strategy for garnering large-scale followings would be likely to encourage others to espouse incremental reforms that they are more inclined to support – accommodating the authoritarian system and the hierarchies by which it is legitimized – in a manner that would constitute a lesser, but still serious, challenge to compartmentalization. The forms of progressive politics with which the elite-student group were engaged, though predicated on areas of identity that intersect with their own social echelon, remain socially cross-cutting. Online contention around gender or sexual identities among such groups, if unconstrained by internet censorship, might serve to generate broader coalitions across Chinese cultural hierarchies – as notably failed to occur in the limited intrusion of the global #MeToo movement in China. A rise in political entrepreneurship (Tilly, 2004; He and Su, 2018) among elite students, leveraging their skills as consummate online communicators to attract followership beyond their own social echelon, might not challenge the authoritarian system itself. However, it would undoubtedly result in the articulation of political claims along lines of cross-cutting identity that the Party-State would

be unable to accommodate in a differentiated fashion, undermining the manageability of Chinese youth. Such claims, even if they were not directed against the authoritarian system, would remain irreconcilable with the compartmentalization through which that system is maintained; they would therefore become idealistic, rather than pragmatic.

These considerations suggest that while the inherent affordances of online and offline communications may support the compartmentalized homogeneity of elite-student groups and the cross-cutting heterogeneity of bohemian groups, it is the Party-State's capacity to shape those affordances that sustains the linkages between these patterns of social organization and corresponding pragmatic and idealistic orientations towards politics. Control over the domestic internet thus supports the strategy of compartmentalized social management while constraining systemic opposition based around cross-cutting egalitarian ideals to a small countercultural minority. Furthermore, the Party-State can shape these affordances without alienating elite-student groups, who are entirely capable of using platforms beyond its control. This indicates that the Party-State's control is limited to interventions which do not seriously curb the 'uses and gratifications' (Rubin, 2002; Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2011; Huang and Zhang, 2017) that culturally mainstream Chinese youth derive from online communications.

The pertinent question then becomes whether the modified affordances of internet-mediated communications, as shaped by the Party-State, contribute to – or undermine – the manageability of Chinese youth. As we have seen, elite-student groups' use of information technology renders the constraints of social compartmentalization less perceptible yet does not facilitate the expansion of their social horizons beyond homogeneous networks, integrating them into an elite public sphericule while pragmatically reconciling them with the authoritarian system. By contrast, for bohemians to whom the intervention of the Party-State in online communications is considerably more apparent and directly suppressive, their use of information technology intensifies their divergence from the norms and networks of mainstream youth society, while containing this divergence to local groups bound together

through face-to-face interaction. Though the consequent solidarity generated among such dense yet heterogeneous groups can serve to support idealistic opposition to authoritarianism, the threat posed by such opposition is constrained: trans-local links and influence on mainstream youth are diminished by exclusion from national public communications. The aggregate impact of internet-use is thus to support the manageability of Chinese youth by helping to maintain the social and cultural distance between bohemian and culturally mainstream groups.

Nonetheless, because bohemian cultural life and the idealistic politics it generates are predicated on face-to-face interaction, internet controls may be insufficient to contain their burgeoning influence. To return to the analogy of the US counterculture – the sudden permeability of the barrier between subcultural bohemian and elite-student groups in the 1960s, introducing social heterogeneity and egalitarian idealism to formerly segregated culturally mainstream youth, did not depend on the mediation of the internet. A broad-based counterculture, with lasting effects on political attitudes, emerged among a youth generation under conditions of increased prosperity, leisure-time, and independence from parental control that are remarkably similar to those experienced by contemporary Chinese youth. The pervasive adoption of mobile broadband technology among this generation may moderate the appeal of physical participation in bohemian cultural life through the super-abundance of mediated entertainment that the smartphone provides; similarly, the collapse of the culture-counterculture barrier in the US was facilitated by a commercial mass-market for bohemian cultural products that state controls on the culture industries preclude in China. The persistent influence of the orthodox Confucian tradition may constitute a further limiting factor. And yet, despite the foreign origins of the subcultures that proliferate in Chinese bohemian scenes, these subcultures are localized, disseminated in forms that are suffused with a heterodox tradition which is not only deeply rooted in Chinese culture, but is also widely accessible to Chinese youth throughout the sociocultural hierarchy. This indicates that the cultural gap between bohemian and elite-student groups in China is inherently more permeable than those

which separate the geolinguistic clusters that Taneja and Wu (2014) identify in global patterns of website access. Similarly, quite unlike the relative appeal of geolinguistic website clusters, the subcultural forms through which heterodoxy is expressed in local bohemian scenes throughout China, and the ritually intense face-to-face interactions they facilitate, offer profound socio-emotive rewards that are simply unavailable within the constraints of the university environment. The emotive appeal at the heart of bohemian culture constitutes its very raison d'être; the social and political implications of immersion in this culture are merely incidental – albeit inescapable – side effects.

Any effort to predict large-scale cultural trends based on small-scale evidence is likely to be unreliable. Nonetheless, the profound intensity of experience and sheer quality of cultural production encountered in Liangshan's bohemian cultural scene, combined with a dramatic expansion of student populations throughout urban China, suggests that similar social environments are likely to draw in ever-greater numbers of young people possessed of unprecedented affluence and opportunities for leisure. As I have argued, this trend would necessarily imply an increasing heterogeneity in the social connections of formerly segregated youth groups, potentially threatening the resilience of the authoritarian system. Cross-cutting heterogeneity is a challenge to the compartmentalized structure on which Party-State social management rests, which allows the demands of different groups to be treated differentially, while preventing the aggregation of such demands and discontents between groups. While the politics of homogeneous elite-student groups tends to be predicated on the interests of those groups alone and thus remain pragmatically reconcilable with the authoritarian system, the heterogeneity of bohemian groups tends to generate an idealistic politics that is irreconcilable with that system. This is largely because their structural position, cutting across the compartmentalized structure of Chinese society, leads them to aggregate the distinct claims of different groups into general discontent with the system itself. Herein lies their inherent threat to the Party-State. If a large-scale popular movement should challenge the stability of CCP rule in the future, it is unlikely to be led by bohemians. But bohemian groups, or other groups

with equivalent levels of socially cross-cutting network diversity, would undoubtedly play an important role in connecting and coordinating the various societal elements that would have to come together in any such movement. Because this hypothetical movement would necessarily involve expansive interest-aggregation, it would embody an idealistic egalitarianism that, in the Chinese context, would render it truly countercultural.

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Appendix A – Keywords Extracted from Elite-Student and Bohemian Social Media Corpora

Figure 80: Top 100 Keywords in Student User-Generated Content (SUG), 1-50

Rank	Keyword	Explanation	Research Corpus Frequency	Reference Corpus Frequency	Fisher's Exact Test Odds Ratio	Fisher's Exact Test P-Value
1	支付宝	Zhifu Bao, Alibaba payment method	17	0	inf	1.01E-68
2	medill	Location: Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, United States	8	0	inf	1.01E-32
3	<talkshow>	Broadcast: participant's live-stream show, on Yizhibo (一直播) platform	7	0	inf	1.01E-28
4	<jin meilin>	Person: participant's friend, student on foreign exchange	7	0	inf	1.01E-28
5	递延型	Deferred (business context)	5	0	inf	1.00E-20
6	<explainer>	Infographic series from university communication department online publication	5	0	inf	1.00E-20
7	啊啊啊啊	Interjection expressing amusement / surprise	5	0	inf	1.00E-20
8	<kong gen>	Person: participant's friend, student	5	0	inf	1.00E-20
9	问万	From '求问万票' slang indicating request for information from WeChat contacts	4	0	inf	1.00E-16
10	<barry>	Person: non-Chinese friend from university exchange program	4	0	inf	1.00E-16
11	新闻院	Location: Journalism department	3	0	inf	1.00E-12
12	<wudang road>	Location: street near to university	3	0	inf	1.00E-12
13	burrinjuck	Location: Burrinjuck, Australia	3	0	inf	1.00E-12
14	<yao wencheng>	Person: participant's Weibo contact	3	0	inf	1.00E-12
15	overbooking	Aviation context: United Express Flight 3411 incident	3	0	inf	1.00E-12
16	90后	90s generation	3	0	inf	1.00E-12
17	phildumphy	Misspelling of Phil Dunphy, Character from US TV series Modern Family	3	0	inf	1.00E-12
18	bagage	Baggage, in French	3	0	inf	1.00E-12
19	<janet>	Person: non-Chinese contact of participant's friend, student on foreign exchange	3	0	inf	1.00E-12
20	<qian xiulan>	Person: participant	3	0	inf	1.00E-12
21	transcripts	Academic records	3	0	inf	1.00E-12
22	<hao chenguang>	Person: participant	3	0	inf	1.00E-12
23	阿拉恰特	Location: Alaçatı, Turkey	5	1	49,952.80	6.03E-20
24	封神召唤师	Summoner of the Gods, Android Mobile Game	44	10	43,975.62	2.46E-166
25	turkcell	Turkcell, Turkish mobile phone operator	4	1	39,961.84	5.02E-16
26	大晚上	Evening, implying lateness	9	3	29,972.88	2.22E-34
27	大同大张	Person: Datong Dazhang, Artist	3	1	29,971.08	4.01E-12
28	梁鸿案	Inconceivable eventuality, literary allusion from Chinese opera	3	1	29,971.08	4.01E-12
29	<mo huiqing>	Person: former student of department, parental medical appeal	3	1	29,971.08	4.01E-12
30	<liangshan open>	Local tennis tournament	8	3	26,642.29	1.66E-30
31	民附	Location: Central University For Nationalities Subsidiary Middle School	5	2	24,976.40	2.11E-19
32	究室	Location: Study room	5	2	24,976.40	2.11E-19
33	strath	Location: Strath Valley, Australia	3	2	14,985.54	1.00E-11
34	<fu bingwen>	Person: participant's friend and classmate	6	4	14,985.99	2.11E-22
35	债券通	Bond Connect: investment channel that gives overseas investors access to fixed income markets in Mainland China	6	6	9,990.66	9.28E-22
36	<cui guang>	Person: participant's friend and classmate	3	3	9,990.36	2.00E-11
37	catholique	Catholic: French, from Université Catholique de Lille	4	4	9,990.46	7.02E-15
38	<cici>	Person: participant's friend and classmate (Latin character nickname)	8	8	9,990.86	1.29E-28
39	胶片机	Film camera (photography)	4	4	9,990.46	7.02E-15
40	<fang peizhi>	Person: participant's friend and classmate	3	4	7,492.77	3.51E-11
41	6k+	> 6,000, non-Chinese convention, from post about budget travel	4	6	6,660.31	2.11E-14
42	<north field>	Location: local university sports ground	4	7	5,708.83	3.31E-14
43	9i	Honor 9i, mobile phone model	7	14	4,995.38	1.17E-23
44	helpx	HelpX: barter platform in which people offer or receive homestays	5	10	4,995.28	3.01E-17
45	yass	Location: Yass, Australis	6	12	4,995.33	1.86E-20
46	工学部	Engineering department	4	9	4,440.20	7.17E-14
47	朋友圈	Moments: WeChat semi-public posts and timeline	41	102	4,017.26	1.22E-128
48	<comms review>	University communication department online publication	4	11	3,632.89	1.37E-13
49	译介	Translation (interpretive)	4	11	3,632.89	1.37E-13
50	<bai yanmei>	Person: from student journalist's email address	4	13	3,073.99	2.39E-13

