

# IMAGINARIES OF A BETTER CHINESE SOCIETY ENACTED IN THE REVIVAL OF CONFUCIAN EDUCATION

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AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF LIVING AND LEARNING IN CONTEMPORARY  
CLASSICS READING EDUCATION *DUJING JIAOYU*

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## ABSTRACT

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Studying Confucian classics is commonly known as core activity in Chinese imperial education – at least for young men who sought a career as government official. When this learning technique reappeared in classrooms of privately-run so-called contemporary “academies” and “study halls”, heated debates on the value of traditional education for contemporary Chinese society ensued in academia and society. Children who study the classics in a full-time approach receive education outside of China’s system of compulsory education. Given that study halls and academies are usually not registered as schools, they can neither offer an officially recognized diploma nor an official school registration which is, for example, needed for participation in the secondary school and the university entrance examinations. The legal situation of reading the classics today as alternative to public education remains subject of negotiations between headmasters of the newly emerged facilities and local government officials. Nevertheless, parents take the risk to send their children to these facilities to receive education. In addition, parents are taking on a huge financial burden as study fees in these facilities are quite high. Despite all obstacles, many parents decide that their child(ren) should learn from China’s ancient masters rather than from today’s schoolbooks.

In the continued trend of Confucian revival in China since the 1980s and 1990s, classics reading education appears as a project of retraditionalization on the level of the people (*minjian*). Originally developed by educator and Confucian scholar Wang Caigui, the educational approach of reading the classics has been translated into different forms of practice in individual educational facilities. Even though classics reading activities and initiatives are very diverse and far from forming a coherent movement, educational activists follow the common goal to make Chinese society more moral, civilized, and more Chinese again. Confucian idealism is projected into visions of a better future which highly influence activists in the classics reading movement (*dujing yundong*). Motivated (or repelled) by perceived lacks and deficiencies in Chinese society today, classics reading activists develop rich imaginaries of a better future; this utopian thought is attempted to be implemented into everyday routines and learners’ lives in study halls and academies.

Ideals and specific localized practice play key roles in classics reading education: ideals are implemented into daily practice, and daily practice takes place in a carefully designed environment which responds to these abstract ideals with corresponding ideal structures. The embodiment of abstract ideals and visions in locations and people’s identities, behaviors and actions is a major concern in grounded utopian movements. The theory of grounded utopian

movements is taken over as tool to make results of the study of the classics reading movement better understandable and to take them to another level of abstraction and comparability. Emerging in the research on nativistic movements in North and South America among native groups, grounded utopian movement theory explained what fell out of the grid of established social movement and new social movement theory – movements that could not respond well to the society-state relation assumed in Northern America and Europe in relation to their nation state building processes. Crucial for the introduction of this new theoretical framework is a history of foreign occupation and cultural oppression which influenced nation building processes in these countries. Considering China's turbulent conditions at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, similarities in historical fates appear, especially in China's intellectual world and educational landscape which were both dominated by foreign thought and system for a long time. Different "lacks" in China's current society (inadequate public education, moral decline of society, shifting family values and lack of knowledge in child raising on parent's side) are linked to China's multiple disconnection with its own cultural tradition in the past (from Qing dynasty onwards but at the latest starting with the anti-traditional May Fourth Movement in 1919). Confucian activists take the responsibility for filling or counterbalancing these lacks with a rich cultural and moral education under the patronage of the sages of China's more distant and more glorious past.

Interview and participant observation data from ethnographic field research carried out between October 2015 and July 2016 are the basis for this study. In 2015, information on the phenomenon of classics reading education which was taken directly from practice was scarce and largely related to studies which were not mainly concerned with education but, for example, with Confucian revival in general or the religious/ spiritual side of popular Confucian projects. In-depth interviews drew a vivid image of the classics reading world as imagined and lived by classics reading educators and parents. Field observation during the visits in class and naturally occurring talks with involved people revealed how difficult it is to drag such rich ideals into reality. The highest ideal to become a morally upright gentleman (*junzi*; the term is used gender-neutral and encompasses girls and women) who would influence and improve Chinese society requires time consuming daily recitation of Confucian (and "Western") classics over many years – a practice which is always the same and carried out in the same daily rhythms. Exceedingly few (parents of) children commit to the whole package of 20 years of classics reading education – and considering that the movement only picked up speed at the beginning of the 2000s, there can hardly be students who already went all the way. An assessment of possible outcomes of the movement can only have a preliminary character, but there are activists who critically examine their own actions and



routines and see the price paid for sticking to ideals too strictly. In many cases, students' further development in higher education and/ or professional life remains a question mark. Utopia in practice looks less ideal than in theory. Nevertheless, the utopian movement of reading the classics teaches a lot about coping with caesuras in the past, changes in the present, and conceptualizations of the future. Active engagement in realizing these future concepts drives people to explore new paths – even in legally unclarified grey areas – and secure their own participation in (social) matters which are of concern for them. Even though the classics reading movement might be small and operating in the margins, the Chinese government has started to respond to people's own initiatives in their (educational) policies.

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#### DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENFASSUNG (GERMAN SUMMARY)

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Das Studieren konfuzianischer Klassiker war im chinesischen Kaiserreich der Kern der Ausbildung junger Männer, die eine Karriere im Beamtendienst anstrebten. In den Klassenzimmern neu aufgekommener sogenannter „Studierhallen“ und „Akademien“ findet das Lernen der Klassiker heute erneut Anklang. In großen Städten wie Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Chengdu, Xiamen und Guangzhou haben sich diese Privatlehrinstitutionen seit Anfang der 2000er Jahre etabliert. Entwickelt haben sie sich oftmals aus Klassikerlektüre-Aktivitäten nach der Schule oder Arbeit und am Wochenende; aus Zusatzbildung für Kinder und Lesezirkeln für Erwachsene hat sich eine bunte Landschaft der Klassikerlektüre-Erziehung (*dujing jiaoyu*) mit Ganztagsbildungsangeboten entwickelt (in Tageseinrichtungen mit Unterrichtsende zwischen 16 und 18 Uhr und Internaten mit einem getakteten Alltag von 6 bis 21 Uhr). Kinder ab drei Jahren können an Studierhallen und Akademien aufgenommen werden, um die chinesischen Klassiker zu lernen – anfangs nicht über das eigenständige Lesen, sondern über das, was die Lehrer ihnen vorlesen und sie nachsprechen können.

Bildungseinrichtungen, die als „Studienhallen“ (*xuetang*) und „Akademien“ (*shuyuan*) bezeichnet werden, erscheinen als „reaktivierte traditionelle Strukturen“ und werden allgemein unter dem Oberbegriff „traditionelle Privatschule“ (*sishu*) zusammengefasst. Der Unterricht ist rein auf das Lesen bzw. Rezitieren von konfuzianischen Klassikern ausgelegt; Kampfkunst, Kunst und Kalligrafie als Zusatzfächer trifft man häufiger an, Mathematik in seltenen Fällen. Im Vordergrund stehen die Prinzipien und Gedanken der großen Meister der Vergangenheit, insbesondere Konfuzius. Gelebt wird ein bescheidener Lebensstil, abgewandt von Konsum und Unterhaltungsmedien, der bei der Konzentration auf das Lernen hilfreich sein soll und die Kultivierung eines guten Charakters stützt. Nicht nur Kinder widmen sich der Klassikerlektüre, sondern auch interessierte Erwachsene. Neben dem Konzept für Kinder-

Klassikerlektüre hat der Bildungstheoretiker und konfuzianische Gelehrte Wang Caigui auch ein Programm für Erwachsene entwickelt. Kinder sind in seinen Augen noch rezeptiver als Erwachsene und können in jungen Jahren große Mengen an Texten auswendig lernen – von denen sie ein Leben lang zehren könnten, denn man habe ein Leben lang Zeit, sie zu verstehen.

Die Begriffe „traditionelle Privatschule“, „Studierhalle“ und „Akademie“ sind ebenso wie das Rezitieren der Klassiker aus der chinesischen Geschichte bekannt: Akademien konzentrierten sich auf die Vorbereitung der Prüflinge für die kaiserliche Prüfung; sowohl private als auch staatliche Akademien bildeten Studenten und Gelehrte in den konfuzianischen Klassikern aus. Institutionelle Bildung war nur für Männer verfügbar. In traditionellen Privatschulen wurden die Grundlagen dazu gelehrt: Lesen, Schreiben und Rechnen. Mit „Studierhallen“ bezeichnete man zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts Einrichtungen, die im Zuge von Bildungsreformen entlang westlichen Lernens ihren traditionellen Bildungsfokus behielten und als ein Überbleibsel vorreformerischer Zeiten schienen. Auch wenn diese drei Begriffe auf historische Vorgänger hindeuten, sollten Chinas zeitgenössische Studierhallen und Akademien nicht als deren Fortsetzung betrachtet werden; sie zeichnen sich durch eine eigene Dynamik aus.

Die Wiederbelebung des Konzepts traditioneller (konfuzianischer) Bildung mit einem starken Fokus auf dem Rezitieren der Klassiker ist zu einem kontroversen Thema sowohl im akademischen als auch im gesellschaftlichen Diskurs geworden. Nicht wenige Artikel in Zeitungen, Magazinen und akademischen Journals stellen den Wert dieser Bildungspraxis für die heutige Zeit zweifelnd in Frage. Andere Stimmen jedoch loben den Ansatz die eigene Kultur und die Besonderheiten der chinesischen Sprache auf einem Weg zu erlernen, der sehr chinesisch ist. Dringlicher für viele Eltern und Betreiber von Klassikerlektüre-Einrichtungen ist allerdings der unklare Rechtsstatus der Einrichtungen: Studierhallen und Akademien sind oftmals nicht als Schulen registriert. Lernende können dort weder eine Schulregistrierung (*xueji*) erhalten, die u.a. für die Teilnahme an Aufnahmeprüfungen für die weiterführende Schule sowie die Universität benötigt wird, noch Abschlusszeugnisse erhalten, die im staatlichen Bildungssystem anerkannt sind. Ob Eltern, die ihre Kinder in eine Lehreinrichtung unklaren Status schicken, ihrer Pflicht nachkommen, ihren Kindern Bildung zukommen zu lassen (in China gibt es neun Jahre Schulpflicht), ist bis heute nicht geklärt. In der Praxis werden der rechtliche Status und die Registrierungsform der Studierhallen und Akademien (z.B. als NRO oder als Bildungsinformationszentrum) oft zwischen den Leitungen der Studierhallen und Akademien und den zuständigen lokalen Behörden individuell verhandelt. Eltern versuchen Wege zu finden, ihren Kindern einerseits das Lernen an Studierhallen und

Akademien zu ermöglichen, ohne dass ihnen die Schulregistrierung an einer staatlichen Schule abhandenkommt. Für nicht wenige Eltern ist es attraktiv, ihre Kinder auf Basis des Gedankenguts der alten Meister ausbilden zu lassen, anstatt sie den heutigen überfüllten Klassenzimmern und in ihren Augen unzeitgemäßen Schulbüchern auszusetzen. Zusätzlich sind die Schulgebühren dieser Privateinrichtungen recht hoch; zu den formalen Unklarheiten kommt also auch eine finanzielle Bürde hinzu.

Klassikerlektüre-Bildung ist ein Projekt der Retraditionalisierung der chinesischen Gesellschaft, das initiativ auch auf der Ebene der einfachen Bevölkerung (*minjian*) zu verankern ist. Es steht im Trend der Wiederbelebung des Konfuzianismus der 1980er und 1990er Jahre. Zu unterscheiden ist es von der durch die chinesischen Regierung unterstützte traditioneller Bildung (*chuantong jiaoyu*) im regulären Schulunterricht, von der Ausprägung der sog. Nationalstudien (*guoxue*) als akademischer Disziplin mit Fokus auf Auseinandersetzung mit chinesischer Kultur und Geschichte sowie der akademisch orientierten philosophischen Strömung des modernen Neu- oder Neo-Konfuzianismus (*xiandai / dangdai xin Rujia*). Wangs Caiguis ursprünglicher pädagogischer Ansatz der Klassikerlektüre wurde in den einzelnen Bildungseinrichtungen in diverse konkrete Lehrpraxen transferiert. Damit sind die Aktivitäten und Initiativen zur Klassikerlektüre sehr vielfältig geworden; sie sind äußerlich weit davon entfernt, eine *kohärente* Bewegung zu bilden. Dennoch lässt sich ein gemeinsames höheres Ziel der Involvierten festmachen: sie wollen die chinesische Gesellschaft moralischer, zivilisierter und wieder „chinesischer“ machen. Dafür sollen über die Klassikerlektüre-Erziehung moderne Edle (*junzi*) ausgebildet werden, die nach ausreichender Lektüre der Klassiker – bestenfalls 20 Jahre – in die chinesische Gesellschaft eintreten und diese über ihr eigenes gutes Beispiel positiv beeinflussen können. Aufgrund der gemeinsamen Agenda und der Mobilisation, die im Rahmen der Bildung stattfindet, werden die Involvierten „Aktivisten“ genannt und man spricht von der „Klassikerlektüre-Bewegung“ (*dujing yundong*).

Während die Kinder als Rezipienten der Klassikerlektüre-Erziehung eigentlich die Hauptrolle im Bildungsalltag spielen, sind es doch die Erwachsenen, die Eltern, die Lehrenden, und das Leitungspersonal (die Gründer der Einrichtungen), die die Umgebung aktiv gestalten und die Kreateure der Klassikerlektüre-Welt (*dujingjie*) sind. Es sind ihre Ideale und Motivationen, die die physikalischen Orte eingerichtet und mit Leben gefüllt haben. Deshalb sind auch diese drei Personengruppen diejenigen, die im Fokus der Forschungsarbeit stehen. Die Grundlage für die vorliegende Forschungsarbeit bilden Daten aus Interviews und teilnehmender Beobachtung aus ethnographischer Feldforschung, die zwischen September 2015 und Juli 2016 durchgeführt wurde. 27 Einrichtungen in zehn Städten – Beijing, Chengdu,

Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Qufu, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Suzhou, Taishun und Xiamen – wurden besucht. Die meisten Forschungsstandorte sind in der östlichen Region Chinas gelegen, wo die Bevölkerungsdichte sowie das Bruttoregionalprodukt höher sind; für die Studierhallen und Akademien braucht es zahlungskräftige Interessenten. Dennoch ist eine gewisse Tendenz zum Umzug aufs Land innerhalb der letzten Jahre zu beobachten; dort findet sich mehr physischer und ideeller Raum für die Umsetzung der eigenen Bildungsideale. Von den 27 Einrichtungen sind 21 privat geführte Studierhallen und Akademien und damit im Fokus der vorliegenden Arbeit. Nützliche Informationen zur Klassikerlektüre-Praxis sowie zur Abgrenzung des Feldes kamen auch aus anderen Quellen hinzu, wie z.B. einer Redaktion zu einem Klassikerlektüre-Magazin, zwei staatlichen Akademien, einer buddhistischen Akademie sowie einem Unternehmen, das sich mit Klassikerlektüre-Erziehung in der pränatalen und frühkindlichen Phase befasst. Hier kommt eine positive Klangumgebung ins Spiel: bereits der Fötus kann über das Abspielen von Klassikerrezitationen und klassischer Musik positiv vorgeprägt werden; Babies und Kleinkinder seien dann heiterer, gehorsamer und weinten weniger.