Figure 81: Top 100 Keywords in Student User-Generated Content (SUG), 51-100

Rank	Keyword	Explanation	Research Corpus Frequency	Reference Corpus Frequency	Fisher's Exact Test Odds Ratio	Fisher's Exact Test P-Value
51	招季	Recruitment season	7	24	2,913.97	2.64E-22
52	发票圈	To send a moments, WeChat semi-public post (slang)	4	15	2,664.12	3.88E-13
53	<how>	How, in what way (local dialect)	5	19	2,629.09	4.26E-16
54	lille	Location: Lille, France	7	27	2,590.20	5.40E-22
55	<lei ye>	Character in locally produced film	14	60	2,331.34	4.59E-42
56	黑鲨	Xiaomi Black Shark, model of mobile phone	10	48	2,081.47	5.24E-30
57	夜消	Late-night snack, often street-food	4	23	1,737.47	1.76E-12
58	罗瓦涅米	Location: Rovanimi, Northern Finland	16	96	1,665.28	9.56E-46
59	吊丧	Condolences, 1989 performance art piece by Datong Dazhang	4	25	1,598.47	2.38E-12
60	vodafone	Vodafone: multinational mobile phone operator, appearing in posted mobile phone screen captures from overseas trips	5	35	1,427.22	6.59E-15
61	<hu hualing>	Person: participant's friend and classmate	7	61	1,146.48	9.70E-20
62	定投	Automatic, from 基金定投, automatic investment plan (finance)	18	183	982.81	2.04E-47
63	搞死	To be killed by, expression of annoyance	5	51	979.47	3.82E-14
64	faculty	Faculty, academic organizational unit	4	41	974.68	1.49E-11
65	递签	Submit a visa application	4	41	974.68	1.49E-11
66	marimekko	Marimekko, Finnish fashion company	4	47	850.25	2.50E-11
67	programme	Programme, academic	4	49	815.55	2.93E-11
68	<hu jinhai>	Participant's friend, student journalist	8	101	791.36	3.79E-21
69	以弗所	Location: Ephesus, Turkey	7	101	692.43	2.78E-18
70	communications	Communications, used in academic context	5	73	684.28	2.11E-13
71	<meng zongying>	Person: participant	10	150	666.07	2.26E-25
72	scores	Test scores, academic	13	214	606.95	4.77E-32
73	创行	Enactus: 'an international organization that brings students together through entrepreneurship'	8	133	600.96	3.15E-20
74	<xiulan>	Participant's name, latin characters	8	151	529.32	8.42E-20
75	application	Used in context of academic programs	11	212	518.41	1.31E-26
76	<liangshan>	Location: local city, latin characters	11	236	465.69	4.12E-26
77	汉剧	Hakka opera; form of Chinese opera from eastern Guangdong province, popular among Hakka people	8	175	456.73	2.65E-19
78	收件箱	Mailbox; occurs in posted screen captures of emails	5	110	454.12	1.53E-12
79	atlanta	Location: Atlanta, Georgia, USA	5	110	454.12	1.53E-12
80	赤兔	Chitu, Linked-in spin-off job seeking and networking app only available in the Chinese market, discontinued in 2019	13	295	440.30	2.74E-30
81	变形金刚	Transformers, US movie franchise	8	190	420.67	5.03E-19
82	imc	Acronym for integrated marketing communications	11	268	410.09	1.61E-25
83	qdii	Acronym for qualified domestic institutional investor, scheme through which certain Chinese financial institutions can invest in foreign-based securities	7	180	388.53	1.40E-16
84	<song qi>	Person: participant's family member	6	155	386.74	2.18E-14
85	费特希耶	Location: Fethiye, Turkey	6	157	381.81	2.35E-14
86	赫尔辛基	Location: Helsinki, Finland	17	459	370.07	6.76E-38
87	夏令	Summer, used in 'international summer camp', a foreign student exchange program	6	164	365.52	3.04E-14
88	<leafy grove>	Location: university campus scenic area	5	155	322.28	8.13E-12
89	法语课	French language class	5	162	308.35	1.01E-11
90	statement	Used in context of billing for overseas postgraduate course	6	214	280.11	1.45E-13
91	deluxe	From extended version of album by M.I.A., UK hip-hop musician	7	257	272.12	1.61E-15
92	lte	Acronym for long-term evolution, wireless mobile data standard, appearing in posted mobile phone screen captures from overseas trips	10	379	263.62	1.90E-21
93	hdr	Acronym for high dynamic range, used in photographic context	8	322	248.22	3.13E-17
94	塔林	Location: Tallinn, Estonia	5	208	240.16	3.44E-11
95	芽庄	Location: Nha Trang, Vietnam	10	450	222.03	1.03E-20
96	校招	School recruitment, academic context	6	277	216.41	6.64E-13
97	原片	Original image, used in photographic context	8	371	215.44	9.55E-17
98	t9	From Meitu T9, smartphone model	7	366	191.08	1.83E-14
99	communication	Used in academic context	6	316	189.70	1.45E-12
100	program	Used in academic context	7	377	185.51	2.25E-14

Figure 82: Top 100 Keywords in Bohemian User-Generated Content, 1-50

Rank	Keyword	Explanation	Research Corpus Frequency	Reference Corpus Frequency	Fisher's Exact Test Odds Ratio	Fisher's Exact Test P-Value
1	<ken holt>	Person: Jamaican reggae musician, China tour promoted by participant	64	0	inf	9.83E-270
2	<cash bar>	Location: local underground bar and music venue	23	0	inf	2.13E-97
3	<heavy dread>	Local reggae band	22	0	inf	3.40E-93
4	<liangshan bookings>	Participant's music promotion business	20	0	inf	8.68E-85
5	<zhou jinhai>	Person: participant, music promoter, reggae musician	18	0	inf	2.21E-76
6	<psyscape>	Local psytrance & techno event	10	0	inf	9.32E-43
7	<pinball bar>	Location: local bar and underground music venue, connected to skatepark and store <skatekrate>	8	0	inf	2.37E-34
8	药路山	Folk-rock band	8	0	inf	2.37E-34
9	<ma zhaohui>	Person: local barman, friend of participants	7	0	inf	3.79E-30
10	<xiaolu district>	Location: local city district, latin characters	6	0	inf	6.05E-26
11	sixears	Person: psytrance DJ	6	0	inf	6.05E-26
12	goaproductions	Psytrance record label (from URLs and email addresses)	5	0	inf	9.66E-22
13	瞿治	Person: tattoo artist from Kunming, Yunnan	5	0	inf	9.66E-22
14	<flowkru>	Local hip-hop group	5	0	inf	9.66E-22
15	viandoks	Person: psytrance DJ (non-Chinese)	5	0	inf	9.66E-22
16	imcg	IMCG Productions: concert production company	5	0	inf	9.66E-22
17	魔力堂	Psychadelic decor group	5	0	inf	9.66E-22
18	猫免	Location: bar and music venue in Guilin, Guangxi	5	0	inf	9.66E-22
19	白音达	Person: Chinese name of King Lion Miguel, Cameroonian reggae musician	5	0	inf	9.66E-22
20	辛亥	From Xinghai Revolution (1911), which ended the Qing Dynasty	4	0	inf	1.54E-17
21	stringart	Form of textile craft commonly used in psychadelic decor	4	0	inf	1.54E-17
22	yugongyishan	Location: music venue, Beijing	4	0	inf	1.54E-17
23	shalanaya	Psytrance festival, Shanghai	4	0	inf	1.54E-17
24	nirajan	Person: psytrance DJ (non-Chinese)	4	0	inf	1.54E-17
25	psyfidelity	Psytrance event	4	0	inf	1.54E-17
26	<funktronix>	Local nu-disco & funk event	4	0	inf	1.54E-17
27	ellbe	House & techno DJ, from Hong Kong	4	0	inf	1.54E-17
28	<jiang shi>	Person: local rock musician	4	0	inf	1.54E-17
29	古巴朋克合辑	Cuban punk compilation album	4	0	inf	1.54E-17
30	<dongping people>	People originating from city near fieldsite	4	0	inf	1.54E-17
31	脏辫师	Dreadlock hairdresser	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
32	<zeng ying>	Guomindang (Nationalist) WWII martyr	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
33	古巴朋克	Cuban punk	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
34	<escapist>	Location: local skateboarding store and tattoo studio, also selling kendama & string art	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
35	tiger9stein	Person: nu-disco & psytrance DJ (non-Chinese)	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
36	yumon	Location: second-hand clothes and vinyl records market associated with reggae bar in Hangzhou, Zhejiang	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
37	<cnm>	Local grindcore band (mixed Chinese/non-Chinese membership)	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
38	<yuzhou>	Location: local cafe and occasional music venue	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
39	bananapeel	Punk band from Guilin, Guangxi	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
40	<exocet>	Person: local techno DJ	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
41	685号	Location: address of bar and music venue in Shanghai	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
42	<wildpsyz>	Person: local psytrance DJ	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
43	<transcend>	Person: local psytrance DJ	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
44	望月狂欢	Full-moon carnival	3	0	inf	2.46E-13
45	剑球	Kendama; traditional Japanese skill toy	16	2	127,700.81	8.62E-66
46	psytrance	Psytrance: musical genre & subculture	28	4	111,759.65	7.39E-114
47	爱国主义	Nationalism	6	1	95,760.30	4.23E-25
48	rastafari	Rastafarianism: religion originating in Jamaica	18	4	71,834.00	1.62E-72
49	<darkpsy>	Local psytrance & techno event	30	7	68,426.46	8.30E-120
50	undaloop	Hip-hop record label	4	1	63,838.16	7.71E-17

Figure 83: Top 100 Keywords in Bohemian User-Generated Content, 51-100

Rank	Keyword	Explanation	Research Corpus Frequency	Reference Corpus Frequency	Fisher's Exact Test Odds Ratio	Fisher's Exact Test P-Value
51	gusse	Person: psytrance DJ (non-Chinese)	4	1	63,838.16	7.71E-17
52	shpongle	Psytrance / ambient group from UK	3	1	47,877.86	9.84E-13
53	喜宾	"Esteemed guests": used when listing guest performers at musical events	3	1	47,877.86	9.84E-13
54	<breakmaster flex>	Person: local hip-hop DJ (non-Chinese)	3	1	47,877.86	9.84E-13
55	民主日	International Day of Democracy (15th September)	3	1	47,877.86	9.84E-13
56	<huaihai road>	Location: local underground nightlife hub	30	11	43,544.11	2.55E-117
57	灵族	Psytrance festival & organization	16	6	42,566.94	4.20E-63
58	雷鬼	Reggae: musical genre	60	24	39,934.59	4.11E-232
59	jahjah	Jah: Rastafarian name for God	10	5	31,922.14	2.80E-39
60	<song fa>	Person: participant & sound engineer	4	2	31,919.08	2.31E-16
61	rasta	Member of the Rastafarian religion	16	8	31,925.20	4.14E-62
62	<cash>	Location: local bar and underground music venue (English name, also used by Chinese speakers)	233	150	24,881.54	0.00E+00
63	<kangju>	Local punk band	44	29	24,229.96	2.18E-165
64	蒋亮	Person: reggae / dub musician and DJ	3	2	23,938.93	2.46E-12
65	趣味赛	Friendly contest: competitive event, e.g. skateboarding, kendama	3	2	23,938.93	2.46E-12
66	雷鬼乐	Reggae music	10	7	22,801.53	1.81E-38
67	陆月	June (formal)	4	3	21,279.39	5.39E-16
68	<zhou longwei>	Person: participant, punk musician	13	10	20,750.39	2.62E-49
69	<munchies>	Restaurant connected to local bar and underground music venue	6	5	19,152.06	2.79E-23
70	jah	Jah: Rastafarian name for God	31	26	19,036.90	6.16E-115
71	<skatekrate>	Skateboarding equipment shop, connected to local skatepark, bar and underground music venue <pinball bar>	13	11	18,863.99	5.72E-49
72	<entheogen>	Local psytrance DJ (non-Chinese)	20	17	18,780.73	1.38E-74
73	<heavy dread>	Local Reggae Band (in Chinese)	6	6	15,960.05	5.59E-23
74	<huaihai road>	Location: local underground nightlife hub (in latin characters)	6	6	15,960.05	5.59E-23
75	reggae	Musical genre	47	56	13,403.82	1.51E-168
76	<mo wen>	Person: local music fan, friend of participants	3	4	11,969.46	8.61E-12
77	赵启正	Person: Zhao Qizheng, Chinese politician, former director of State Council Information Office	3	4	11,969.46	8.61E-12
78	施旭东	Person: new-wave & post-punk musician	3	4	11,969.46	8.61E-12
79	玩啤	Location: bar & music venue in Baise, Guangxi	4	6	10,639.69	3.24E-15
80	龙胆紫	Hip-hop group	17	26	10,437.25	1.48E-60
81	mantis	Person: techno & psytrance DJ	9	14	10,260.52	1.21E-32
82	purplesoul	Hip-hop group (English name)	7	11	10,156.56	1.21E-25
83	<tan wen>	Person: participant, student, psychedelic décor designer	5	8	9,974.87	1.24E-18
84	<traphouse>	Location: local bar and underground music venue	16	27	9,459.32	1.49E-56
85	<liangshan>	Location: local city	138	236	9,352.30	0.00E+00
86	kawa	Reggae band with Chinese ethnic-minority folk influences	28	52	8,596.90	5.96E-97
87	<moonbase>	Local bar and music venue (latin characters)	9	18	7,980.41	6.97E-32
88	新球	"New ball": used in promoting Kendama sales	4	8	7,979.77	7.63E-15
89	<concrete bar>	Location: local bar and underground music venue	20	40	7,981.81	3.63E-69
90	<ren guang>	Person: local music fan, friend of participants	3	6	7,979.64	2.07E-11
91	shak	Person: psytrance DJ (non-Chinese)	6	13	7,366.18	1.64E-21
92	<elevated art>	Location: local tattoo studio	4	9	7,093.13	1.10E-14
93	<five junction>	Location: local commercial hub, site of underground bar & venue	4	9	7,093.13	1.10E-14
94	<xiang yun>	Person: local tattoo artist	4	11	5,803.47	2.10E-14
95	hoid	Misspelling of 'hold', from anglicized phrase 'hold住', originating in Hong Kong, expressing confidence in handling a situation	7	20	5,586.11	3.36E-24
96	<livehouse>	Location: local music venue	46	133	5,523.55	6.10E-151
97	kendama	Japanese name for traditional skill toy, in latin characters	10	33	4,836.69	1.78E-33
98	psychedelic	Used to describe musical genres and associated art	11	37	4,745.26	1.32E-36
99	decor	Used in referring to temporary art and craft instalations in music venues, chiefly for psytrance events	10	34	4,694.43	2.31E-33
100	bigband	Used to describe large musical ensembles	8	28	4,560.16	7.18E-27

Figure 84: Top 50 Keywords in Student WeChat-Shared Content with 0 Weibo Occurrences