Im Jahr 2015 waren Informationen über das Bildungsphänomen um die Klassiker, die direkt aus der Praxis kamen, sehr rar. Einzelne Informationspakete waren weitgehend in Studien zu finden, die sich nicht hauptsächlich mit traditioneller Bildung, sondern beispielsweise mit der Wiederbelebung des Konfuzianismus im Allgemeinen oder der religiösen bzw. spirituellen Seite konfuzianischer Praxis beschäftigten. In den Interviews, die dieser Arbeit zu Grunde liegen, zeichnet sich nun ein sehr anschauliches Bild der heutigen Welt der Klassiker und wiederbelebter konfuzianischer Bildung, wie sie von Eltern und Lehrkräften gedacht, verkörpert und gelebt wird. Zu Beginn der Forschung stand die Klassikerlektüre-Erziehung als Bildungsform im Fokus. Im Zuge der Beobachtungen hat sich recht schnell ergeben, dass die persönlichen Motive und Ideale der Akteure die Frage beantworten, warum Eltern, Lehrende und Leitungspersonal der Klassikerlektüre-Einrichtungen so viel Zeit und Geld in diese Bildungsform stecken und das Risiko einer unklaren Rechtslage und unklarer Weiterbildungsmöglichkeiten für Kinder auf sich nehmen. Gerade im Hinblick darauf, dass es auch in staatlich organisierten Akademien Wochenendkurse in Klassikerrezitation für Familien gibt und in staatlicher Bildung traditionelle Bildung und die Klassiker wieder mehr unterstrichen werden, scheint es so, als gäbe es im privaten Klassikerlektüre-Sektor noch andere Anreize.

Diese Ideale und Motivationen sind mit farbenfrohen Zukunftsvorstellungen verbunden. Die utopische Perspektive kam während der Feldforschung auf und stand nicht bereits in der Vorbereitung als zu belegende These im Raum. Sie hat die weitere Abstraktion der in der

Analyse aufgekommene Kategorien gestützt und sich auf theoretischer Ebene während der Auseinandersetzung mit Praxis und Daten aus der Feldforschung manifestiert. In einem konstruktiven Grounded Theory-Ansatz (Charmaz 2006: 178) ist die schrittweise Abstraktion der Analyseergebnisse im Vergleich mit anderen Studien und Theorien zu einer Theoretisierung im Bereich von Utopien und utopischer Bewegungen geworden – schlussendlich ist die Nähe zu Price et al. (2016) in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit *grounded utopian movements* (GUM) sehr hoch; diese Nähe leitet sich aus den Daten selbst her. Zudem haben die Theoriebildung im Themenbereich von Utopien sowie derjenigen im Verfahren der Grounded Theory eine hohe Überschneidung im prozeduralen Vorgehen: das Grounded Theory-Verfahren arbeitet mit einzelnen Datenfragmenten und Informationsstücken, die im kontinuierlichen Vergleichen und Codieren weiterentwickelt werden. Ebenso erfordert das Verfolgen von utopischem Gedankengut eine „detektivische“ Arbeit (vergleiche Jameson 2010: 25); Hinweise aus der Praxis müssen in Hinblick auf die utopischen Facetten verstanden und belegt werden; oft ist es die Kombination von Fragmenten und nicht die einzelne Information, die die utopische Vision zeigt. Die prozeduralen Dynamiken des Analysevorgangs sowie die Anforderungen der utopischen Perspektive an die praktische Analysearbeit haben die Theoriebildung nochmals gestärkt.

Die Verkörperung abstrakter Ideale und Visionen in Orten sowie in den Identitäten, Verhaltensweisen und Handlungen von Menschen ist ein zentrales Thema in der Klassikerlektüre-Bewegung und ebenso in den *grounded utopian movements*. Die grundlegende Theorie entwickelte sich aus der Untersuchung nativistischer Bewegungen in einheimischen Gruppen Nord- und Südamerikas, die aus dem Rahmen etablierter Theorien zu sozialen Bewegungen hinausfielen. Zwei Gründe sind hier ausschlaggebend: (1) die untersuchten nativistischen Bewegungen stellen keine Opposition zum Staat dar, wie man sie in vielen sozialen Bewegung annimmt; vielmehr operieren sie im durch den Staat vorgegebenen Rahmen und antizipieren Alternativen zum Gegebenen in eben diesem Rahmen; das hängt u.a. damit zusammen, dass (2) die Formierung zum Nationalstaat in den Regionen, in denen die *grounded utopian movements* zu verankern sind, anders stattgefunden hat als in Europa – nämlich unter ausländischer territorialer wie kultureller Okkupation. Im konkreten Fall Chinas lassen die turbulenten politischen und gesellschaftlichen Umstände zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts auf gewisse Ähnlichkeiten schließen. Insbesondere zu erwähnen sind dabei die Vereinnahmung Chinas intellektueller Welt durch „westliches“ Gedankengut sowie die Dominanz angloamerikanisch und sowjetisch geprägter Bildungssysteme nach Abschaffung des konfuzianischen Bildungs- und Prüfungssystems. Mängel in der heutigen Gesellschaft Chinas werden von Klassikerlektüre-Involvierten im hohen Maße auf diese Einflüsse

zurückgeführt, die seit Ende der Qing-Dynastie (1644-1911), aber mindestens seit der anti-traditionalistischen Vierten-Mai-Bewegung ab 1919 an Präsenz und Einfluss gewannen. Die wahrgenommene kulturelle Entwurzelung und die Mängel der Gesellschaft (unzufriedenstellende staatliche Bildung, moralischer Verfall der Gesellschaft, bröckelnde Werte, wandelnde Familienkonzepte und mangelhaftes Wissen in Kindererziehung auf Seiten der Eltern) scheinen durch Entfremdung von den eigenen Traditionen hervorgerufen zu sein. Sie finden ein sehr reiches und positivistisches Gegenkonstrukt in der Zukunftsvision einer besseren und chinesischeren Gesellschaft, die sich aus den kulturellen Ressourcen einer positiven Vergangenheit bedient, die als von negativen äußeren Einflüssen unangetastet wahrgenommen wird und als rein oder pur gilt. Die Wiederaufnahme dieses positiven Fadens, über die Gegenwart bis in die Zukunft weitergesponnen, ist die Grunddynamik der Klassikerlektüre-Bewegung.

Einer der Hauptantriebe für das hohe persönliche Engagement von Eltern, Lehrern und dem Leitungspersonal ist die Vision von einer besseren Zukunft für die eigenen Kinder und für die chinesische Gesellschaft. Gespiegelt ist dies auf der weniger idealen Seite einer negativ wahrgenommenen Vergangenheit, und zwar auf zweierlei Weise: (1) schließt dies die persönliche Vergangenheit ein, die u.a. vom Leistungsdruck im chinesischen Schulsystem, von Desorientierung bezüglich des *eigenen* Lebenswegs nach dem Universitätsabschluss sowie von der Erinnerung an Eltern, die sich mit Kindererziehung wenig auskannten, geprägt ist. Dazu kommt (2) das Bild von Chinas Schicksal zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts, das von der Abkehr von der eigenen Tradition bis hin zur Zerstörung derselben sowie der Kopie ausländischer Bildungssysteme und der starken intellektuellen Prägung durch „westliches“ Gedankengut gezeichnet war. Wie bereits erwähnt werden viele Mängel der heutigen chinesischen Gesellschaft – dass sie unmoralisch sei (bzw. in einem Raum unklarer moralischer Werte agiert), materialistisch und kapitalistisch orientiert sowie kulturell entwurzelt sei – auf eben diese historischen Schicksale zurückgeführt. Mit der Klassikerlektüre-Erziehung nehmen die drei Personengruppen, die im Zentrum der Forschungsarbeit stehen (Eltern, Lehrer, Studierhallen- und Akademien-Leitungspersonal), die Verantwortung für einen Ausgleich dieser negativ geprägten (bzw. erinnerten) Vergangenheit auf sich; dieser Ausgleich soll durch Bildungspraxis in der Gegenwart geschehen, die auf eine bessere Zukunft hinarbeitet. In den konkreten Lehr- und Lernalltag sollen also ideale bzw. visionäre Aspekte konkret implementiert werden.

In der Feldforschung zur vorliegenden Arbeit hat sich gezeigt, dass das Spannungsfeld zwischen idealen und konkreten örtlich lokalisierten Praktiken zentral in der Klassikerlektüre-Erziehung ist: Ideale auf abstrakter Ebene werden in räumlichen Strukturen gespiegelt;

positive Charakterbildung der Schülerinnen und Schüler findet in einer positiven (harmonischen) Klangumgebung statt. Stadtlärm soll möglichst vermieden werden; die Ruhe und die Naturklänge auf dem Land stellen für viele Involvierte das ideale Grundgerüst einer Lernumgebung dar. In städtischen Studierhallen wird durch räumliche Isolation und visuelle Einfachheit versucht, Ruhe zu erzeugen; für Einrichtungen im ländlichen Bereich ist die natürliche Umgebung Teil ihrer idealen Lernumgebung. Die Lernenden sind durch nichts abgelenkt und können sich voll dem Klassikerstudium widmen. Für zusätzliche Positivität und Harmonie im täglichen Einfluss werden in den meisten Studierhallen und Akademien Lesungen der Klassiker und klassische (chinesische und westliche) Musik abgespielt – oft noch zusätzlich zur Geräuschatmosphäre durch die gemeinsame Klassikerrezitation im Klassenzimmer. Die zu Grunde liegende Überzeugung ist, dass eine Persönlichkeit an die Perfektion des Edlen herankommt, wenn möglichst keine „verunreinigenden“ Einflüsse auf den Lernenden einwirken. Ist die Persönlichkeitsbildung abgeschlossen, wirkt die inhärente „Gutheit“ wie eine Art Schutzschild gegen Negativität, mit der man im alltäglichen Leben und außerhalb der Mauern von Studierhallen und Akademien später selbstverständlich konfrontiert sein wird.

Eltern und Lehrende nehmen in dieser Ausbildungsform neue Rollen ein – bzw. werden sich ihrer eigentlichen traditionellen Rollenpflichten wieder bewusst. Die Eltern sollen das Kind lieben und es großziehen; der Lehrer soll streng sein, Anleitung geben und sein Wissen teilen. In der Auseinandersetzung mit den Klassikern, mit traditioneller sozialer Hierarchie und sich selbst bzw. seiner eigenen Elternrolle definieren Eltern ihre Elternschaft in einer Gesellschaft sich wandelnder sozialer Werte neu. In den Studierhallen und Akademien kommt der Institution der Lehrkraft eine hohe Bedeutung zu; die Lehrperson ist diejenige, die die Worte der alten Meister in die Gegenwart trägt. In der Praxis jedoch sind die Lehrerinnen und Lehrer selten im pädagogischen Beruf ausgebildet; viele junger Mütter sind mit ihren Kindern zusammen in die Studierhalle gekommen und lesen nun im Unterrichtsalltag Texte in klassischen Chinesisch vor, die die Kinder nachlesen. Passion für die konfuzianische Tradition und Bereitschaft für den langen Arbeitsalltag von morgens früh bis spätnachmittags (in Tageseinrichtungen) und bis abends (in Internatsstudierhallen und -akademien) sind die wichtigsten Voraussetzungen für die Aufnahme dieser Tätigkeit. Strenge jedoch wird vielerorts hochgehalten; der Alltag ist entlang des Stundenplans voll durchgetaktet; in Internaten meist von 6:00 Uhr morgens bis 9:00 Uhr abends. Der Lehrende führt die Lernenden entlang von Regeln und Ritualen durch den Alltag. Dem Lehrer wird für den Unterricht durch Verbeugen gedankt; Konfuzius wird als erster Lehrer und Urmeister geehrt – vom Verbeugen vor seinem Bildnis bis hin zu täglichen Zeremonien.

Die Überschneidungen von Regeln und Ritualen zeigt über eine stellenweise Gratwanderung zwischen Bildung und Spiritualität, welche persönlichen Bedürfnisse mit der Etablierung von Studierhallen und Akademien neben der Altnativausbildung für die (eigenen) Kinder gestillt werden. Glaube und Spiritualität auf Volksebene sind weitläufig nach der Kulturrevolution (1966-1976) nicht erhalten; Ahnenglaube, Ahnenverehrung und Ahnentempel sind verschwunden. An Stelle der Ahnen und ihrer Tempel tritt für die erwachsenen Nutzer der Klassikerlektüre-Einrichtungen Konfuzius, der an Stelle aller Ahnen geehrt werden kann. Ein einfaches Leben führen wie die Meister der alten Zeit, einfache Nahrungsmittel wie Reis und Gemüse genügsam in kleinen Mengen zu sich nehmen wie die Bevölkerung im alten China, mit der Natur in Verbundenheit stehen wie vor der Zeit von elektronischer Unterhaltung und Massenmedien – die Vergangenheit hat einen starken Einfluss auf den Lebensstil an modernen Studierhallen und Akademien.