Rank	Keyword	Explanation	Research Corpus Frequency	Reference Corpus Frequency	Fisher's Exact Test Odds Ratio	Fisher's Exact Test P-Value
1	支付宝	Zhifu Bao, Alibaba payment method	63	0	inf	7.25E-208
2	芙祐子	Character's name from *Pleasure*, novel by Japanese writer Nanae Aoyama	39	0	inf	5.90E-129
3	关注度	Attention (degree of)	32	0	inf	6.12E-106
4	<lsu.edu.cn>	Website of local university	30	0	inf	2.30E-99
5	<explainer>	Infographic series from university communication department online publication	30	0	inf	2.30E-99
6	<yan enlai>	Person: Editor of local newspaper	29	0	inf	4.47E-96
7	<cao qiuyue>	Person: participant, student journalist	26	0	inf	3.27E-86
8	卡理斯玛权威	Charismatic authority	26	0	inf	3.27E-86
9	张溪溟	Person: Documentary director	24	0	inf	1.23E-79
10	90后	90's generation	24	0	inf	1.23E-79
11	媒体人	Media person	24	0	inf	1.23E-79
12	<yu guang>	Person: student journalist	23	0	inf	2.39E-76
13	<jia yun>	Person: student journalist	22	0	inf	4.63E-73
14	paristech	Cluster of 10 grandes écoles in Paris, France	22	0	inf	4.63E-73
15	<li xiaodan>	Person: Student journalist	22	0	inf	4.63E-73
16	britbox	Online streaming service, joint venture between BBC and ITV	22	0	inf	4.63E-73
17	女权主义者	A feminist	21	0	inf	8.99E-70
18	<bagua road>	Location: street near to university	20	0	inf	1.74E-66
19	刘松霖	Person: medical researcher from clickbait article about cancer risk	20	0	inf	1.74E-66
20	boser	Person: Ulrich Boser, author of books on learning skills	20	0	inf	1.74E-66
21	冬悦	Person: survivor of shipwreck in Malaysia where several Chinese tourists drowned	20	0	inf	1.74E-66
22	<wu fang>	Person: student journalist	20	0	inf	1.74E-66
23	<guojibangongshi>	Email address for student exchange program applications	19	0	inf	3.39E-63
24	<bai tingfeng>	Person: student journalist	18	0	inf	6.57E-60
25	<zhao ruolan>	Person: relative of missing student from university	18	0	inf	6.57E-60
26	<liangxin>	University student association's online publication	18	0	inf	6.57E-60
27	<pubops>	Article series on public opinion, from university communication department online publication	17	0	inf	1.28E-56
28	<lsu_lfhao>	Email address of university online publication	17	0	inf	1.28E-56
29	窥私欲	Voyeurism	16	0	inf	2.47E-53
30	德史	Character's name from *Pleasure*, novel by Japanese writer Nanae Aoyama	16	0	inf	2.47E-53
31	杜大爷	Person: 'Uncle Du', nickname for Rodrigo Duterte, President of the Philippines	16	0	inf	2.47E-53
32	<liangju>	Local style of Chinese opera	16	0	inf	2.47E-53
33	<qin rong>	Person: student journalist	15	0	inf	4.80E-50
34	<qian ai>	Person: student journalist	15	0	inf	4.80E-50
35	<lin ying>	Person: student journalist	15	0	inf	4.80E-50
36	抗洪救灾	Flood defence and disaster relief	15	0	inf	4.80E-50
37	<comm lit>	Article series on communication theory, from university communication department online publication	14	0	inf	9.32E-47
38	<wu meixiang>	Person: student journalist	14	0	inf	9.32E-47
39	<qin xiu>	Person: nurse from article on hospice care in university online publication	13	0	inf	1.81E-43
40	奶奶庙	Grandmother Temple, Hebei	13	0	inf	1.81E-43
41	<lin yusheng>	Person: WeChat public account blogger who has written several critical articules about the local university	13	0	inf	1.81E-43
42	滕固	Person: early 20th century Chinese art historian, educated in Germany	12	0	inf	3.51E-40
43	赶超型	Catch-up, used to describe modernization	12	0	inf	3.51E-40
44	<lsuxinwenzhan>	WeChat public account: university publication	12	0	inf	3.51E-40
45	保守主义	Conservatism	12	0	inf	3.51E-40
46	荣宅	Historic building in Shanghai, currently rented by Prada	12	0	inf	3.51E-40
47	<chang ai>	Person: student journalist	12	0	inf	3.51E-40
48	刘金灿	Person: survivor of shipwreck in Malaysia where several Chinese tourists drowned	11	0	inf	6.81E-37
49	新闻院	Location: Journalism department	11	0	inf	6.81E-37
50	<han hong>	Person: general coordinator of Marxism and Ideology department	11	0	inf	6.81E-37

Figure 85: Top 50 Keywords in Student WeChat-Shared Content with >0 Weibo Occurrences

Rank	Keyword	Explanation	Research Corpus Frequency	Reference Corpus Frequency	Fisher's Exact Test Odds Ratio	Fisher's Exact Test P-Value
1	<zhao yuanjun>	Person: missing student from university	66	1	128,020.60	6.64E-216
2	民附	Location: Central University For Nationalities Subsidiary Middle School	85	2	82,440.55	1.25E-276
3	<liangshan open>	Local tennis tournament	97	3	62,720.94	0.00E+00
4	<tao jing>	Person: student journalist	22	1	42,669.89	1.07E-71
5	<jiang yu>	Person: childhood leukaemia patient	40	2	38,792.16	2.62E-129
6	斯琴高娃	Person: actor	18	1	34,911.45	1.25E-58
7	病毒式	Viral (of communication)	16	1	31,032.28	4.20E-52
8	<liu wenyan>	Person: student journalist	13	1	25,213.58	2.53E-42
9	<grove stage>	Location: university outdoor stage	48	4	23,275.66	4.09E-153
10	<dissemination review>	University communication department online publication	12	1	23,274.03	4.56E-39
11	<lsugj>	University international exchange programme	33	3	21,335.40	2.25E-105
12	交流部	(International) Exchange department	11	1	21,334.49	8.17E-36
13	basilio	Character from the ballet version of Don Quixote, first performed in Russia in 1869	11	1	21,334.49	8.17E-36
14	李昊阳	Person: former journalism student	10	1	19,394.95	1.45E-32
15	天部	Shallow part of skin (acupuncture)	37	4	17,941.27	2.25E-117
16	梅花奖	Chinese Opera Awards	9	1	17,455.42	2.56E-29
17	00后	00's generation	9	1	17,455.42	2.56E-29
18	<liangda people>	People from local university	18	2	17,455.73	1.25E-57
19	<li qingzhao>	Person: participant, student journalist	17	2	16,485.93	2.18E-54
20	米尔斯坦	Person: Andrew Millstein, president of Disney Animation Studios	24	3	15,516.38	3.59E-76
21	tweetdeck	Social media dashboard application for management of Twitter accounts	15	2	14,546.35	6.52E-48
22	消费主义	Consumerism	7	1	13,576.39	7.72E-23
23	隔离型	Solitary (language learning style)	7	1	13,576.39	7.72E-23
24	<old block>	University campus building	14	2	13,576.57	1.12E-44
25	鲍勃·迪倫	Person: Bob Dylan (non-standard transliteration)	7	1	13,576.39	7.72E-23
26	<yi xiang>	University data journalist	7	1	13,576.39	7.72E-23
27	<luo shunyuan>	Campus police officer	20	3	12,930.22	3.09E-63
28	校编	Proofreader	6	1	11,636.88	1.31E-19
29	麦克卢汉	Person: McLuhan (Marshall), media scholar	6	1	11,636.88	1.31E-19
30	沉思型	Reflective (language learning style)	6	1	11,636.88	1.31E-19
31	丰富多彩	Richly colorful	6	1	11,636.88	1.31E-19
32	辛顿	Person: Hinton (Geoffrey), cognitive psychologist and computer scientist	6	1	11,636.88	1.31E-19
33	绩点3.0	3.0 grade point average	6	1	11,636.88	1.31E-19
34	ieseg	Location: IÉSEG School of Management, France	6	1	11,636.88	1.31E-19
35	黄灿然	Person: poet & translator	6	1	11,636.88	1.31E-19
36	奥塞罗	Othello, Shakespearian character	6	1	11,636.88	1.31E-19
37	理解性	Comprehensibility	6	1	11,636.88	1.31E-19
38	peretti	Person: Jonah Peretti, CEO of Buzzfeed	6	1	11,636.88	1.31E-19
39	女权主义	Feminism	23	4	11,152.38	4.18E-72
40	交流生	Exchange students	16	3	10,344.09	2.39E-50
41	新殖民主义	Neocolonialism	5	1	9,697.38	2.18E-16
42	<xue xiaodan>	Person: student journalist	5	1	9,697.38	2.18E-16
43	卫潇雨	Person: journalist	5	1	9,697.38	2.18E-16
44	曼纽尔·卡斯特	Person: Manuel Castells, media scholar	5	1	9,697.38	2.18E-16
45	滚君	Person: author and blogger	5	1	9,697.38	2.18E-16
46	自娱型	Recreational (of live streamers)	9	2	8,727.71	1.41E-28
47	杨乃彭	Traditional Chinese opera performer	9	2	8,727.71	1.41E-28
48	<lsuer>	Anglicized slang for students from local university	9	2	8,727.71	1.41E-28
49	罗子君	Person: actor	9	2	8,727.71	1.41E-28
50	洛丽	Laure, character from French romantic comedy film Fanfan (1993)	17	4	8,242.97	7.62E-53