Während die meisten Interviews visionär geprägt sind, zeigen komplementär dazu Feldbeobachtungen und natürlich aufgekommene Gespräche mit einigen Beteiligten wie schwierig es ist, diese Visionen in die Realität zu bringen. Das höchste Ideal zu erreichen, nämlich ein moralisch aufrechter Edler (*junzi*) zu werden, der die chinesische Gesellschaft beeinflussen und verbessern kann, erfordert eine zeitintensive tägliche Rezitation konfuzianischer (und „westlicher“) Klassiker über viele Jahre hinweg – in Form einer immer gleichen Praxis, die in den immer selben Tagesrhythmen durchgeführt wird. Während viele Eltern von einer Moralerziehung entlang der Klassiker begeistert sind, entscheiden sich nur wenige für eine 20-jährige Klassikerausbildung der eigenen Kinder. Fortgeschrittene Klassikerausbildung findet z.B. an Wang Caiguis eigener Akademie in den Bergen von Taishun statt. Kinder, die dort aufgenommen werden, müssen profunde Vorkenntnisse in den Klassikern haben: sie müssen 300.000 Zeichen Klassiker (200.000 chinesische und 100.000 englische, wobei ungeklärt bleibt was ein „englisches Zeichen“ sein soll) auswendig gelernt haben, damit man sich nun selbstständig im Eigenstudium mittels Kommentaren und Wörterbüchern dem näheren Verständnis des jahrelang auswendig Gelernten widmen kann. Kritiker sehen in dem alleinigen Fokus auf die Aufnahme an Wangs Akademie eine Wiederholung des Hypes um die Hochschulaufnahmeprüfung – und die kritische Haltung der starken Prüfungsorientierung der staatlichen Bildung hat viele Aktivisten erst zur Alternative der Studierhalle bzw. Akademie geführt. Tatsächlich gibt es 2015-2016 noch keine Absolventen der Wang'schen Akademie; die Bildungsinitiative selbst hat erst in den 2000er Jahren an Dynamik gewonnen. Eine Beurteilung der Ergebnisse bzw. Auswirkungen von Klassikerlektüre-Erziehung ist zum heutigen Zeitpunkt schwer. Ersichtlich ist aber bereits, dass es in vielen Fällen oft unklar bleibt, welche Weiterentwicklungsmöglichkeiten



Absolventen bezüglich Hochschulbildung und / oder Berufsleben überhaupt offenstehen. Im Süden Chinas hat sich zudem unter den Klassikerlektüre-Aktivisten eine Gegenbewegung zu Wang Caiguis purem Klassikerlektüre-Ansatz (*laoshi daliang dujing*) entwickelt, die dem Rezitieren von mindestens acht Stunden pro Tag mittlerweile ablehnend gegenübersteht. Dies hat nicht nur mit der inhaltlichen Monokultur der Rezitation zu tun, sondern auch mit der konkreten Rezitationspraxis, die sich negativ auf die Gesundheit von Kindern niederschlägt; als Beispiele werden u.a. chronische Halsentzündungen durch stetiges lautes Lesen sowie ein Anhalten des Körperwachstums angegeben. Utopia sieht in der Praxis weniger ideal aus als in der Theorie.

Trotzdem lehrt die utopische Ausrichtung der Klassikerlektüre- Bewegung viel über den individuellen und gesellschaftlichen Umgang mit einschneidenden Momenten in der Vergangenheit, mit Veränderungen in der Gegenwart sowie über Konzeptualisierungen der Zukunft. Aktives Engagement bei der Umsetzung dieser Zukunftskonzepte führt dazu, dass Menschen neue Wege beschreiten, die unter Umständen auch über rechtlich nicht geklärte Grauzonen führen, wohl aber ihre eigene Beteiligung an (gesellschaftlichen) Angelegenheiten sichern, die für sie von Belang sind. Die Klassikerlektüre-Bewegung mag zwar klein sein, aber die chinesische Regierung hat bereits begonnen, in ihrer (Bildungs-)Politik auf die Initiativen der Aktivisten zu reagieren: im Jahr 2017 wurden die Einrichtungen erstmals mit der konkreten Bezeichnung „sishu“ in offiziellen Dokumenten erwähnt. Die Tendenz geht dahin, dass sich staatliche Schulen und lokale Behörden vermehrt den Schülerinnen und Schülern an Studierhallen und Akademien annehmen sollen. Unklar bleibt bis heute, welche konkreten Auswirkungen dies auf die Bildungspraxis hat, die in Studierhallen und Akademien stattfindet, und ob die rechtliche Lücke, die die Freiheit für die Konzipierung einer traditionellen Privatlehre gestattet hat, sich schließen wird.

Ähnlich der Wiederbelebung konfuzianischer Ethik in einem alternativen pädagogischen Ansatz, findet eine religiös inspirierte Moral über den pädagogischen Ansatz in Gülen-Schulen Eingang in die moderne Türkei. Klassische Erziehung und Moral, die beiden Grundpfeiler der Klassikerlektüre-Bewegung, spielen auch in der Gülen-Bewegung eine entscheidende Rolle. In der konkreten Bildungspraxis soll durch religiös geprägte Moralerziehung in Kombination mit Lehre in den Naturwissenschaften die Grundlage für eine bessere Gesellschaft in der „Goldenen Generation“ (Cıngıllıoğlu 2017: 63) kreiert werden. Auch im Falle der Gülen-Bildungsbewegung sind es historische Umstände, die Utopien und Dystopien hervorbringen und es erlauben, die heutige Welt zu verstehen und zu kritisieren. Zentral sind hier zunächst die pädagogische und philosophische Konzeption, nicht die diversen Dimensionen und Vereinnahmungen in der Praxis sowie mögliche politische

Dimensionen; das kann im Rahmen dieser Auseinandersetzung nicht geleistet werden. Der Fokus liegt hier vielmehr darauf, wie andernorts ähnliche Mechanismen und ggf. ähnliche Schicksale in der Vergangenheit Strukturen hervorgebracht haben, die sich stark idealen Zukunftsvisionen widmen.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION: REVIVAL OF CONFUCIAN EDUCATION

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China experienced a revival of Confucian tradition-inspired educational activities among civic actors in the 1990s. In 1994, the Taiwanese scholar and disciple of the new Confucian thinker Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909-1995)<sup>1</sup> Wang Caigui 王财贵 (born in 1949) started an initiative on reading Chinese classics under the slogan “My child, read with me” (*Xiaopengyou, gen wo du* 小朋友，跟我读; He 2009: 23). Parents in Taiwan started to read and recite the *Analecets* (*Lunyu* 论语), a Confucian classic containing dialogue situations between the Master Confucius and his disciples, with their children. In 1997, activities expanded to mainland China, and mobilized parents to read classics of the Confucian canon in Classical Chinese<sup>2</sup> with their children after class and on weekends (He 2009: 26f.; Cao 2012: 18). A common dynamic motivates Confucianism-enthusiasts or activists to work on the common agenda of Confucian revival for different personal and collective reasons. The seed for the classics reading movement (*dujing yundong* 读经运动) was planted, especially in big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Chengdu, and Xiamen (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 85; Li 2008: 152; He 2009: 23, 26f.). Dutournier and Ji (2009: 67) see a large potential of people’s mobilization within Confucianist activity; especially educative projects such as reading the classics involve a lot of actors and promise them a large personal gain (e.g. through self-cultivation).

“Classics reading education” (*dujing jiaoyu* 读经教育) is the pedagogical concept underlining the activities of reading the classics which is further specified according to different target groups as classics reading for children (*shao'er dujing* 少儿读经 or *ertong*

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<sup>1</sup> Mou was an important thinker in the second generation of modern New Confucianism in the mid-20th century. In 1958, he and his contemporaries Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909-1978), Zhang Junmai 张君勱 (1886-1969), and Xu Fuguan 徐复观 (1903-1982) composed the “Manifesto on the Reappraisal of Chinese Culture to Global Intellectuals: Our Joint Understanding of Chinese Scientific Research and the Future Prospects of Chinese Culture and the Culture of the World” (Wei Zhongguo wenhua jinggao shijie renshi xuanyuan: women dui Zhongguo xueshu yanjiu ji Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie wenhua qiantu zhi gongtong renshi 为中国文化敬告世界人士宣言: 我们对中国学术研究及中国文化与世界文化前途之共同认识). It emphasizes the importance of Chinese culture beyond China’s national borders. This is also Wang Caigui’s starting point; he aims at implementing this idea in an educational approach based on reading the classics (Makeham 2003b: 56; Makeham 2003a: 28-29. Xi 2011: 124; TS15001\*).

\*Note: Interviews carried out in the context of this study are referred to with the interviewee’s code. Details of the respective interviewee are listed in Table 14, annex p. 312.

<sup>2</sup> Classics reading educators usually use the term “wenyanwen” to refer to the language used in the Confucian classics which is accurately translated into “literary Chinese” and refers to written Chinese in formal and literary writing prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a narrow sense, “Classical Chinese” refers to ancient Chinese writing of Zhou 周 (c. 1050-221 BCE) and Han 汉 (206 BCE-220 CE) dynasties. Later written and formal Chinese would be referred to with the term “Literary Chinese”. In practice, the distinction of the two terms is not always this clear. Furthermore, Confucian classics are a collection of writings collected over a large period of time which makes the distinction of the language(s) even harder (see also Li 2009: 368). In the context of this study, the term “classical Chinese” (*wenyanwen* 文言文) is used for the language level; for a precise linguistic study, one might choose otherwise.

*dujing* 儿童读经) and for adults (*chengren dujing* 成人读经; Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 85; Wang 2009: 6-8, 12-14). “Reading” does not mean to sit down in silence, browse through a couple of books and engage in thinking about Confucian philosophy. Rather, reading activities on the classics consist in joint recitation with others, followed by self-study of the classic at hand with the goal of text memorization. Intensity of self-study and amount of text for memorization vary with age. The main goal of classics reading activities is the recitation of the classics by heart – the words of the sages of China’s past are stored within the reader’s mind, ready to unfold an effect on the reader and his/her actions for their whole life. The earlier the reader begins to read the classics, the better the anticipated personal outcome – a conviction which has led to the development of prenatal and early childhood classics reading education based on classical Chinese music and aesthetic appreciation of Chinese characters and paintings. Education in study halls and academies is offered to children starting at the age of three. A person well-versed in the Confucian classics, a morally upright gentleman<sup>3</sup> (*junzi* 君子), is the anticipated outcome of classics reading education (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 43, 86f.).

Educational facilities referred to as “study halls” (*xuetang* 学堂) and “academies” (*shuyuan* 书院) appear as “reactivated traditional structures” (Billioud/ Thoraval 2007: 15 Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 86) and are commonly summarized under the generic term of “traditional-style private school” (*sishu* 私塾). They emerged in the 2000s and are the places that host classics reading education in a full-time teaching approach. Principles and thoughts of great masters, a modest lifestyle devoted to learning and cultivating a good character are in the foreground of study hall and academy education. Not only children but also parents and other interested parties are attracted by these facilities and the practice of reading and reciting Chinese classics – not only the *Analects* with which the project once started in Taiwan.

The terms “traditional-style private school” (*sishu*), “study hall” and “academy” are known from Chinese history: academies concentrated on preparations for the imperial examination; both private and governmental academies trained students and scholars in the Confucian classics. Institutional education was available for men only (Lee 2000: 12, note 11). Private education in traditional-style private schools covered basic teaching of reading, writing, and calculating. Study halls emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during educational reform and adoption of Western<sup>4</sup> learning. Even though these three terms hint to

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<sup>3</sup> “Gentleman” is an approximate translation of the term “junzi” which used to refer to aristocrats in ancient China. A “junzi” was a “superior man.” It was Confucius who taught that superiority should consist in living up to the ideal of humanity which could be achieved by a good education that was only available to aristocrats before Confucius. (Lee 2000: 17f).

<sup>4</sup> The term “Western” often refers to the imperial powers active in China at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Western learning, a Western school system, Western thought. People involved in classics reading education also

historical precedents, China's contemporary study halls and academies should not be regarded as their continuation (see Billioud 2010: 220).

Teaching material in study halls and academies also has a connection to China's past. The history of the Confucian canon starts in Zhou 周 dynasty (c. 1050-221 BCE, see Lee 2000: 17) when Confucian education was defined by the so-called "Six Arts" (*liuyi* 六艺): rites, music, archery, charioteering (chivalry), writing, and arithmetic (Lee 2000: 18).

Defined normatively, the six arts covered a broad range of knowledge. A systematic approach to knowledge, based on one's understanding of the nature and categorization of knowledge, and a balanced acquisition of the different branches of learning made a true human. This was quite a generalist definition of education. (Lee 2000: 19)

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, the "Six Arts" were re-coined as the "Six Classics" (*Liujing* 六经)<sup>5</sup>: the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 诗经), the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易经), the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚书 or *Shujing* 书经), the *Records of Rites* (*Liji* 礼记), and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), as well as the *Canon of Music* (*Yuejing* 乐经) which had been lost over time (Lee 2000: 21, 47). The remaining "Five Classics" (*Wujing* 五经) were defined as textual canon, and the mastery of this canon became the core of Confucian education. Under the Han emperor Wudi 武帝 (r. 179-157 BCE), the classics were chosen as core preparatory material for the imperial examinations and, thus, for civil service appointments (Lee 2000: 21, 47). The Song [宋] dynasty neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) compiled the "Four Books" (*Sishu* 四书): *The Analects* (*Lunyu* 论语), *the Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大学), *Centrality and Commonality* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), and *the Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子). Parts of the "Four Books", such as *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*, have been chapters in the *Book of Rites*, and have been outlined as works of special importance within the "Four Books." They also served as basis for the imperial examinations from 1313 until the examinations were abolished 1905 (Sellmann 2009: 872) and the traditional educational system ceased. With the revival of Confucian education, the "Four Books" and "Five Classics"<sup>6</sup> re-entered private classrooms. It is subject of scholarly dispute how Confucian

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use this term a lot but referring to the West in two major ways: (1) the term is used to mark the region in which culture based on Greek philosophy emerged; it is the region where they place the Bible, Shakespeare, Greek mathematics (geometry), Plato's and Aristotle's works. This refers to a broader European cultural region. However, (2) "the West" occasionally also refers to the United States, especially when capitalism, consumerism, and utilitarian (non-humanistic) education are addressed – in this usage, the term appears rather pejorative. The terms "West" and "Western" are frequently used in secondary literature and by interviewees; it is therefore also used in this study – even though quite broad and unspecific – but it is further specified when needed and/or possible.

<sup>5</sup> These classics are not considered as standard texts that contain the sum of all knowledge relevant within the Six Arts, but as standard texts that were chosen as a ground framework for more systemized learning (Lee 2000: 21, note 23).

<sup>6</sup> When talking about the Confucian canon, classics reading educators today commonly refer to the "Four Books" and "Five Classics" as mentioned in this short historical overview. If one would analyze the Chinese classics (or

classics (*jing* 经) became (or were declared) classics; however, the process must have been made top-down, supposedly enhanced by central state power (Lee 200: 204, note 96). In classics reading education today, it is Wang Caigui who did the largest effort in defining which works should be integrated into an educational agenda. Apart from the “Four Books” and “Five Classics” on the Chinese side, he also integrated “Western classics” such as the Bible and Shakespeare into a classical curriculum – to reveal the openness and tolerance towards other cultures as specified by second generation modern new Confucian scholars already. “Western classics” are books of undeniable value for Western culture; everybody would consider them to be valuable within Western tradition (Wang n.d. a: 26).

Confucian classics used to have their fix spot within the educational system in imperial China. Reading the classics in China today seems *out of place*; the examination system does not exist anymore, and today’s education is not centered on mastery of textual canons. In 1905, the Chinese imperial examinations had been abolished by the Ministry of Education as response to the perceived backwardness of Chinese education in comparison to the invading American and European imperialistic powers which took control of large areas on Chinese grounds (Bailey 2013: 400; Pepper 1996: 57f.). A return of classically infused education in China’s system of public education today stands out and has caused an academic debate on advantages and disadvantages of a possible return of traditional education (see chapters 1.3 and 1.4).

Scattered classics reading activities such as hobby reading groups or family leisure time programs have often been brought into a full-time educational program. This formation, however, did not happen without friction. The most famous case which gained a lot of media attention is the “Hall of Mencius’ Mother” (Mengmu Tang 孟母堂) which opened in 2005 in

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canonical works, *jing* 经) from a sinological point of view, however, one would encounter more titles which also changed over time depending on the prescribed material for imperial examinations in each dynasty. In Song dynasty, for example, the “Thirteen Classics” encompassed the *Book of Changes*, the *Book of Documents* (also referred to as *Book of History*), the *Book of Odes* (also referred to as *Book of Poetry*) all three classics on rites (the *Records of Rites* (*Liji* 礼记), the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周礼), and the *Book of Rites* (or *Book of Etiquettes and Rites*, *Yili* 仪礼), the *Zuo Commentary* (*Zuo Zhuan* 左传) and the *Gongyang Commentary* (*Gongyang Zhuan* 公羊传) on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the *Analects*, the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝经), the *Erya* 尔雅 (China’s oldest surviving dictionary or encyclopedia with unclear authorship) and *Mencius* (Lee 200: 204, note 96). Neo-Confucian scholar Cheng Duanli 程端礼 (1271-1345) held the view that a learner at the age of 15 should be well-versed in the “Four Books” and the “Nine Classics”, the latter being the *Book of Changes*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Book of Odes*, the three rites classics (see above), and three commentaries on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Zuo Commentary*, *Gongyang Commentary*, and *Guliang Commentary* *Guliang Zhuan* 穀梁传; Lee 2000: 386). Learning commentaries written by great scholars who already studied the great masters before oneself as a student would approach the matter with one’s own thought was very important in Chinese education. Apart from Wang Caigui’s own academy, however, commentary tradition barely finds space in today’s classics reading education. Furthermore, this study aims at analyzing people’s interaction with the chosen classics rather than the text corpus at the basis of classics reading education. It is worthwhile, though, to be aware of the complex history of the Confucian canon which fades into the background of today’s classics reading education.

Shanghai (Sheng 2013: 346). Children joining a full-time study hall either leave the system of public education or do not even enter it in the first place. Normally, they do not have a school registration (*xueji* 学籍) which is provided by governmentally acknowledged (public) schools and needed for the high school entrance examination (*zhongkao* 中考) after six years of elementary schooling and the university examination (*gaokao* 高考) after another six years of secondary school education. A regular educational path for children in full-time classics reading facilities is impossible; however, this is also not the goal of classics reading education. Educational practice is rather isolated from formal public schooling in China. Given that there are nine years of compulsory education in China, facilities like Mengmu Tang had and have conflicts with local authorities because their legal status is (still) unclear. They are discussed in the context of private people-run schools (*minban xuexiao* 民办学校) and homeschooling (*zai jia shangxue* 在家上学; see chapter 1.3), but none of the existing categories of educational facilities really apply to contemporary classics reading facilities. If this meant that children were dropping out of school is a huge topic which is discussed in the context of infringement of compulsory education; if the parents neglect their responsibilities towards their school-aged children is still subject of diverse interpretations of existing laws and possible readings of the situation of learning in a study hall or academy (Tan 2011: 28; Sun 2014: 238; Sheng 2013: 347-349; see chapter 1.3).

In spite of all controversies around classics reading education and the complicated legal status of the teaching facilities, the main drivers – parents and private educators, teachers and headmasters (referred to as “head of the hall,” *tangzhu* 堂主) – invest a lot of time, money and effort into the creation of environments for classical learning and the design of a teaching approach to cultivate children (male and female) into Confucian gentlemen. Endeavors to research and reflect on the past, to bring the educational past into the present, and to recreate environments in which pure Confucian – or Chinese – thought and language are promoted are very much motivated by present conditions of Chinese society and possible futurities after having gone through a purification process in revived Confucian education. Dissatisfactions with society and education, lack of orientation in personal life, and coping with historical and personal pasts drive a group of people to something that proved to be reliable for Chinese society before today: Confucius and Confucian education. Education based on reading the classics aims at creating a brighter, more humane, more Confucian, and maybe more Chinese China, built on efforts (of self-cultivation) by the people. While the revival of Confucian education is fired by these imaginaries, they are, at the same time, also dragged into the present within the educational process in study halls and academies – students, teachers and parents are actors in the present enactment of a future vision. The (scattered and somewhat



amphibious) movement of reading the classics and classics reading education is regarded as a grounded utopian movement (Price et al. 2016: 128) in this study, as outcome of various historically grounded conflicts and frictions which are counterbalanced by a utopian vision of a brighter future that is embodied in classics reading education. This theoretical lens helps to place classics reading education with its own characteristics and dynamics within the overarching trend of Confucian revival and to explain the existence of yet another facet of traditional revivalist activity.

Chinese culture is a literate culture; written words such as the Confucian canon are key elements in the exploitation of the inner workings of Chinese culture. A Sinologists' work can be very much centered on text, written records of history, and the textual tradition of certain important writings. An analysis of the revival of Confucian education in China today could be started from the scholar literati culture and tradition. However, research on theoretical or philosophical underpinnings and written documents – teaching material, books on educational approaches, and so forth – would neglect the *performance* of turning to Confucian education with its underlying hopes and dreams as well as the motivations and the expectations behind the *performance* of Confucian education. This study wants to shed light on people's interaction with the past, on people's motivations behind the engagement in classics reading education and their hopes for life after having gone through such an education. Classics reading education in contemporary study halls and academies is, therefore, approached ethnographically. This study is based on qualitative data accumulated with interviews and participant observation. Narrations of participants of the educative movement construct the world of reading the classics as they see it. "Thick description" (Auerbach/ Silverstein 2003: 142) from observation within the field allows for a critical examination of these narratives – this is crucial because interviewees tend to talk about colorful visions and large ideals for the future which they seek to approach with present practice that often looks different. For reasons of privacy protection, the names of participants and facilities are altered (see also chapter 2.1.3).

The utopian dimension of their educational project – the production of morally upright gentlemen (*junzi*) in the present with a method taken from the past for a better China in the future – calls for an analysis of the phenomenon with a strong historical basis which, at the same time, makes the sinological lens indispensable. Furthermore, the approach of grounded utopian movements is taken from research on social movements and subcultures in the aftermath of cultural occupation by foreign control or cultural oppression in North and South America (Price et.al. 2016). Utopia as category of analysis itself emerged in (historical) research on mechanisms of revitalizing native and traditional culture after periods of war and

oppression in different cultures (Gordin et al. 2010; see chapter 2). This necessarily involves a study on historical backgrounds – but the analysis of utopian thought does not reveal history itself but people’s coping mechanisms with certain developments in the past. Classics reading education attracts people who are passionate about Chinese culture, but also dissatisfied with general social conduct and public education – issues which are believed to root in China’s modern history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The common dynamic along classics reading educators towards a bright future appears as attempt to counterbalance the mistakes of the past.

## OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1.1 briefly examines study halls and academies as educational institutions in imperial China. Chapter 1.2 deals with the fate of Confucian or traditional education within the changing educational systems of 20<sup>th</sup> century China to show how ruptures in the educational system meant a break with tradition that simultaneously produced a longing for tradition. All three private educational facilities (*sishu*, study hall, and academy) play a role in 20<sup>th</sup> century Confucian revival already. Chapter 1.3 shows that study halls and academies in contemporary China first and foremost stand on insecure grounds. Legally located in a grey area, the construct of classics reading education is in limbo with public education, people-run schools (*minban xuexiao* 民办学校) and homeschooling. A categorization within the Confucian revival in China since the 1980s and 1990s in chapter 1.4 sheds light on the grassroots character of the movement and the importance of people’s initiative. Existing research on Confucian revival in China on political and academic level is quite encompassing; research on popular Confucianism shows that tradition has already entered people’s everyday life. Classics reading education as research topic is picked up from there the analysis tackles the process towards a Confucian utopia through reading the classics. Educators seek at social transformation through transforming (or: cultivating) the self; the starting points for such intentions are located in history and the goal of a better society lies within the future. With present action, classics reading educators bridge past and future. This study looks at the idealist thought and its (attempted) implementation in practice and sheds lights a new dimension on Confucian revival on the level of society.

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical approach of this study based on an overview of places and people involved in classics reading education. Semi-structured interviews as data collection method are reflected under consideration of the researcher’s role in the field, given that the researcher also functions as interpreter of the collected data (2.1.1). The process of field research, selection of research sites and regional differences reflected in these (2.1.2) is

followed by a general overview of the selected study halls and academies (2.1.3). Finally, the interviewees – parents, teachers and headmasters of the educational facilities – as main drivers in classics reading activities are introduced (2.1.4). Utopia as a theoretical lens emerges from the data analysis and, at the same time, supports the further abstraction of the categories that emerged from the data (2.2). Intertwining of ideal spatial creation and ideals of education as implemented in practice are the key to understand classics reading education practice. In context with entanglements of past, present and future dimensions, the way for considering classics reading education as grounded utopian movement is paved (2.2.1 and 2.2.2). Apart from the characteristics of the movement, utopian elements also lie within the theory that shapes classic reading pedagogy, lifestyle and ideals, i.e. in Wang Caigui's pedagogical concept itself (2.3).

The dynamics that drive people towards classics reading education are explored in chapter 3. Shortcomings of today's Chinese society are met with imaginaries of a new society based on a Confucian social and moral order (3.1). Disillusion over public education drives people to classics reading education either as better educational choice for their children or as work place that offers possibilities for personal development (3.2). Memories of China's distant past are taken as inspirations for a better future that balances the wrongs within China's close past and present (3.3). Networking in personal meetings and via social media fills the classics reading movement with constant vital energy; activists of different age groups join forces in diverse classics reading activities within and around the framework of classics reading education, such as reading camps and learning groups (3.4). The path towards a better future seems to be paved by a re-established Confucian morality and social order through reading the classics (3.5).

Locations and spatial designs of study halls and academies are in the focus of chapter 4. A good person is educated in a good environment. Both urban and natural sceneries are actively designed with features that resemble what is perceived as "natural" and beneficial for the learner (4.1). Apart from the characteristics of the physical premises in both tangible surface (such as wood material and nature paintings) and abstract quality (such as cultural connotation of nature paintings), study halls and academies as social space are quite unique. Classics reading education as full-time education grows from parental initiatives in people's homes; this raises issues of family, family education, and a family-like community in academies and study halls. Space for alternative education comes along with redefinitions of parenting and parents' roles (4.2) which is the basis for a Confucianist harmonious society (4.3).

Study halls and academies are dedicated to a modern Confucian self-cultivation that aims at the production of a morally upright person (*junzi*) under the guidance of the words of the sages of the past for a better coping with today (chapter 5). Reading the classics is embedded in a classroom equipped with a certain material structure and social (Confucian) hierarchy, especially concerning the position of the teacher (5.1). Implementation of rules and discipline are a major part of classics reading education that forms the personal character but also the physical body; body and mind need to be in balance so that the mind can absorb large amounts of the classics (5.2). Rules and rituals do not only structure classroom activity, but daily educational life in general, e.g. in terms of resting and hygiene, food, and (spiritual) Confucius ceremonies – a disciplined person of moral integrity is not only well-versed in reciting the classics but knows how to live according to them (5.3). Rules and rituals extend into an area that is concerned with spirituality (e.g. in form of ancestor worship) had been vibrant in people’s lives before the Cultural Revolution and is now made possible again in classics reading facilities (5.4). Cultivation of the individual through the classics enhances cultural empowerment that is believed to be extendable from the individual to society in general (5.5).

After having perused the details of the classics reading world, chapter 6 looks at it with a little distance to ponder the question what the strive towards utopia means in practice – and which compromises learners actually have to make when they (or their parents) make a commitment to classics reading education: among classics reading educators, there are followers of and opponents to Wang’s pure classics reading approach; opponents criticize negative effects and health issues which they relate to Wang’s strict teaching approach (6.1). Additionally, the question of possible engagement in the *actual* Chinese society (and not the imagined Confucian society that could be at the end of developments after many generations) in terms of a professional career often remains a question mark (6.2). Classics reading facilities have nominally entered official documents issued by the government in 2017 which raises the question if people’s engagement in education actually shows political success or if the government is on the way to reclaim its stakes in this field of private education to close the legal loophole which private classics reading educators have filled with life in the past two decades (6.3).

Chapter 7 goes beyond the borders of the People’s Republic of China and gives an outlook on the impact of classics reading education abroad. Preliminary research to this study in Germany shows that overseas Chinese parents in other countries are likewise interested in reading Chinese classics with their children. Reasons for their interest in Confucian culture differ from Chinese classics reading educators; the cultural connection of the children abroad

to the parent's birth country is in the foreground (7.1). Similar to the revival of classical Chinese (language and culture), Latin experiences a renaissance in the Italian Accademia Vivarium Novum (7.2.1). Accademia Vivarium Novum is a single case but it has connections with Wang Caigui. Italy and China meet based on their classical cultures which is the sort of cultural encounter that Wang Caigui wants to achieve on the long run. Like the revival of Confucian ethics within an alternative educational approach, morality inspired by Muslim religion finds its way into modern Turkey through the educational approach in Gülen schools (7.2.2).<sup>7</sup> Given that there is a movement behind the educational approach that stems from historical ruptures, the character of the Gülen movement shows certain similarities with the classics reading movement. Classical education and morality, the two main pillars of the classics reading movement, also play a crucial role in the Gülen movement. Scientific education and religiously inspired morality are believed to be the basis for a better society in the "Golden Generation" (Cingilloğlu 2017: 63). As Gordin et al. (2010: 13) state, historical conditions continue to throw up utopias and dystopias as ways to shape, understand, and critique our contemporary world." (Gordin et al. 2010: 13) GUM theory, deriving from studies of nativistic activities among North and South American natives, brought in extension over China and Turkey, shows similar (motivations for) utopias on different grounds.

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### 1.1. HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE I: ACADEMIES AND STUDY HALLS IN IMPERIAL CHINA

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Private education in China is a topic that reaches far back into early history. When tracing private educational institutions back into history, Han 汉 dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) is a good starting point: education experienced an institutional consolidation, especially at local levels (Lee 2000: 52). A central educational system run by the imperial court was established which reached into metropolitan areas as well as towns and villages in form of city schools (*zhouxue* 州学) and county school (*xianxue* 县学). Under Emperor Han Wudi 汉武帝 (156-87

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<sup>7</sup> In this study, the focus is on *educational* theory and practice of the Gülen movement. Possible political, subversive, or sectarian dimensions which are subject of controversies are not within the scope of this study. For example, the German news programme on SWR broadcasted a report on the question if Gülen schools were a democratic educational group or a dangerous sect. While the organization would stress tolerance and democratic dialogue, internal power structures are compared to organized crime, informants talk about secret parallel structures and infiltration of state structures in Turkey, and mothers talk about inappropriate behavior towards their daughters such as attempted enforcement of wearing a headscarf.