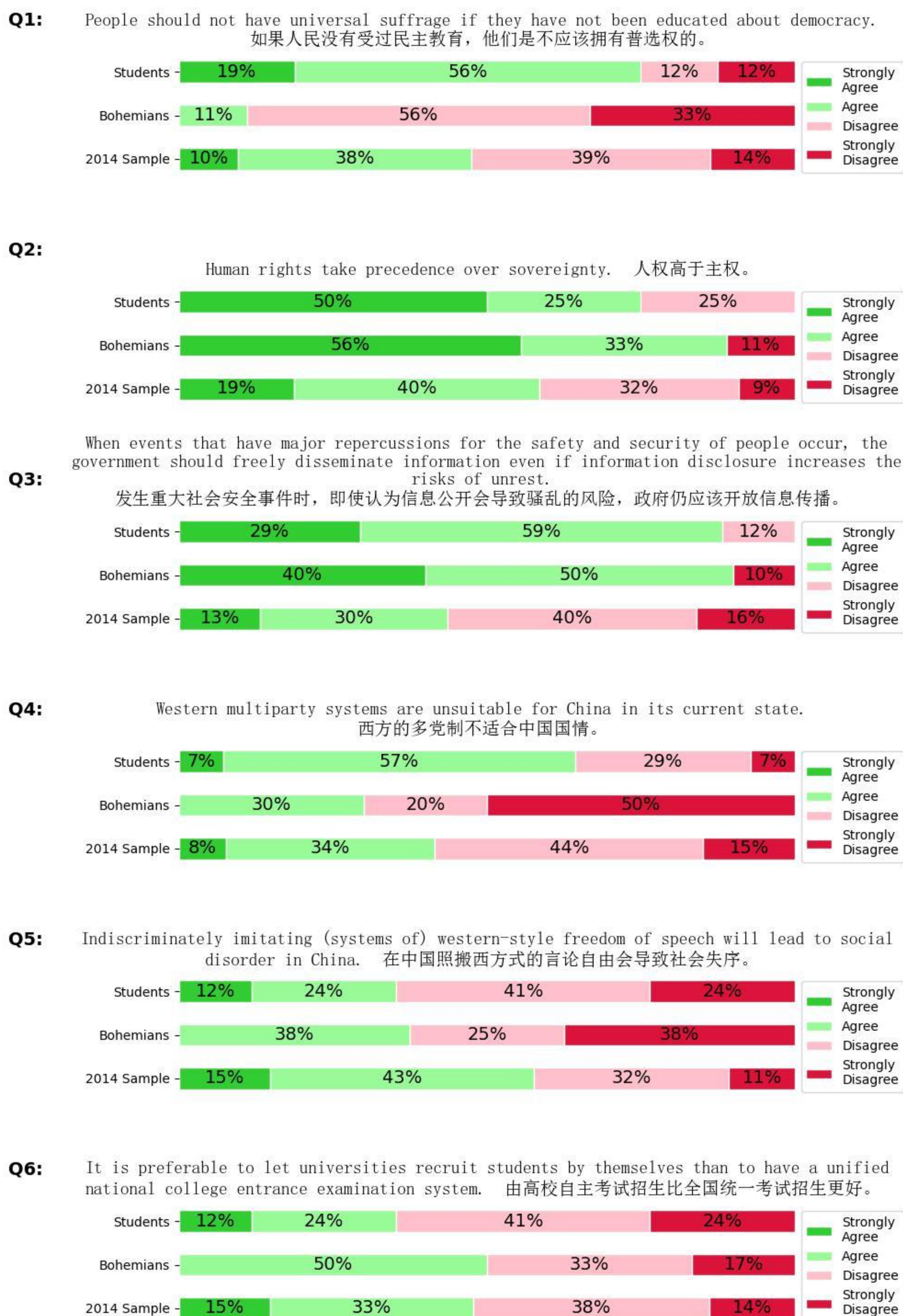
Figure 86: Top 50 Keywords in Bohemian WeChat-Shared Content with 0 Weibo Occurrences

Rank	Keyword	Explanation	Research Corpus Frequency	Reference Corpus Frequency	Fisher's Exact Test Odds Ratio	Fisher's Exact Test P-Value
1	<cashbar>	WeChat public account: local underground bar and music venue	211	0	inf	0.00E+00
2	<ken holt>	Person: Jamaican reggae musician, China tour promoted by participant	171	0	inf	0.00E+00
3	<zhou jinhai promotion>	WeChat public account: participant, music promoter, reggae musician	104	0	inf	0.00E+00
4	<jiedian>	Location: address of local underground bar and music venue, latin characters	83	0	inf	9.12E-268
5	shalanaya	Psytrance festival, Shanghai	71	0	inf	3.70E-229
6	<transcend>	Person: local psytrance DJ	70	0	inf	6.11E-226
7	sixears	Person: psytrance DJ	55	0	inf	1.11E-177
8	刘耗	Person: rock musician	55	0	inf	1.11E-177
9	goaproductions	Psytrance record label	55	0	inf	1.11E-177
10	<pan mengyao>	Person, restaurateur affiliated with local underground bar and music venue	54	0	inf	1.84E-174
11	<liangshan scenic area>	Location: local scenic area	52	0	inf	4.99E-168
12	佬佤	Location: bar and restaurant in Kunming, Yunnan, specializing in cuisine of the Wa minority people	49	0	inf	2.24E-158
13	<wildpsyz>	Person: local psytrance DJ	48	0	inf	3.70E-155
14	猛丁	Brand of beer (IPA)	46	0	inf	1.01E-148
15	thundersouls	Rock band (non-chinese)	38	0	inf	5.51E-123
16	ijapa	Person: hip-hop musician	37	0	inf	9.09E-120
17	<deng de>	Person: photographer, artist, former punk musician	33	0	inf	6.73E-107
18	<cash munchies>	WeChat public account: local restaurant affiliated with underground bar and music venue	32	0	inf	1.11E-103
19	viandoks	Person: psytrance DJ (non-Chinese)	31	0	inf	1.83E-100
20	<zeng ying>	Guomindang (Nationalist) WWII martyr	31	0	inf	1.83E-100
21	tiger9stein	Person: nu-disco & psytrance DJ (non-Chinese)	29	0	inf	4.98E-94
22	曼德维尔	Location: Mandeville, Jamaica	28	0	inf	8.22E-91
23	符命	Heavenly omen anointing a king	28	0	inf	8.22E-91
24	<dai chang>	Person: local skateboarder	27	0	inf	1.36E-87
25	药路山	Folk-rock band	27	0	inf	1.36E-87
26	<funktronix>	Local nu-disco & funk event	27	0	inf	1.36E-87
27	capleton	Person: Jamaican reggae musician	26	0	inf	2.24E-84
28	<livehouse records>	WeChat public account: local music venue	26	0	inf	2.24E-84
29	<liangshan bookings>	Participant's music promotion business	25	0	inf	3.69E-81
30	snapline	Post-punk band	25	0	inf	3.69E-81
31	<maying>	Location: rural village in same province as field site	24	0	inf	6.08E-78
32	古巴朋克	Cuban punk	24	0	inf	6.08E-78
33	<xiaolu district>	Location: local city district, latin characters	22	0	inf	1.65E-71
34	<jiang shi>	Person: local rock musician	22	0	inf	1.65E-71
35	<hao kang>	Person: local artist & fine art lecturer	22	0	inf	1.65E-71
36	liftshift	Person: progressive trance and psytrance DJ and producer (non-Chinese)	21	0	inf	2.73E-68
37	<running dogs>	Local hip-hop group	21	0	inf	2.73E-68
38	80后	80s generation	21	0	inf	2.73E-68
39	nu-disco	Electronic music genre	20	0	inf	4.50E-65
40	雲羿	Psytrance organization	20	0	inf	4.50E-65
41	<guo honghui>	Person: local composer, music lecturer, cultural official	20	0	inf	4.50E-65
42	<Redacted>	Person: local brewer	20	0	inf	4.50E-65
43	kosmosz	Person: psytrance DJ	20	0	inf	4.50E-65
44	stringart	Form of textile craft commonly used in psychadelic decor	20	0	inf	4.50E-65
45	psybient	Electronic music genre	20	0	inf	4.50E-65
46	<mao fan>	Person: local activist, intellectual, musician	20	0	inf	4.50E-65
47	<ye yongrui>	Person: local artist	19	0	inf	7.43E-62
48	良心朋克	Good-hearted punk	19	0	inf	7.43E-62
49	<kickdrum>	Person: local hip-hop DJ	18	0	inf	1.22E-58
50	浸淫于	To immerse oneself in	17	0	inf	2.02E-55

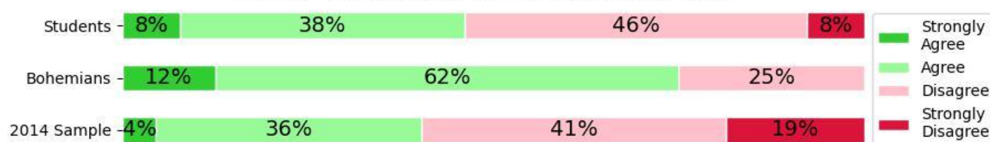
Figure 87: Top 50 Keywords in Bohemian WeChat-Shared Content with >0 Weibo Occurrences