(SWR report "Report Mainz," June 12, 2018. Online: <https://www.swr.de/report/guelen-in-deutschland-demokratischer-bildungsverein-oder-gefaehrliche-sekte/text-des-beitrags-guelen-in-deutschland/-/id=233454/did=21828424/mpdid=21867520/nid=233454/sxj5b5/index.html>; last access: November 1, 2018). However, a detailed discussion of the diverse directions of the Gülen movement cannot be achieved within this study.

BCE), the imperial academy (*taixue* 太学) developed in the capital city of Chang'an 长安;<sup>8</sup> only after the establishment of the imperial academy, the educational system gained more attention and influence on society (Chen 2009a: 31-32). A curriculum based on the Confucian canon formed the core of the imperial academy and aimed at preparation for imperial examinations (Glöckner 2013: 193). While the imperial court took care of higher education, basic education remained in private hands of renown scholars or within kinship organization (Lee 2000: 15; 44; 53).

Imperial schools were restricted in contents and limited in the number of enrollable (adult) students. More capacities to train students were available in private education and conditions for student enrolment were more liberal (Chen 2009a: 188-190). Private education also offered a broader variety of subjects or focal points: there were private institutions focused on elementary teaching (*mengxue jiaoyu* 蒙学教育) such as reading, writing, basic rules for appropriate behavior, and everyday knowledge. On private level, there were also schools with a focal point in canon study education (*jingxue jiaoyu* 经学教育), often including instruction in the *Analects*, the *Classic of Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝经) and a few other classics, depending on the teacher's knowledge. In-depth classics instruction focused on specific classics (*zhuanjing jiaoyu* 专经教育) aimed at preparation of higher studies in the classics or preparation for the imperial examinations. This in-depth training was offered both in private and in imperial academies given that the market for this training was not small; the imperial examinations opened the career path into civil service. For this reason, education started to become an important issue among Han dynasty high-status families as a resource for long-lasting prosperity of the clan (Chen 2009a: 191-193).

After the fall of Han dynasty, the central power ceased which also affected state-run imperial educational institutions. Central educational institutions experienced another solidification in Sui 隋 (589-608) and Tang 唐 (608-910) dynasties; imperial examinations (*keju* 科举) which were held irregularly in Han dynasty already now started to take place regularly (Glöckner 2013: 194). Private education, however, remained intact and developed even further into a systemized structure with two main pillars of learning as the basis for further studies: (1) learning characters and words (*shizi* 识字) and reciting texts which the teacher reads out loud and (2) communal ethics (*lunli shehui* 伦理社会), encompassing philosophical concepts, memorization of short text passages, and writing short essays (Chen 2009b: 221-222, 393, 396, 407; Lee 2000: 57-59). Facilities of elementary education throughout China's imperial history were commonly referred to as "*sishu* 私塾" (traditional-style private school). They were not only located in metropolitan areas but were scattered

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<sup>8</sup> Today: part of the city Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

from big cities over counties into the smallest local settlements and offered basic cultural education for local children. School age was not particularly prescribed, but boys normally started at age seven or eight with elementary learning (Chen 2009b: 221).

The educational historian Chen Xuexun 陈学恂 (1913-1991) links the private character of the institution *sishu* to its origin as educational facility for small children affiliated to influential families and clans (*jiazu huo zongzu neibu de you'er jiaoyu jigou* 家庭或宗族内部的幼儿教育机构, Chen 2009d: 158) far back in Chinese educational history. In secondary literature, private educational institutions in imperial China which are often referred to as “*sishu*” in general – a usage taken over in this study – but bear different names when specific forms are described. *Sishus* were not only run by clans for their own (and relatives’) children, but could, for example, be funded by a village that offered (free) education for all children in the community. In Ming 明 (1368-1644) and Qing 清 (1644-1911) dynasties, the *sishu* system was in its best structure which can be divided into three main branches of private schooling:

- (1) The “*jiaoguan* 教馆” (instruction hall) or “*zuoguan* 坐馆” (sitting hall): influential families would hire a teacher to instruct their own children at home; children of friends and relatives were also welcome.
- (2) The “*men'guan* 门馆” (home school [at the tutor’s place]) or “*jiashu* 家塾” (home school): a teacher would open a place for teaching and learning either at his own place (commonly in the ancestral memorial hall of the house), in a local temple, or a place for rent, and teach local children basic knowledge.
- (3) The “*cunshu* 村塾” (alternative: “*cunxue* 村学”; village school) or “*zushu* 族塾” (alternative: “*zuxue* 族学”; clan education facility): a village community or a larger clan would jointly fund a facility for education and hire teachers to teach their children.

Dutournier and Wang (2018: 275) indicate that private education in imperial China only meant a “less official” education; boundaries between private and governmental education were blurry, and the government also invested in private or locally run schools given that they all aimed at the same educational goals. In Yuan 元 dynasty (1279-1368), the “county school” (*shexue* 社学) based on mixed funding emerged: the imperial court added funds to those of communities in small towns and villages to establish educational facilities for children in rural and remote areas. This type of jointly organized schools was later replaced by the “free private school” (*yixue* 义学), an institution for free elementary education that was jointly funded by the court, regional budgets (of the county, village, city, or community), and private donors. In Song 宋 dynasty (960-1279), these schools also existed but were mainly focused on the children of the sponsors; in Ming and Qing dynasties, children of poorer and socially

disadvantaged families could send their children to these schools for elementary education (Chen 2009d: 158-159). Teachers in these schools came from different social backgrounds, but most of them related to the imperial examination system. Lots of young men wished to improve the status of their families, participated in the exams and failed. A career in teaching and preparing the next generation for the exams was a second chance for them (Chen 2009b: 226).

From historical accounts, the term *sishu* appears as a general term for an educational landscape that had been shaped by private initiative. In an accurate conceptual history, however, French sinologist and anthropologist Guillaume Dutournier and Wang (2018: 274) argue that local privately run “neighborhood schools” in imperial China were only referred to as “shu 塾”. The term “sishu” emerged in the Republican Era (1912-1949) as term for traditional schools which remained as remnants of traditional Confucian education within many waves of educational reforms since the end of Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and, thus, bears a negative connotation. Among today’s classics reading educators, however, the term “sishu” subsumes traditional educational facilities bearing a positive connotation, having in mind the traditional private school landscape of imperial China which is also remembered in a positive light.

In Song dynasty, the educational landscape was enriched by neo-Confucian scholars such as Zhu Xi who furthered the establishment of private academies (*shuyuan* 书院) (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 21) which focused on instruction in the Confucian canon (Chen 2009c: 294). While the imperial academy *taixue* trained a limited number of imperial examination candidates for the exam that would decide their future career, private academies could do the same, but also served as platform for in-depth learning focusing on specific classics, for research, philosophical discussions, and scholarly exchange. Private teachers or literati scholars instructed young students; the variety of subjects, contemplation and own research was broad and organized in systematic learning – laying the basis for a system of science in Song China (Chen 2009c: 280, 286; Lee 2000: 85f.). The private sector contributed immensely to education in Song dynasty which provided private education with a special position and reputation (Chen 2009c: 280).

The system for recruiting only the best scholars and literates well-versed in the Confucian classics to administer the country remained in such a form until the civil examination was abolished in 1905. A new school system modelled after the American educational system and based on both Chinese and non-Chinese (Western) learning was established. Furthermore, a new central government institution, the Board of Education (*xuebu* 学部), was founded to supervise newly established primary and secondary schools as well as universities (Bailey



2013: 400). This transitional phase at the end of Qing dynasty produced the “study halls” (*xuetang* 学堂) as institutions for elementary teaching in a reformed educational system.<sup>9</sup> In 1907, 100 elementary schools (*xiao xuetang* 小学堂, lit. “small study halls”) opened in each metropolitan area to educate 5,000 students; each county got 40 schools for 2,000 students and each village one school for 40 students. Children started to go to school at age seven. Especially in rural areas, the *sishu* had been the core of education; change was met with protests. New study halls were maligned as “Western study halls” (*yang xuetang* 洋学堂) with “Western books” (*yangshu* 洋书).<sup>10</sup> New schedules that adopted semester breaks from the Anglo-American school system did not suit the local rhythms anymore: schools in the *sishu* system were usually closed during harvest season so that children could help their parents in the fields; the idea of summer vacations according to the new system influenced family’s work forces in harvest season. Some teachers established their own *sishu* next to the new study halls. In some regions, new study halls were even destroyed – 170 cases of destruction were reported only between 1904 and 1910. In 1910, the court therefore decreed to change and improve existing private schools, and teachers would occasionally and slowly accept opportunities for further training which facilitated the educational change (Chen 2009e: 133-136, 145-147, 151, 156, 164, 168-169). In 1964, one last *sishu* was discovered in Beijing. However, under Mao Zedong’s Communist rule, private education was illegal, and the school promptly disappeared (Qin 2007: 11). The last institution in the character of a *sishu* was erased from China’s educational landscape.

Academies (*shuyuan*), flourishing in Song dynasty under neo-Confucian scholars and ceasing at the end of imperial history, saw a reactivation in the 1920s and 1930s within the emerge of the modern new Confucianism, a school of thought that brought Confucianism into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a time when Western culture and science was praised for superiority and Chinese tradition was viewed with suspicion, Confucian tradition was brought up to show that China also had to offer a valuable cultural legacy (Liu 2007: 74). The academies in the 1920s and 30s had been established to preserve traditional teaching (of Confucian classics) and to create a platform for exchange of thought in traditional manner by scholars of modern new Confucianism. Ma Yifu 马一浮 (1883–1967), for example, founded the Fuxing Academy

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<sup>9</sup> The old curriculum based on the Confucian canon (especially the “Four Books” and the “Five Classics”) changed; “Western” subjects such as mathematics (*suanxue* 算学), geographical knowledge (*yudi* 舆地), history (*lishi* 历史), natural sciences (*like* 理科), and physical education (*ticao* 体操) were integrated and the proportion of the classics in schooling was highly reduced. Teachers received additional support in new teacher colleges (*shifan jiangxisuo* 师范讲习所) in which they acquired knowledge on these new subjects and on methods how to teach them (Jiang 2011: 12).

<sup>10</sup> The term “yang” literally means “oceans” and hints to foreign things beyond the ocean; it is used for reference to “Western” things bearing a negative connotation.

(Fuxing Shuyuan 复性书院) in Sichuan to teach young university students Chinese classics. Although contemporary academies of classics reading education also seek to preserve tradition in a certain way, Confucian activists are actors different from scholars; they aim at popular dialogue with Chinese tradition while new Confucian scholars did their efforts on academic levels (Billioud / Thoraval 2007: 7; Chen 2012: 69).

The terms for all three educational facilities – *sishu* (traditional-style private schools), *xuetang* (study halls) and *shuyuan* (academies) – (re-) emerged in turbulent times within educational reforms and large influence by foreign systems and contents of education. The three terms that are used to label the new places of classical learning in China today share a common history of turmoil; all three terms came up in the late imperial or early Republican era, at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, within times of change. Starting in the 2000s, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they appear again in the context of changes. Appearing under the label of old educational institutions, the new educational facilities for reading the classics elude to a tradition of which they are, however, not a linear continuation. Historian Eric Hobsbawm (1983: 2, 4-5) makes the case that certain traditions are constructed, if not even invented, as response to needs arising from changes in the present. In a novel situation, creations referring to the past can work as elements of stability – these creations are different from customs. “New” traditions arise when the “old” traditions might have proven to be not acceptable, not suitable, not usable for a new situation. “Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented.” (Hobsbawm 1983: 8) Creating new traditions is a deliberate choice to refrain from the old ones. Communities that identify with these new creations find themselves bound together by jointly using them (Hobsbawm 1983: 12). Classics reading education facilities, referring to a stable and bright past, appear as a new construction at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and are the centers of a small diasporic community who re-evaluate the meaning of Confucian tradition for their lives. Interaction with the historical past is, to a large extent, certainly not only basis for rediscovering this tradition, but also for (re-) building parts of it.

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## 1.2. HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE II: CHANGING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS IN 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY CHINA

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After the fall of Qing dynasty in 1911, China’s political system remained fragile (in the sense of subject to many changes) until the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 by Mao Zedong. In 1911, Sun Yat-sen 孙中山 (1866-1925), co-founder of the Nationalist Party of China Guomindang (GMD), was installed as provisional President of a Republic of China

which ceded soon. 1912 to 1916 was Yuan Shikai's 袁世凯 (1859-1916) presidency; the former military and government official of the Qing dynasty failed to install himself as a new emperor; the Republican government's central power crumbled and transferred to local warlords. The 1930s and 40s were scarred by civil wars emerging from the competitive struggles between the political parties of the Nationalist and the Communists which culminated into the Nationalists' flight to the island of Taiwan and the foundation of the PR China on mainland China in 1949 (Halbeisen 2000: 136-137, 151-152). Parallel to the changes of the political scenery, the educational system underwent constant alternations – there was so much euphoria for educational reforms that between 1900 and 1937 that no single generation graduated from secondary school in the same system in which they started primary school (Glöckner 2013: 196).

As described in the previous section, elementary teaching at the end of Qing dynasty underwent a reformation towards Western subjects and teaching material inspired by Anglo-American education. While the imperial examination system had been abolished in 1905 already, the young Republic's educational system was reformed towards modernity and progressivism from 1912 onwards. Chinese classics were removed from the curriculum and substituted by “Western” subjects (e.g. natural sciences and subjects that required experimentation and laboratory work). In 1922, a restructuring of the whole educational system according to the American model took place: six years of primary education with a basic junior level of four years and a senior level of two years. General secondary education with a three-year junior and a three-year senior level was based on a differentiated American curriculum including special subjects in industrial, commercial, agricultural areas from which students could choose from at the senior level. Some vocational secondary schools in differentiation from normal secondary schools as according to the Japanese educational system were also part of the reformed educational landscape (Pepper 1996: 61-62).

Foreign influence also brought along intellectual re-orientations among Chinese intellectuals. Science and democracy were two core concepts discussed under the new intellectuals of the 1910s and 1920s; modern philosophies and literature from “the West” were widely received (Seitz 2000: 143). New ideas and nationalistic sentiments among young intellectuals at the time found their manifestation in newly published magazines such as the *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian* 新青年), founded by Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 in 1915. Intellectuals such as Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962) sharply attacked the Confucian tradition and claimed that it would weaken the Chinese people, giving them a lesson in passive devotion only (Seitz 2000: 142). With slogans like “down with the Confucius store” (*da dao kongjiadian* 打倒孔家店; Liu 2008: 187), especially the youth turned against Confucian tradition; the culture of the

Chinese past was blamed for all shortcomings and turned into the scapegoat for all evil that happened to China at the turn to the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Liu 2007: 74).

The time between 1915 and 1919 in which the path to an intellectual reorientation and transformation in intellectual history was paved is also defined as period of a “New Culture Movement” (Xin Wenhua Yundong 新文化运动). However, the hope for a new culture under adoption of Western thought was soon disappointed by the Western imperial powers’ constant holds on Chinese territory: on May 4, 1919, the so-called “May Fourth Incident” culminated in student protests against the Paris Agreement in the streets of Beijing; the agreement determined the cession of the German leased territory Jiaozhou 胶州 in Shandong province to Japan. The historians Rahav (2015: 159) and Chow (1960: 6) count the time span of the “New Culture Movement” as preluding period of the May Fourth Movement (Wusi Yundong 五四运动).<sup>11</sup> The whole Era of May Fourth, if the periods of intellectual reorientations and disappointments are counted in, was a time in which Chinese intellectuals seriously struggled with their own tradition and the adoption of new ideas from foreign and former imperialistic powers. This was one of the larger caesuras with traditional culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it was not long until the next one happened.

The victory of the Communist Party and the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 brought another set of foreign, i.e. Soviet, influences on China. Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893-1976) implemented a Communist system in China that came with a central hierarchy of party, government, and military and a social restructuring (Seitz 2000: 148), the implementation of Communist ideology, land reform and nationalization of land (Seitz 2000: 152-154); the face of China changed once again under foreign influence, even though the impetus came from the inside. Soviet consultants supported the Chinese government in establishing a socialist school system. Teaching content and material oriented towards technical subjects (e.g. engineering and mining) was imported from the Soviet Union and translated into Chinese. “Red and expert” was the credo from 1958 onwards; schooling and working were combined: students would partly work in their school’s factory or garden or only go to school only part time to support China’s workforce (Glöckner 2013: 198). Even

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<sup>11</sup> This term generally and in its broadest meaning covers intellectual, political, and cultural changes in the time span between 1915 and 1923/24/25 that largely involved protests on the side of young Chinese intellectuals (Rahav 2015: 13; Chow 1960: 4–6). The so-called “May Fourth Incident” either marks the high point of the movement or the starting point of following upheavals, depending on the point of view. A concise definition of the time span of the movement is, considering its complexity, not easy and maybe even impossible. Rahav (2015: 159) suggests 1923 as end but points out that the political scenery that was occupied by May Fourth organizations and groups only changed around 1924 when political parties gained more importance in politics (Rahav 2015: 125). Chow (1960: 5) states that a few authors take the “May Thirtieth Incident” as endpoint when workers and students protested upon the killing of a Chinese worker in a Japanese factory. Taking into consideration the numerous possibilities of timing in this case, Chow (1960: 6) suggests a variable periodization.

though traditional schools had school breaks in harvest periods that enabled students to work when needed, this mode of learning was completely different from the traditional scholar literati-oriented learning of the classics. The focus shifted from gaining knowledge and wisdom through books to learning skills for being a productive worker.

With the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), educational culture and Confucian tradition experienced one of the largest waves of destruction in Chinese modern history. On August 18, 1966, the Central Committee of the CCP defined two tasks for the *Magna Charta* of the revolutionaries: (1) to eliminate political cadres who chose the direction of capitalism and to turn against bourgeois academic authorities, and (2) to destroy the “four relicts” (*si jiu* 四旧) of Chinese society, which are “old thinking,” “old culture,” “old customs,” and “old habits” (Seitz 2000: 188). Professors and teachers were violently attacked; old furniture, books, pictures, and porcelain were burnt; temples and other cultural sites were destroyed (Seitz 2000: 188), leaving China with a cultural “tabula rasa” (Seitz 2000: 145). Educational qualification was an aspect that receded into the background; political and ideological attitude counted more. School curricula were reduced to Mao’s “Red Book”, the so-called “Mao Bible”, containing his core thoughts, and facilities for higher education (universities) were shut down. Educational opportunities were cut down to a minimum – due to the loss of chance for a good education, the generation of the Cultural Revolution is called the “lost generation” (Glöckner 2013: 199).

Rebooting the educational system was possible during the Reform and Opening program starting in 1978 with the “Four Modernizations” – goals to strengthen (1) agriculture, (2) industry, (3) national defense as well as (4) science and technology in China. Commissions to draw up new school curricula and teaching materials were assembled; education got a new structure that was oriented towards and Anglo-American system again: six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary (*chuzhong* 初中) and three years of senior secondary education (*gaozhong* 高中, Glöckner 2013: 199), rounded off with the university entrance examinations (*gaokao* 高考) which were successfully implemented in 1977. This structure is the basis for China’s education until today. In addition to regular public schools, the government has introduced “key schools” (*zhongdian xuexiao* 重点学校) with overall better equipment and teaching personnel to educate the (well-financed) elite (Glöckner 2013: 200).

Existing inequalities in access to education were addressed by a law on compulsory education: in 1985, the State Education Commission was established with the purpose to manage educational matters, and in 1986, this Commission issued a law on nine years of compulsory education free of charge regardless of children’s gender, social background, or

ethnicity (see Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China, articles 2 and 4;<sup>12</sup> Glöckner 2013: 200-201; Lin 1999: 39-40). In 1998, the Ministry of Education (*jiaoyubu* 教育部) substituted the former State Education Commission, subsuming regional offices of education on provincial, municipal and district level under their central umbrella. Financial responsibilities and control over education is distributed from the central organ to the regional branch offices on different administrative levels.<sup>13</sup> Universities remain directly under control of the Ministry of Education (Glöckner 2013: 200).

Although restructuring the institutions, China failed in updating the school curricula. In the 1990s, schools still followed the curriculum that had been designed by the State Education Commission shortly after the Cultural Revolution (Lin 1999: 40). Criticism on the unnecessarily high number of subjects and the tough schedules for children (31 hours of school for elementary 1<sup>st</sup> grade and 36 hours for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 37 hours for seniors) was raised in the 1990s (Lin 1999: 40-41); the government responded with “quality education” (*suzhi jiaoyu* 素质教育) which is the key concept in Chinese education since 1999. The idea of quality education is that the focus should be on the overall educational process, not only on its outcomes; it should change the focus from exams and homework to the learning process and from the teacher to the student as a learner (Cui / Zhu 2014: 2). In 2001, the Ministry of Education issued the *Compendium for Curriculum Reform of Basic Education* (trial edition). Basically, planned changes in curriculum and teaching required that (1) classroom activities focused more on knowledge acquisition (students learn how to learn) and the development of a positive learning attitude; (2) the curriculum was more balanced, i.e. single subjects were taught in correlation with each other and not as isolated stand-alone themes; (3) essential knowledge and life-long learning were taught and outdated contents was dismissed from the curriculum; (4) passive and rote-learning were substituted by active, analytical and problem-solving learning that generated new knowledge and involves student cooperation; (5) an evaluation of curriculum, teacher (teaching process) and students (learning process and outcome) were added to the schools' agendas to keep the students' growth and teachers' development in everybody's minds; and (6) it was required that schools had more liberty to design classes according to local needs; central curriculum control was shifted to local authorities (Cui / Zhu 2014: 2-3; Feng 2006: 132-133).

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<sup>12</sup> The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China: Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China. Online: [http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Law/2007-12/12/content\\_1383936.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Law/2007-12/12/content_1383936.htm) (last access: November 23, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Schools were either related to the provincial bureau or the level below (prefectural or county level); kindergartens are task of township offices or even a level below (village level).

Despite many changes and reforms, China's public education system is still subject of lots of criticism,<sup>14</sup> especially among classics reading participants. Many people feel that their children are not properly prepared for life in public schools; they call for reforms and changes into a more humane and student-oriented education. For Chinese learners, such an education would need to be based on Chinese educational (i.e. Confucian) tradition.

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### 1.3. STATE OF THE ART I: UNCLEAR STATUS OF TODAY'S STUDY HALLS AND ACADEMIES

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Research on study halls and academies in China's contemporary educational landscape is scarce, even though articles in academic journals and newspapers are available in large numbers. Discourse in academic or professional journals reveals that study halls and academies are a hot topic in different aspects – concerning their legal status, their teaching material and methods, their humanistic ideals, and their (possible) position in the present. Discussions on study halls and academies in the present often refer to their alluded ties to the past. Evaluations of and opinions on classics reading education, study halls and academies today are, therefore, often based on assumed relations to historical precedents; they are seen in a negative light as relicts of the past. When discussed as alternative to public education, classics reading education is placed on the same level with education in China's system. This is an uneven comparison which does not do justice to classics reading education in its characteristics of an amphibious movement. Only very few journalists report data from the field collected during a personal visit. In most articles, already existing knowledge on either traditional or today's education is directly drawn together with the phenomenon of a newly emerged educational approach based on reading Confucian classics. Such articles reflect the questions and problems which arise with the emerge of study halls and academies quite well, but the character of classics reading education and a deeper insight into people's motivations and aims remains covered. Nonetheless, such articles are a perfect entry into the scenery and the tackle important issues which are also addressed in this study.

Contemporary study halls and academies are part of China's private education, a sector which gained in importance in the 1980s. Under the Communist regime of Mao Zedong, private education was not tolerated. Within the Reform and Opening Era of the 1980s, private education re-emerged alongside economic growth. Information on the first private schools in the 1980s is scarce since they did not have to officially register as schools, but hypotheses are

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<sup>14</sup> Considering the many changes of the educational system, one might also be inclined to say that China's current educational system is under criticism because it already witnessed *too many* changes which diffused its original essence.

that teaching took place at the teachers' homes (similar to the form of *jiashu* 家塾) or in rooms of public schools that were not in use. Public schools in financial distress would occasionally rent out their classrooms for some extra cash. This happened quite often because many public schools proved to be insufficient to provide students with ideology, values and skills for their future roles in (modern) society. In 1978, many public schools were closed, being unsuitable for proper education. Thus, between 1976 and 1980, the number of public primary schools decreased from 1,044,000 to 917,000 and of secondary schools from 192,162 to 118,377 nationwide. At the same time, economic growth due to China's liberal market economy improved people's living standards; a newly emerging middle class and newly rich people demanded better education and had also the necessary finances to invest in private education (Kwong 1997: 244-245, 248).

In the 1990s, private schools got more prominent as quite profitable enterprises. Organizers invested largely in building classrooms, student dormitories and school equipment; private schools were, thus much better situated than public schools (Kwong 1997: 251).<sup>15</sup> Private schools started to run under the label "people-run school"<sup>16</sup> (*minban xuexiao* 民办学校). Governmental tolerance towards the first people-run schools was passive in the beginning and integration into policy happened step by step. One interpretation is that the PRC Constitution issued in 1982 was the first official document to acknowledge them implicitly by stating governmental acceptance of "collective economic organizations, state enterprises and institutions, and other sectors of society to establish educational institutions of various types in accordance with the law" (Ding 2008: 659-660). Another view is that the government acknowledged the existence of such schools in their educative directive in 1985 and subsequently issued the first legal regulations for the new form of education in 1987 in "Some

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<sup>15</sup> Numbers of private schools were, however, still very vague and fluctuated between 2,000 and 60,000 according to different media reports (Kwong 1997: 256).

<sup>16</sup> There are different accounts on the history of the term "minban":

(1) It can be traced back as far as the Second Civil War (1927-37) as label for people-sponsored or people-organized education funded by a community (Ding 2008: 659). After the foundation of the PR China, such schools continued to flourish because Mao hoped to be able to provide universal education for everybody in these schools.

(2) Another view is that the concept emerged in the 1950s: "society run" or "people-run" schools were (financially) supported by state enterprises or governmental offices and established to respond to the needs of communities. Some schools operated according to the state curriculum, others were oriented towards agriculture or technical skills and graduates were likely to start working where they went to school (Kwong 1997: 244). Julia Kwong, sociologist at the University of Manitoba, sees a criticism towards today's people-run schools by reusing a label from the 50s: "Calling these 'people-run schools' - the same name as their considerably different predecessors from the 1950s and 1960s - in the officially controlled media reflects government discomfort with these schools' character." (Kwong 1997: 245)

*Minban* schools are also referred to as "non-state" or "non-governmental" school in literature; here, the term "people-run" schools is used.



Temporary Regulations for Schools Operated by Society's Force"<sup>17</sup> (*guanyu shehui liliang banxue de ruogan zanxing guiding* 关于社会力量办学的若干暂行规定). In 1993, the central government took the position of being willing to actively support the development of such schools (Kwong 1997: 254). However, the first legal document actively using the term "minban" was issued in 2002:

It was then that the first central law specific to *minban* education - the Law on Promoting *Minban* Education (*Minban jiaoyu cujinfa* 民办教育促进法 (*Minban Education Law*)) - was published. One year later, on 1 April, the Enforcement Regulations of the Law on Promoting *Minban* Education (*Minban jiaoyu cujin fa shishi tiaoli* 民办教育促进法实施条例 (*Enforcement Regulations*)) also came into effect.<sup>[18]</sup> These two documents set the official boundaries within which *minban* education is supposed to operate. (Ding 2008: 660)

People's initiatives preceded the officially granted legal framework for their work in education. Since the 2000s, private education is, thus, officially supported.

Discussions on the legal status of study halls and academies involve the concept of people-run schools. The most famous case of legal disputes is the 'Hall of Mencius' Mother' (Mengmutang 孟母堂) in Shanghai which had afflictions with the law several times: in September 2005, 12 children (ages four to 12) started to learn Confucian classics in the full-time study hall. The headmaster did not have any permission for running a (people-run or private) school; the narrow curriculum focused on the classics only did not meet with the requirements for proper basic education (Sheng 2013: 3–4; Zhang / Jiang 2006: 6; Wu 2013: 5). In 2006, the study hall was declared *illegal* and had to close (Sun 2014: 238).<sup>19</sup> According to the Shanghai Ministry of education, the school violated Chinese law in the following

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<sup>17</sup> Kwong's (1997: 254) translation: "Temporary Regulations on the Running of Society-Run Schools."