Rank	Keyword	Explanation	Research Corpus Frequency	Reference Corpus Frequency	Fisher's Exact Test Odds Ratio	Fisher's Exact Test P-Value
1	psytrance	Psytrance: musical genre & subculture	449	4	185,167.57	0.00E+00
2	剑球	kendama; traditional Japanese skill toy	159	2	131,080.39	0.00E+00
3	<bandit radio>	WeChat public account: local underground culture	198	4	81,621.34	0.00E+00
4	<huaihai road>	Location: local underground nightlife hub	421	11	63,131.76	0.00E+00
5	关铮	Person: rock musician	75	2	61,821.80	1.46E-238
6	cnhc	Chinese Hardcore Festival	37	1	60,993.68	3.45E-118
7	undaloop	Hip-hop record label	34	1	56,047.97	1.43E-108
8	daymare	Person: fashion designer	33	1	54,399.41	2.29E-105
9	<tasty reviews>	WeChat public account: local food reviews	31	1	51,102.31	5.86E-99
10	<ye he>	Person: Documentary filmmaker	28	1	46,156.69	2.38E-89
11	羊禾	Person: folk musician	28	1	46,156.69	2.38E-89
12	<zhou longwei>	Person: participant, punk musician	274	10	45,185.97	0.00E+00
13	ischia	Location: Island in Italy	27	1	44,508.17	3.79E-86
14	<bao jiakang>	Person: participant, psytrance & funk DJ	63	3	34,619.52	9.27E-199
15	p.o.e.	Person: hip-hop artist	20	1	32,968.63	9.45E-64
16	舒尔金	Person: Alexander Shulgin, renowned psychedelic chemist	20	1	32,968.63	9.45E-64
17	林玉峰	Person: indie-pop musician	19	1	31,320.15	1.48E-60
18	b.o.	Person: rock DJ (non-Chinese)	38	2	31,321.13	4.29E-120
19	atoned	Person: psytrance DJ	19	1	31,320.15	1.48E-60
20	ironmic	Freestyle hip-hop contest	18	1	29,671.67	2.33E-57
21	灵族	Psytrance festival & organization	107	6	29,401.25	0.00E+00
22	<iris tattoo>	Location: Local tattoo studio	17	1	28,023.20	3.63E-54
23	d-evil	Hip-hop group	17	1	28,023.20	3.63E-54
24	raves	Electronic dance music events	16	1	26,374.73	5.66E-51
25	<huaihai>	Location: local underground nightlife hub (in latin characters)	87	6	23,904.90	9.35E-272
26	lbion	Person: psytrance & techno DJ	14	1	23,077.81	1.36E-44
27	<psyscape>	Local psytrance & techno event	94	7	22,138.79	6.35E-293
28	<kangju>	Local punk band	387	29	22,011.37	0.00E+00
29	<gilgamesh>	Local hip-hop artist	13	1	21,429.36	2.09E-41
30	大小手	Charitable music festival	13	1	21,429.36	2.09E-41
31	<guanyi district>	Location: Local district	26	2	21,429.82	8.44E-82
32	灵族村	Location: site of psytrance festival	13	1	21,429.36	2.09E-41
33	yuanqi	Philosophical/spiritual concept of original vital energy (in latin characters)	12	1	19,780.92	3.20E-38
34	hatta	Person: psytrance DJ (non-Chinese)	12	1	19,780.92	3.20E-38
35	jamaican	Nationality	12	1	19,780.92	3.20E-38
36	牛啤堂	Craft Brewery	24	2	19,781.31	1.97E-75
37	shpongle	Psytrance / ambient group from UK	12	1	19,780.92	3.20E-38
38	e.f	Person: psytrance DJ	12	1	19,780.92	3.20E-38
39	吴登	Person: folk musician	12	1	19,780.92	3.20E-38
40	雷鬼	Reggae: musical genre	268	24	18,415.02	0.00E+00
41	<sharp stick>	Local punk band	11	1	18,132.48	4.88E-35
42	mantis	Person: techno & psytrance DJ	149	14	17,547.76	0.00E+00
43	rastafari	Rastafarianism, a religious movement from Jamaica	42	4	17,309.16	1.21E-130
44	imbeer	WeChat public account: craft beer	21	2	17,308.56	6.90E-66
45	collaborated	Used in musicians' and DJs' English-language bios	21	2	17,308.56	6.90E-66
46	蒋亮	Person: reggae musician	21	2	17,308.56	6.90E-66
47	贤孝	Style of traditional Chinese folk music	21	2	17,308.56	6.90E-66
48	ozora	Hungarian psytrance festival	20	2	16,484.32	1.04E-62
49	消费主义	Consumerism	10	1	16,484.04	7.38E-32
50	jahjahway	Person: hip-hop artist	10	1	16,484.04	7.38E-32

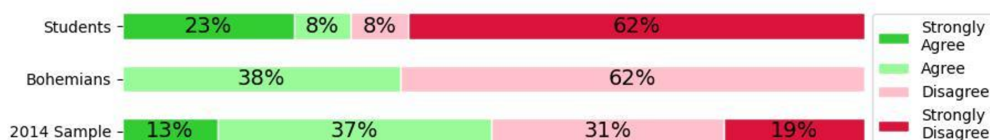
Appendix B – Chinese Political Compass Survey Responses



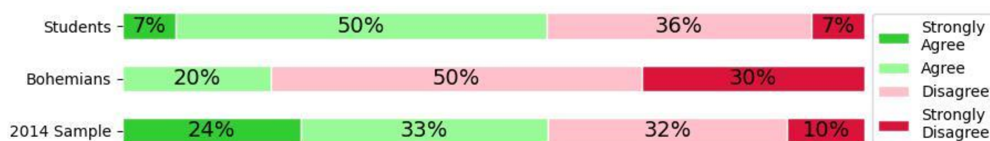
Q7: Religious leaders and adherents should be allowed to conduct missionary work in nonreligious spaces. 应该容许宗教人士在非宗教场所公开传教。



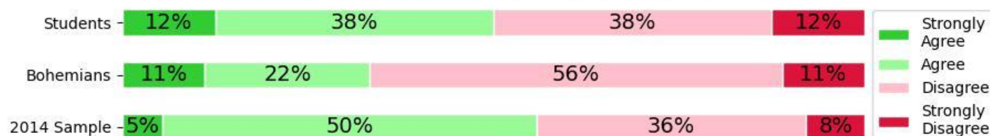
Q8: Primary school, secondary school, and college students should all participate in government organized military training. 无论中小学生或大学生，都应参加由国家统一安排的军训。



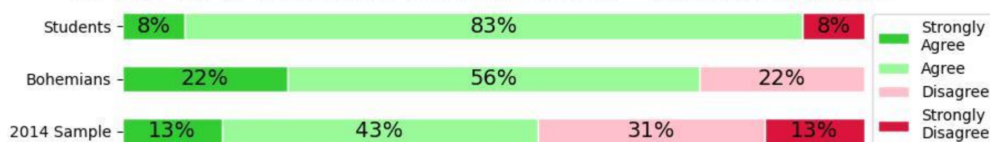
Q9: National unity and territorial integrity are the highest interest of society. 国家的统一和领土完整是社会的最高利益。



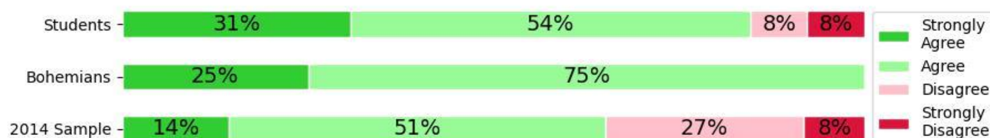
Q10: Even if procedural rules are violated in the process of investigation and evidence gathering, those who have actually committed crimes should be punished. 哪怕经历了违反程序规定的审讯和取证过程，确实有罪的罪犯也应被处刑。



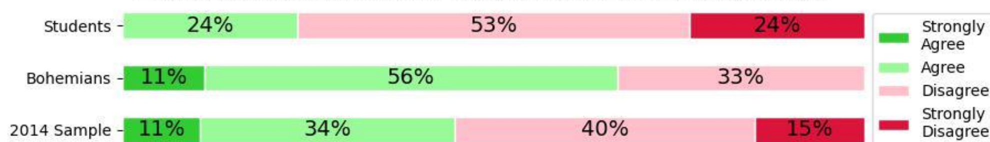
Q11: The state has an obligation to provide foreign aid. 国家有义务进行对外援助。



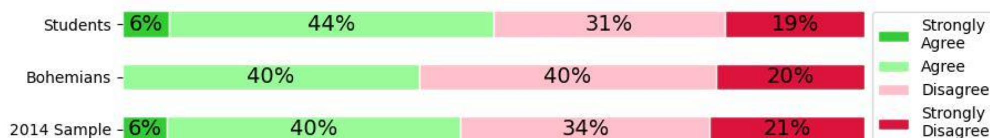
Q12: It is acceptable besmirch the images of national leaders and founding leaders in literary and artistic works. 国家领导人及开国领袖的形象可以作为文艺作品的丑化对象。



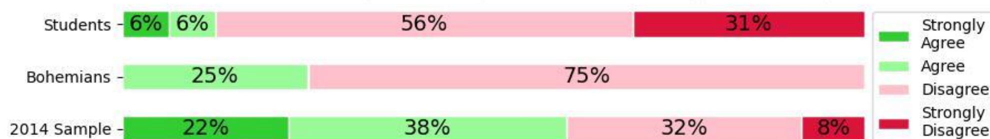
Q13: When laws fail to fully constrain criminal behaviors, people have the right to impose their own punishments for these behaviors.
当法律未能充分制止罪恶行为时，人民群众有权自发对罪恶行为进行制裁。



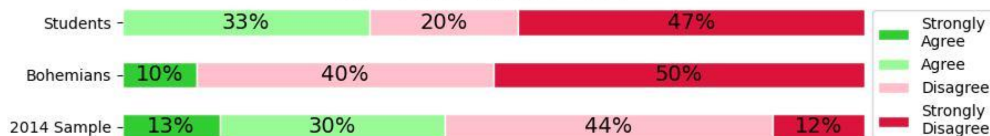
Q14: Media should be allowed to represent the voice of a particular social stratum or interest group. 应当允许媒体代表某一特定阶层或利益集团发言。



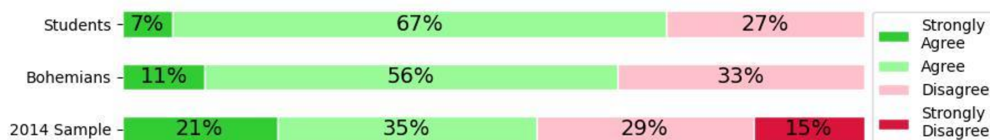
Q15: If it has sufficient state capabilities, China has the right to take any action to defend its national interests. 如果国家综合实力许可，那么中国有权为了维护自己的利益而采取任何行动。