<sup>18</sup> According to the 2013 version of the People-run Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China (*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Minban Jiaoyu Cujinfa* 中华人民共和国民办教育促进法), people-run schools have the same legal status as public schools have while the government guarantees autonomy in running the school (art. 5). Furthermore, the authorities need to ensure that educational practice meets with the requirements of education in the respective region and keeps the standards of public schools as well as that it is in accordance with the Education Law and further related legal guidelines (art. 10). An application for a *minban* school at the respective office (depends on the school level, see art. 11) takes three steps: applicants first have to hand in an exposé of their school concept, containing information on the founder, purposes of the school, its scale, level, form, conditions, management system, financing and management and documents on property ownership, sources of assets, information on donations and the like (art. 12). Within 30 days after submission, the approval organ has to accept or decline the plan (art. 13). If approved, the applicant gets an official letter of ratification for the establishment preparations with which a formal registration of the school is possible. In this step, the founder furthermore has to submit a report on the proceeding of the establishment preparations; articles of incorporation of the school, the name of the members in the first school council, the board of directors and other decision-making bodies; a valid certification documents of the school assets; and evidential qualification documents of the president, the teachers and the accountants (art. 14; The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China: People-run Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China (*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Minban Jiaoyu Cujinfa* 中华人民共和国民办教育促进法). Online: [http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/cwhhy/12jcw/2013-10/22/content\\_1872450.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/cwhhy/12jcw/2013-10/22/content_1872450.htm) (last access: November 2, 2018)).

<sup>19</sup> Journalist Hu Xiying (2009: 36) reports that in 2009, they tried to re-open, but only after one day they had to close again. In 2011, they opened again (Xiang 2012: 50).

aspects: violating the regulations for permission to run an educational institution; violating articles 2, 4 and 35 of the Law of Compulsory Education; and violating the regulation for receiving school fees – a right only granted to formally registered school (Sheng 2013: 3–4). Violation of the Law of Compulsory education is marked as a fault on the parents' side because they had the obligation to send their children to a school when they are in school age; violating the regulations for permission to run an educational facility is marked as the school's fault (Wu / Li 2013: 176–177).

It is argued by critics that the study hall should have registered as a private school because they received funds from donors – the 'Hall of Mencius' Mother' is primarily financed by the Shaonan Culture Classics Reading Education Promotion Center (Shaonan Wenhua Dujing Jiaoyu Tuiguang Zhongxin 绍南文化读经教育推广中心) – and enrolled many children from all over the country. For such a large educational business, a registration as a people-run school would be in order (Zhang / Jiang 2006: 6–8). However, given that the Ministry of Education rates the study hall's curriculum as too narrow, this would have to fail. Self-chosen and self-produced teaching materials lacked the minimum of educative requirements; the study hall did not have a supervising committee for teaching methods and materials – no governmentally approved standards could be guaranteed (Zhang / Jiang 2006: 9).

Another argumentation is that study halls and academy education as private education resemble the form of homeschooling (*zaijia shangxue* 在家上学, Wu 2013: 5). Educators in the 'Hall of Mencius' Mother', facing accusations of multiple legal transgressions, tried to console local authorities by referring to their educational facility as a home school and their learning community as family-like group; only children of friends and family would live and learn together in their facility (Sheng 2013: 3f.). Indeed, contemporary classics reading education often starts in people's homes and study halls frequently start as private educational initiative for local children. Homeschooling as such is a scattered phenomenon in China which is highly influenced by homeschooling practice in the US<sup>20</sup> and Europe (Zhu / Zhang 2009: 46f.; Tan 2011: 28f.; Zhang / Jiang 2006: 6f.). It is criticized for possible social isolation at home and a lack in the teaching force; one would need wise parents with much

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<sup>20</sup> The report of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Research Institute traces homeschooling back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it emerged in the US as reaction of the middle class upon the increasing automatism and structuralism at state schools. Especially for religious parents who sought for an upbringing in accordance with religious and ethical ideals, education in state school seemed unsafe and rather oriented towards the demands of an industrialized and machine-centered labor market than towards their children's needs. Consequently, they kept their children at home and taught them by themselves (Yang 2013: 3).

Homeschooling is not yet researched a lot, but the 21 Century Education Research Institute reports that around 18,000 in China receive education at home (Zhao / Badzis 2014: 20).

knowledge to guarantee that the homeschooled child received an encompassing education – which was hard to be realized (Hu 2007: 3; Zhu / Zhang 2009: 46f.; Zhao / Badzis 2014: 19f.). The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Research Institute, a Chinese based education think tank, negates the homeschooling character of contemporary *sishu* education in their 2013 report on homeschooling in China; the various kinds of private schools, e.g. homey and small-scale study halls, belonged to another category of education (Yang 2013: 6) – which one, however, is not further specified.

Others try to solve the legal issues by integrating the educative form of study halls and academies into the terminology of existing laws. The Law on Compulsory Education required each school-aged child to go to school to be educated (*ruxue jiaoyu* 入学教育) in the sense of receiving formal education. Places for this education can, as acknowledged by the Law on Compulsory Education, be public schools as well so-called “other educational facilities” (*qita jiaoyu jigou* 其他教育机构), for example people-run schools. This meant that children did not necessarily have to go to *public* schools; “other” facilities were also acceptable by law. In this context, it is argued that study halls and academies could also be put under this category. Study halls and academies could be valid choices for parents to fulfil their obligation to enable their children to receive education (Wu / Li 2013: 178). The Non-State Education Promotion Law (*Minban jiaoyu cujinfa* 民办教育促进法) could therefore be regarded as a first legal basis for a way to administer study halls and academies and a first step towards integrating them into the system of private schools (Wu 2006: 216). The Chinese government and public (and governmentally acknowledged) schools are drawn into responsibility to solve such issues of formal classification.

Parents also have their responsibilities in education which is why authors claim that they should be better informed and supported in their parental rights. Since parents had the obligation to ensure their children’s education, they also had the right to make choices in education (*fumu jiaoyu xuanzequan* 父母教育选择权); they had the rights to choose form and place of education for their children. Authors even refer to the Declaration of Human Rights to support their arguments for parental rights:

Compulsory Education is the right of the learner’s parents on choosing education; this parental right on choosing education is not only a preferential ‘natural right’ but is also based on international law. The International Declaration of Human Rights clearly states that ‘parents have a preferential right of choice on the education that their children receive’. <sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> “义务教育是受教育者父母的一种教育选择权利，这种父母教育选择权不仅是优先性的‘自然权’，也有其国际法律依据。《世界人权宣言》明确规定，‘父母对其子女所受之教育，有优先选择权’。” (Wu / Li 2013: 177)

Study halls and academies as alternatives to public education emerge from people's initiatives, and people's interests are drawn into the focus of the discussion of study halls' and academies' position and legal status in China.

Apart from form and legal status of the newly established study halls and academies, tradition-inspired teaching practice is a topic in academic and public discourse. With reference to the May Fourth Movement in 1919, it is argued that the disadvantages of Chinese classics for educative purposes had already been proved, and its revival was not suitable for today's society (Xiao 2007: 77f.). Study halls and academies are criticized as "copy of the past" (*fugu* 复古), as unscientific, illegal, and as a result of backwardness in thought (Yu 2007: 1f.). Wang Caigui's method of memorizing large quantities of texts for memorization is often criticized as "stuffing the duck" method; such a way of learning would break with all better knowledge provided by modern pedagogy and psychology (Liu 2004: 19f.).<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, blind memorization of the Confucian canon led to blind acceptance of the power position of the Confucian classics and mythical stories; there would be no space for reflection, and skills of critical reflection would be most necessary in an age of global cultural exchange. Classics reading education would therefore nurture mental blindness, empty-headed followership, and people without citizen awareness (Li 2008: 152f.).

However, the ideas of learning in relation with reciting the classics also meet with favor. Chinese classics could, for example, play a crucial part in today's life-long moral education (Gu 2009: 119). The recitation of classics was the best method of learning a new language: repetition and imitation. Combined with the student-centered self-learning in study halls, such an approach could result in deep language skills – something that students in public schools today lacked because teaching was too teacher-centered (Li 2000: 11f.). Individuality in education is underlined by reference to historically grounded elementary teaching (*mengxue* 蒙学) which used to be tailored to the needs of child regarding choice, number and frequency of characters, length of sentences, and repetitions of characters in texts (Wang 2011: 28). Given that good language skills were the basis for conceptually grasping other subjects and for further individual development, one should not underestimate the value of basic education as based on good classical language (Liu / Liao 2011: 6). Education from China's past could therefore help to improve the unsatisfactory reality of Chinese education today. It is even argued that academies and study halls had better resources to focus on students' quality (*suzhi* 素质) because they had a humanistic foundation (*yi ren wei ben* 以人为本) which referred to

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<sup>22</sup> Wang Caigui responded to his critics that his method was more like "stuffing the cow": cows have huge stomachs and ruminate several times until the food is completely processed. Similarly, people needed time to digest the contents of the classics (see Liu 2004: 20).

language and moral instruction based on the Confucian classics. Public schools, on the contrary, would all operate with the same books, the same teaching methods, and would thus be limited in their educative mission (Xiao / Cheng 2011: 137). Parents, too, would show weaknesses in fulfilling their educational responsibilities by pushing their original parental responsibility for their child's education (including moral education) to public schools. The existence of study halls and academies with a humanistic outlook and a focus on moral instruction according to the contents of Confucian classics would resemble how huge the neglect of these areas must be in today's child upbringing (Lu 2006: 56). The new facilities are regarded as result of pluralistic education which is welcome; however contents and environment of learning simultaneously appear as too narrow to some external observers (Wu 2013: 6).

In the context of formal and private schooling, study halls and academies are a source for confusion since neither educational authorities nor parents or involved educators are sure about the legal framework in which they should act in. Legal texts on compulsory education and privately-run schools are drawn to justify actions as needed, but since there are no standards, dispute remains. In spite of this, parents' and private educators' passion for Chinese tradition and Confucian education keeps them on track of classics reading education.

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#### 1.4. STATE OF THE ART II: CHINA'S CONFUCIAN REVIVAL AND TODAY'S CLASSICS READING EDUCATION

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Classics reading education appears as topic in scholarly research on the Confucian revival in different strata of Chinese society. French sinologist and anthropologist Guillaume Dutournier and Chinese sociologist Ji Zhe 汲喆 (2009: 67f.) distinguish between academic (*xueshu* 学术), political (*guanfang* 官方) and popular (*minjian* 民间) ambitions within the Confucian revival.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the American sinologist Anthony DeBlasi (2015: 67-70) detects the revival of Confucian values in academic discourse, expressions of state power, popular culture and people's interest. Modern new Confucian thought or philosophy as well as the academic subject of "National Studies" (*guoxue* 国学) are anchored on the scholarly level. On the political level, narratives related to a glorious past and references to the greatness of

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<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, new Confucian scholar Liu Shuxian, a representative of the academic level of this threefold dimension, offers a similar distinction in his study on Confucian thought and its revival: according to his "method of a threefold division" (*san fen fa* 三分法), strings of Confucian thought can be split into spiritual Confucianism (*jingshen de Rujia* 精神的儒家) which mainly covers philosophical endeavors, politicized Confucianism (*zhengzhihua de Rujia* 政治化的儒家) which refers to the political tradition since Han dynasty when Confucianism became state ideology, and popular Confucianism (*minjian de Rujia* 民間的儒家) which was mainly concerned with daily faith and habitus, family values, education and lifestyle (Xi 2011: 196).

Chinese culture govern political discourse. “National Studies” is often used as synonym for classics reading education; many classics reading teachers claim to practice traditional elementary teaching (*qimeng jiaoyu* 启蒙教育) in form of “National Studies education” which is, then, used to refer to classics reading education (Wang 2009: 139; Liu / Wang 2014: 1, 2, 4). However, there is a difference between classics reading education as invention by Wang Caigui and National Studies as academic subject. Governmental endeavors to re-establish traditional education (*chuantong jiaoyu* 传统教育) and Confucian moral values are focused on the state curriculum (Liu / Wang 2014: 1, 2, 4). On first sight, it seems as if classics reading education could be inspired or even motivated by the governmental efforts or activities initiated by officials. However, the French sinologist and cultural anthropologist Sébastien Billioud (2018: 6) insists that popular activities have their own dynamics within the Confucian revival, as the following sections show.

#### 1.4.1 – CONFUCIAN REVIVAL IN ACADEMIA AND ON GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL

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In Chinese scholarly circles before the 1980s, Western modernity was praised whereas Chinese tradition was regarded as relic from a negatively perceived feudal past. However, along with the economic growth of the “Asian Four Dragons,”<sup>24</sup> countries which preserved Confucian tradition and traditional values appeared in favorable light. Interest in tradition and culture boomed and culminated in so-called “crazes” or “fevers”. A “culture craze” (*wenhua re* 文化热) was expression of popular enthusiasm directed to Chinese traditional culture, Confucian education, and canonical works and Western culture mostly within urbane and more educated social groups (Billioud 2007: 52; Billioud / Thoraval 2007: 6f.; Oldstone-Moore 2015: 53). Chinese academia followed with a “National Studies craze” (*guoxue re* 国学热) in the 1990s (Oldstone-Moore 2015: 53). National Studies are broadly referred to as holistic and organic Chinese learning of the Chinese past and became an academic discipline at university. Topics are, for example, classical studies, the study of China’s philosophical master, material culture studies, technical and divinatory studies, Western studies, classics, history, collected writings of China’s past, Chinese religion – the list is long (Makeham 2012: 101). Australian sinologist John Makeham (2012: 103) argues that the tradition behind National Studies was an *invented* construct, an invented tradition that encapsulated the

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<sup>24</sup> The “Asian Four Dragons” are Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan.

Singapore even turned to Confucian education: The 1979 Goh Report (Goh Keng Swee was the Minister of Education) recommended a new moral education curriculum; in 1982, it was decided that Confucian education should offer one facet for this moral education. Confucian specialists were invited to consult the government on this issue (Dirlik 1995: 238–239).

learning of essential contents of the past in an original way. The term “*guoxue*” referred to “*guoguxue* 国故学”, the study of the national heritage, or simply the study of China’s history. These studies were concerned with learning of research on China’s history and culture and were brought as subject into academia by Hu Shi at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century already (Makeham 2012: 99). Between 1920 and 1930, National Studies were institutionally manifested in study courses, departments and research institutes.<sup>25</sup> Academics’ efforts to redefine and specify the subtopics of today’s National Studies were part of China’s long-lasting identity crisis and expression of an “epistemological nativism” which is a “view that the articulation and development of China’s intellectual heritage must draw exclusively on the paradigms and norms of so-called indigenous/local or China-perspectives,” (Makeham 2012: 89) and therefore as a response to the introduction of foreign philosophies, “Western” science and education (Makeham 2012: 101). Contradictory in this process is that National Studies entered into Chinese academia in a subject formation that was introduced to China by the US and Europe: “with all academic disciplines that took root in China in the early part of the twentieth century, it was a product of the disciplinarization and professionalization of knowledge that began in Europe and America in the previous century” (Makeham 2012: 103). While on the one hand, the development of National Studies can be judged as defense mechanism against foreign influence, it also took shape through this foreign influence.