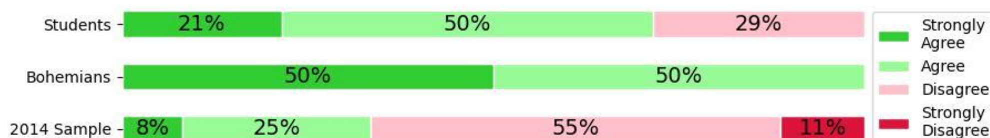
Q16: Force should be used to reunify Taiwan with China if conditions permit.
条件允许的话应该武力统一台湾。



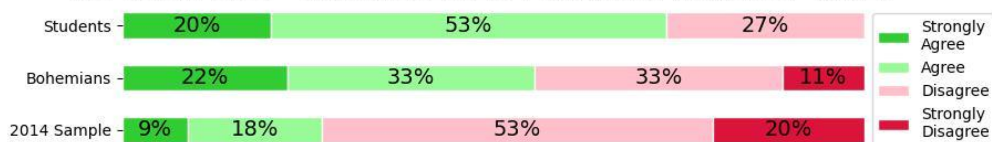
Q17: Lawyers should do their utmost to defend clients even if the client has committed a crime.
律师即使明知被辩护人的犯罪事实也应当尽力为其进行辩护。



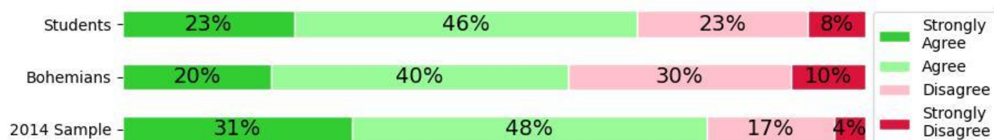
Q18: Chinese citizens should be allowed to hold foreign citizenship.
应该允许中国公民同时具有外国国籍。



Q19: It is impossible for western countries led by the United States to tolerate the rise of China into a major power. 以美国为首的西方国家不可能真正容许中国崛起成为一流强国。



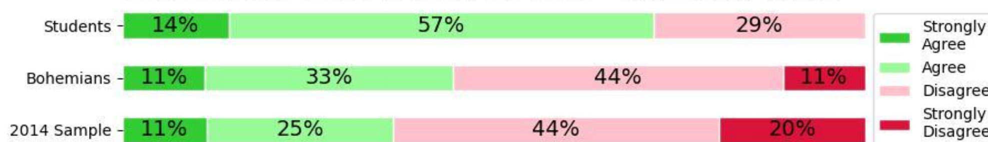
Q20: The state should take measures to train and support athletes so they can win glory for the country in various international competitions.
国家应当采取措施培养和支持体育健儿在各种国际比赛场合为国争光。



Survey Queston Category: Economic

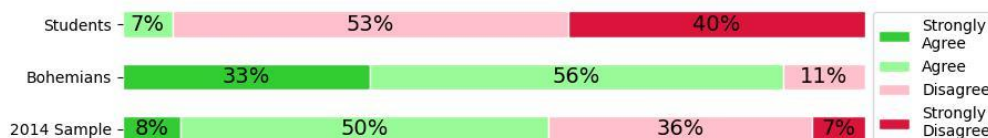
Q21:

The minimum wage should be set by the state. 最低工资应由国家规定。

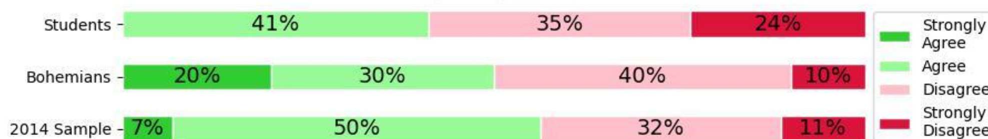


Q22:

The fruits of China's economic development since reform and opening up are enjoyed by a small group of people; most people have not received much benefit.
中国改革开放以来的经济发展的成果都被一小群人占有了，大多数人没得到什么好处。

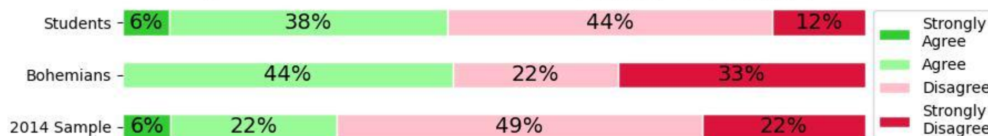


Q23: In the decision-making of major (infrastructure) projects, individual interests should give way to social interests. 在重大工程项目的决策中，个人利益应该为社会利益让路。



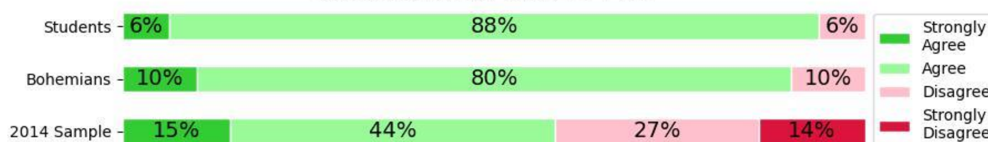
Q24:

Wasting food is an individual freedom. 浪费粮食也是个人的自由。

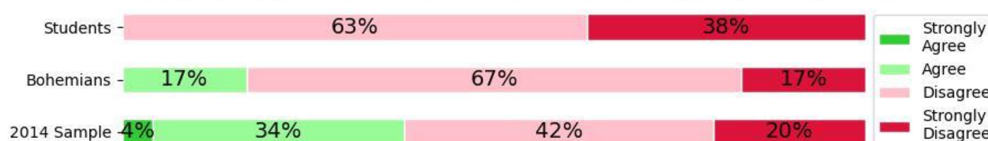


Q25:

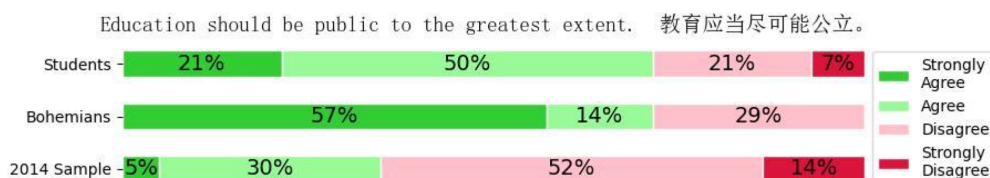
If the price of pork is too high, the government should intervene.
如果猪肉价格过高，政府应当干预。



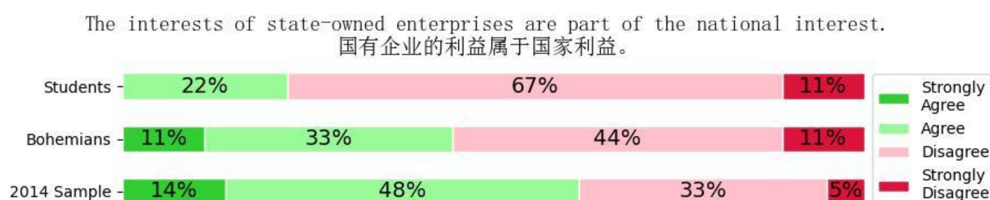
Q26: A high tariff should be imposed on imported goods that are also produced domestically to protect domestic industries. 应当对国外同类产品征收高额关税来保护国内民族工业。



Q27:

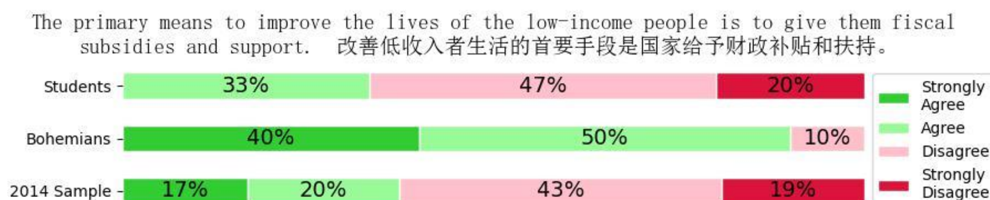


Q28:

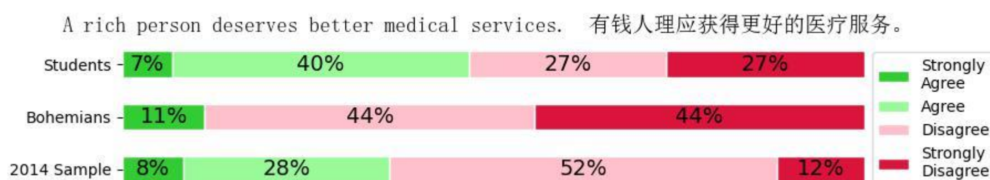


Q29:

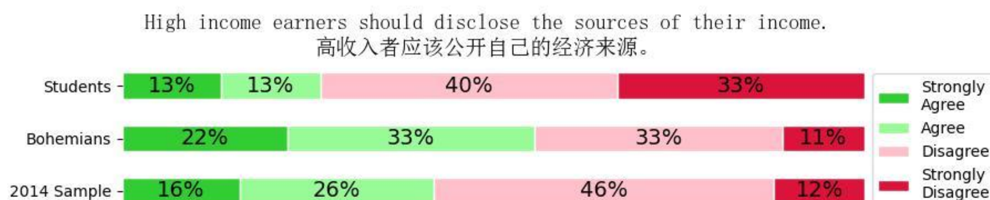
Q30:



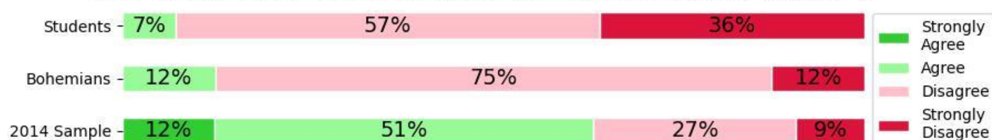
Q31:



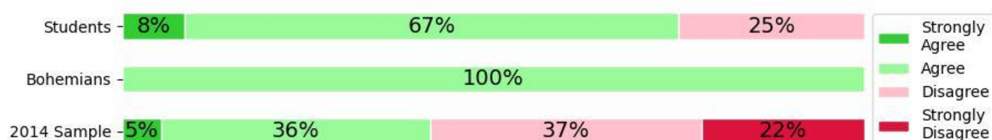
Q32:



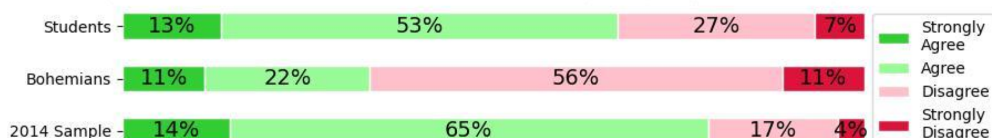
Q33: People who make money through capital gains contribute less to the society than people make money through labor. 靠运作资金赚钱的人对社会的贡献比不上靠劳动赚钱的人。



Q34: It is better to sell state-owned enterprises to capitalists than to let them go bankrupt. 与其让国有企业亏损破产，不如转卖给资本家。



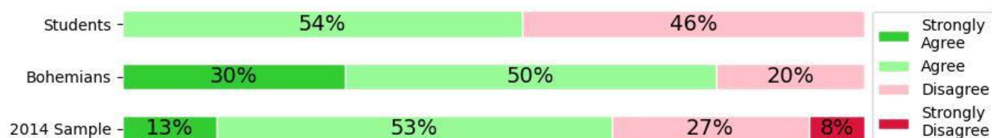
Q35: Sectors related to national security and important to the national economy and people's livelihoods must be controlled by state-owned enterprises. 那些关系到国家安全、以及其他重要国计民生的领域，必须全部由国有企业掌控。



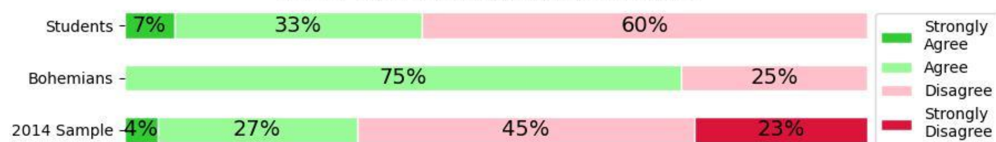
Q36: The process of capital accumulation is always accompanied by harm to the working class. 资本积累的过程总是伴随着对普通劳动人民利益的伤害。

Q37: Individuals should be able to own, buy and sell land. 私人应当可以拥有和买卖土地。

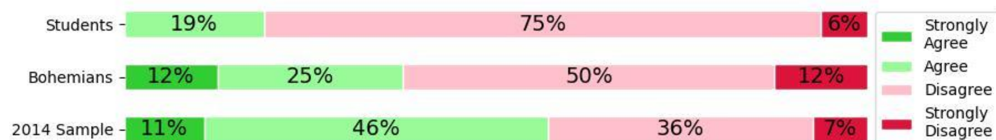
Q38: The government should adopt higher grain purchasing prices to boost the income of peasants. 政府应当采用较高的粮食收购价格以增加农民收入。



Q39: Foreign capital in China should enjoy the same treatment as national capital.
在华外国资本应享受和民族资本同样的待遇。

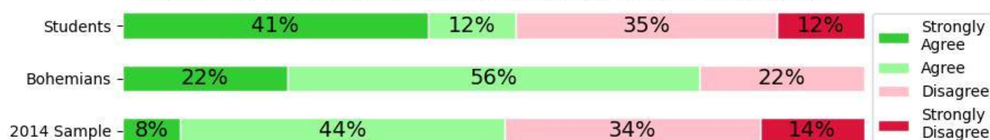


Q40: Natural monopolies that emerge out of market competitions are harmless.
市场竞争中自然形成的垄断地位是无害的。

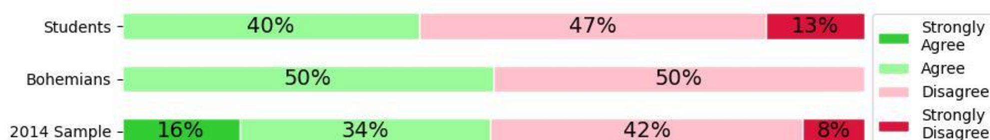


Survey Queston Category: Cultural

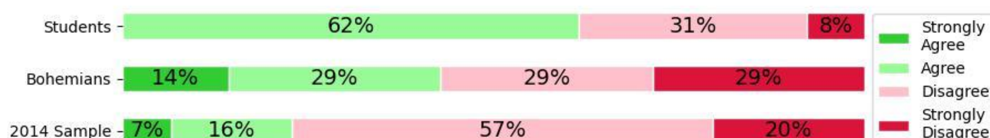
Q41: Two adults should be free to engage in voluntary sexual behavior regardless of their marital status. 两个成年人之间自愿的性行为是其自由，无论其婚姻关系为何。



Q42: One should not openly comment on the shortcomings of their elders. 不应公开谈论自己长辈的缺点。

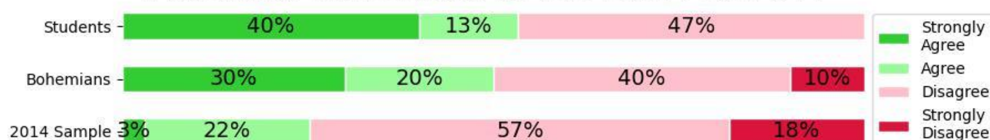


Q43: The modern Chinese society needs Confucianism. 现代中国社会需要儒家思想。

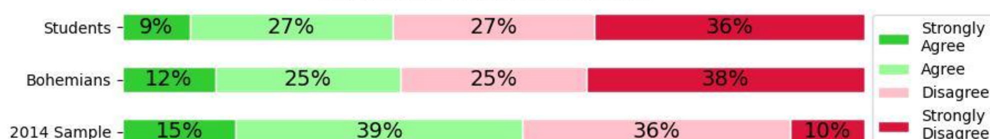


Q44: The fundamental standard to evaluate the value of a work of art is whether it is liked by the masses. 判断艺术作品的价值的根本标准是看是不是受到人民大众喜爱。

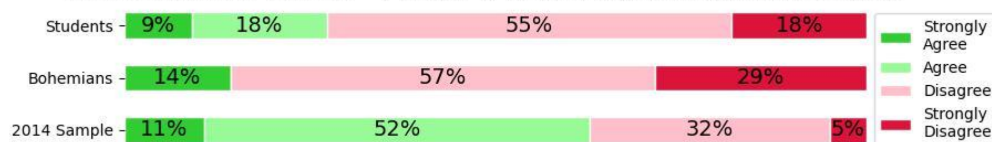
Q45: Even with population pressures, the state and the society have no right to interfere in the decision to have a child, or how many children to have. 即使有人口压力，国家和社会也无权干涉个人要不要孩子，要几个孩子。



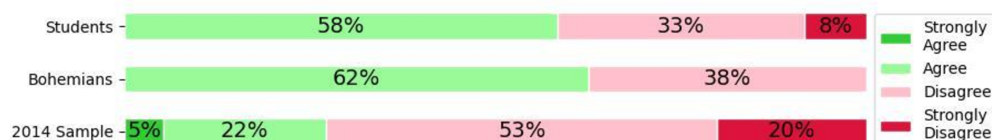
Q46: The Eight Diagrams (Bagua) in The Book of Changes (Zhouyi) can explain many things well. 周易八卦能够有效的解释很多事情。



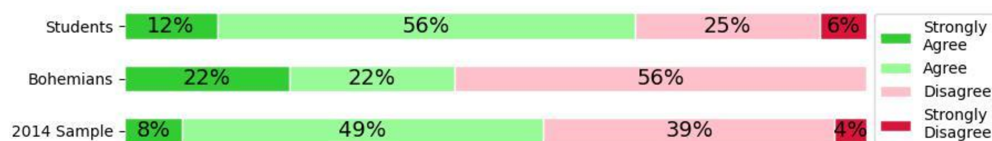
Q47: The perspective of traditional Chinese medicine on human health is superior to that of modern mainstream medical science. 中国传统医学对人体健康的观念比现代主流医学更高明。



Q48: It is unnecessary to push forward the simplification of Chinese characters. 汉字无需人为推行简化。



Q49: Traditional Chinese classics should be the basic education material for children. 应当将中国传统文化的经典作品作为儿童基础教育读物



Q50: I will recognize the relationship between my child and a homosexual partner if it is a voluntary choice. 如果是出于自愿，我会认可我的孩子和同性结成伴侣关系。