National Studies did not remain on the academic level but also aroused enthusiasm among the people. One famous case of popular hype for Confucianism is the “*guoxue* academic celebrity” (Makeham 2012: 98) Yu Dan 于丹 (\*1965)<sup>26</sup> who stepped into the limelight in 2006 and 2007 through her lectures on Confucius’ *Analects* in the CCTV10 program “Lecture Room” (*Baijia Jiangtan* 百家讲坛). Based on her lectures, she wrote the books *Yu Dan Lunyu Xinde* 于丹论语心得 (*Confucius from the Heart*; Hammond 2015: 104; DeBlasi 2015: 74). Yu Dan promotes values and concepts of Confucian teachings as solutions for everyday challenges and social conflict (Hammond 2015: 106). Her interpretation is not concerned with Confucian theory; it relies on common wisdom and appeals to people intuitively; they can find advice to overcome pressures in life in the text interpretation (DeBlasi 2015: 74-78).

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<sup>25</sup> “Already in 1920, National Studies was established as one of the four departments in the existing Graduate Institute (*yanjiusuo* 研究所) of Peking University, and over the following decade graduate institutes of National Studies were successively established at Peking University (1922), at Dongnan University (1923), at Tsinghua University (1925), at Xiamen University (1926), at Yanjing University (1928), and at Qi-Lu University (1930).” (Makeham 2012: 101)

<sup>26</sup> Yu Dan is professor at the Beijing Normal University (Beijing Shifan Daxue 北京师范大学). She holds a master’s degree in classical Chinese literature and a Ph.D. in film and television studies. In 2006 and 2007 she was seen on screen in the CCTV10 programme “Lecture Room” (*Baijia Jiangtan* 百家讲坛) with lectures on Confucianism; her book is based on her TV appearances (Hammond 2015: 104).

She discusses how to deal with regret and disappointment at the things that happen to us, how to develop and maintain friendship as a buffer against the harsh realities of social life, and how to deal with the challenges and opportunities that day-to-day encounters with other people bring our way. (Hammond 2015: 104f.)

Her writing is labelled as “apolitical kind of self-help program” (Hammond 2015: 106, referring to American sociologist Daniel Bell, 1919-2011). However, her intentions support the politically promoted idea of a harmonious society: Yu Dan claims that Confucian culture was within Chinese cultural genes (*wenhua jiyin* 文化基因); social values of Confucianism were crucial for establishing harmonious social relations (*hexie de guanxi* 和谐的关系; DeBlasi 2015: 79).

State authorities encourage the research on Chinese tradition. Confucian hierarchical social order, respect for authorities and the value of social harmony have a potential to support the government’s concept of a “socialist spiritual civilization”. Simultaneously, the narrative of the “harmonious socialist society” (*shehuizhuyi hexie shehui* 社会主义和谐社会; Billioud 2007: 53-55) provided cultural grounds to persist Westernization. The harmonious society (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) is a concept which the CCP also supports; it was the core project of the former President Hu Jintao (Foster 2015: 23; DeBlasi 2015: 71). Economic growth and generally higher living standards were a stable ground for people’s lives; however, individualization of life styles and the overall loss of moral center that is diagnosed among young Chinese (Moore 2015: 139) made it more difficult to implement the vision of a harmonious society. Confucian values, such as filial piety, were useful for the promotion of social responsibility and social harmony. “As such, even though the moral code of Confucianism may not be entirely suitable to modern society and economy, from the perspective of the authorities it is a valuable tool for maintaining social stability.” (Hong / Liu / Huang 2017: 216)

Confucian revival was not only tolerated, but actively supported by state authorities; classical texts, for example, have been integrated into school curricula as part of China’s outstanding traditional culture (*Zhonghua youxiu chuantong wenhua* 中华优秀传统文化; Billioud 2007: 58; Liu / Wang 2014: 1, 2, 4). The “Country’s Medium- and Long-Term Outline Plan to Reform and Develop the Institution of Language (2012-2020)”<sup>27</sup> suggests to “actively develop activities to recite, write and talk about Chinese classics, to strengthen Chinese education on excellent traditional culture and reform traditional education, [and] to

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<sup>27</sup> State Language Commission (Guojia Yuwenzi Gongzuo Weiyuanhui 国家语言文字工作委员会): “The Country’s Medium- and Long-Term Outline Plan to Reform and Develop the Institution of Language (2012-2020) (Guojia zhongchengqi yuyan wenzi shiye gaige he fazhan guihua gangyao 2012-2020 nian 国家中长期语言文字事业改革和发展规划纲要 2012—2020 年)”. Online: [http://www.china-language.gov.cn/jg/wx/201612/t20161216\\_4969.html](http://www.china-language.gov.cn/jg/wx/201612/t20161216_4969.html) (last access: April 3, 2018).



increase the cultural and moral accomplishments of citizens.”<sup>28</sup> On such a basis, the “promotion of excellent Chinese culture” (*hongyang chuanbo Zhonghua youxiu wenhua* 弘扬传播中华优秀传统文化; section II, art. 2.6) can be achieved. Implementation of these suggestions should contain nationwide general further training for teachers and principals in schools and kindergartens, consisting in reciting the classics rhythmically (*Zhonghua jingdian songdu* 中华经典诵读; section III, art. 1.2). The promotion of culture (*wenhua chuancheng* 文化传承; section III, art. 6) in general should furthermore be enhanced by more practice of Chinese classics in schools (recitation of classics, writing of characters) as well as in after-class work groups and extracurricular activities. Platforms for society’s participation in reading the classics should be established and teachers should get further training in traditional education (section III, art. 6.15). Chinese classics, thus, re-entered the classrooms. In 2018, Confucius’ *Analects*, one of the *Four Books* of Confucian tradition, even became part of the university entrance examination.<sup>29</sup> Apart from that, the Chinese government also engages in the establishment of academies (*shuyuan*) where people can learn Chinese classics, even free of charge. Two state-funded academies in Xiamen and Suzhou have been visited during this study. National Studies colleges (*guoxueyuan*) are also established nationwide by the government to increase engagement in traditional culture research (Bai 2017: 75).

The “most prominent discourse on Confucianism”, as Billioud (2018: 2) diagnoses, has been the philosophical. The philosophical school of “modern New Confucianism” (*xiandai xinruxue* 现代新儒学, Liu 2007: 81) refers to the modernization of Confucian thought which started in the May Fourth Era when tradition was at stake and the traditional education system was replaced by a foreign-influenced new one. China was in an intellectual crisis, and a first solution was offered by the so-called “last Confucian” Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893-1988) in his work *Eastern and Western Cultures and their Philosophies* (*Dong xi wenhua ji qi zhixue* 东西文化及其哲学; Liu 2007: 29, 82): while Western countries delivered valuable achievements in science and technology, Chinese culture was strong in terms of harmonious interpersonal relations and stable social systems. Modernization for China meant to combine these three items (Liu 2007: 74; Liu 2010: 332). However, Liang did not turn out as the last Confucian but as the first scholar of a new school of thought (Liu 2007: 75; Liu 2010: 330).

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<sup>28</sup> “积极开展中华经典诵写讲等活动，加强中华优秀传统文化传统教育和革命传统教育，提升国民的文化素养和道德素养。” (Country’s Medium- and Long-Term Outline Plan to Reform and Develop the Institution of Language (2012-2020), section II, art. 2.6)

<sup>29</sup> Chinese Education Online (*Zhongguo Jiaoyu Zaixian* 中国教育在线): “2018 Beijing gaokao kaoshi shuoming gongbu yuwen jingdian bianmu zeng ‘Lunyu’ 北京高考考试说明公布 语文经典篇目增《论语》.” Online: [http://gaokao.eol.cn/bei\\_jing/dongtai/201801/t20180117\\_1581009.shtml](http://gaokao.eol.cn/bei_jing/dongtai/201801/t20180117_1581009.shtml) (last access: April 3, 2018).

While the first generation (1920s) of these scholars was concerned with protection of the own culture facing Western advancements in science, democracy and philosophical thought (such as logic; Xi 2011: 308), there was more cultural self-esteem in the second generation (1950s to 1960s): In 1958, the famous scholars Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909-1978), Mou Zongsan (Wang Caigui's teacher), Zhang Junmai 张君勱 (1886-1969) and Xu Fuguan 徐复观 (1903-1982) composed a "Manifesto on the Reappraisal of Chinese Culture to Global Intellectuals: Our Joint Understanding of Chinese Scientific Research and the Future Prospects of Chinese Culture and the Culture of the World" (*Wei Zhongguo wenhua jinggao shijie renshi xuanyuan: women dui Zhongguo xueshu yanjiu ji Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie wenhua qiantu zhi gongtong renshi* 为中国文化敬告世界人士宣言: 我们对中国学术研究及中国文化与世界文化前途之共同认识). At its core is the idea that Chinese tradition does not only have a value for Chinese society, but also for societies outside of China. Confucianism was believed to contribute to other society's harmonious coexistence (Liu 2007: 8; Liu 2008: 192; Makeham 2003a: 28-29; Xi 2011: 124). In this second generation, the line of "Contemporary Neo-Confucianism" (*dangdai xin Rujia* 当代新儒家; Liu 2007: 81) with a regional focus on scholars in Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas emerges. With a less emotional outlook on May Fourth, Confucianism loses its quality as source of ultimate truth (Xi 2011: 310, 323). Respect for cultural differences and awareness for the importance of dialogue for cultural exchange are qualities that permeate these non-mainland China academics in Confucian philosophy (Xi 2011: 321, 323). Interests in globalization, pluralism, religious movements and global ethics come together in the joint overarching project of "Understanding between East and West and the Globalization of Confucian thought" (*Zhong Xi huitong yu ruxue shijiehua* 中西会通与儒学世界化) (Xi 2011: 307).

According to the Italian sinologist Umberto Bresciani, however, all modern new or neo-Confucianists shared five basic characteristics: (1) "They all show a high regard for the Confucian heritage, and the moral ideal and religious spirit of Confucianism as the highest achievement of human culture, therefore endowed with a universal value and deserving to be preserved and propagated." (Bresciani 2001: 457) (2) They all have a sense of mission to hand down the core of Confucian philosophy as elaborated by the masters of the past, such as Mencius and Zhu Xi (Bresciani 2001: 458); (3) they value the "spiritual culture" as represented by Confucian thought (Bresciani 2001: 459); (4) they are opposed to scientism and stress that life also has a spiritual side or a side beyond mere rationality (Bresciani 2001: 459); and (5) they share a commitment to comparative philosophy to be prepared for an informed dialogue with the West (Bresciani 2001: 459f.).

This personal commitment and the sense of mission of new Confucian scholars are crucial aspects in the criticism of their agendas which seem to be driven more by sentiment than by scientific reason. Similar to Makeham's (2012: 89; 101) assessment of nativism within the subject of National Studies, new Confucianism is also discussed as measurement to strengthen the importance of Chinese culture and tradition on international level and not (only) as academic philosophical discipline. The modernization of Confucian thought within modern new Confucianism serves as philosophical self-assertion but given that Confucian thought is also be discussed as essence of Chinese culture itself, the issue is extended to cultural self-assertion (Lackner 2003: 284-285). Strong identification with the own culture in contrast to "the other" or "foreign culture" reveals itself as defensive mechanism against other culture(s) in which *assertion* of authenticity of the own thought, culture and tradition is more important than the actual content of such claims (Lackner 2003: 275-276).

Considering the criticism of new Confucianism as academic project of cultural self-assertion, it might be argued that their missionary and emotionally driven agendas link them to the revival of Confucianism on popular or personal level rather than to an academic. However, even though new Confucian and neo-Confucian scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have a certain personal, emotional or even nationalistic mission or ambition behind their academic work, their endeavors are still within an academic work environment and their goals are achieved by exchange of thought and dialogue. Confucianist activities on popular level, such as classics reading education, are inspired by the philosophies of these scholars, but these activities take place in a different arena. They are concerned with everyday life, practice of ideas and ideals, and intended change through action, not (only) dialogue and exchange of thought. As a headmaster of an academy in Beijing states, "National Studies are a lifestyle (*guoxue shi yi zhong shenghuo de fangshi* 国学是一种生活的方式)".<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, as Billioud (2018: 4) points out, there is a high number of so-called grassroots scholar (*caogen xuezhe* 草根学者) involved in classics reading education – people who are self-taught in the classics and who engage in Chinese tradition without having an academic background. Popular and academic dimensions of the Confucian revival have their distinctions. However, as the case of Yu Dan shows, however, there can be "transgressions" of the lines between academia and the sphere of the people.

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<sup>30</sup> Presentation of the academy to teachers and headmasters of local schools, Beijing Academy A, January 20, 2016.

#### 1.4.2 – POPULAR CONFUCIANISM AND THE CLASSICS READING MOVEMENT

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Bottom-up retraditionalization activities increased around the 2000s. In both official and popular discourse, the emergence of Confucian projects is perceived within a context of the cult of money (*jian li wang yi* 见利忘义) and the neglect of the common good and the development of private desires (*sun gong fei si* 损公肥私). Antidote is the parallel promotion of a collective attitude and collective projects focusing on values beyond capitalism and consumerism – among which popular Confucian projects are situated (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 1). The threefold distinction of projects of Confucian revival by Dutournier and Ji (2009: 67-68) is shared by Sébastien Billioud and his colleague Thoraval (2015: 8) who use the term “popular Confucianism”<sup>31</sup> for projects with aims of retraditionalization on grassroots level; it “is a translation of a notion, if not a slogan, that activists often claim for themselves: *minjian Rujia* [民间儒家], that is, Confucianism ‘in the space of the people.’” (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 8)

“Popular” (*minjian* 民间) refers to both the administrative level (non-governmental) and actors involved in the projects (“ordinary people;” Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 8). There is a popular *claim* of Confucianism which is new and outstanding given that places of Confucian worship and ritual – Confucius temples (*wenmiao* 文庙) – used to be accessible only for the scholar-literati who gained an official position within the imperial system by successfully passing official examinations. “The very fact that technicians, employees, workers, or peasants may now take possession of Mencius or Confucius temples in order to carry out rituals therefore constitutes some sort of transgression.” (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 8) Popular practice of teaching children Chinese classics (*xiao'er dujing* 小儿读经) takes place in traditional schools (*sishu*) such as study halls (*xuetang*) and academies (*shuyuan*); students occasionally even dress in the traditional dress *Hanfu* 汉服 (Billioud 2007: 58). Institutions from the educational past are rediscovered, reclaimed, and used for collectively shared (personal) interests. Actual places are governed by the people in the name of Confucian revival – or, with a slightly different perspective: people find space and create places where they can carry out their traditional projects. Confucian ideals are tied to actual grounds.

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<sup>31</sup> The term “popular Confucianism” is also used in other fields, e.g. in academia among new Confucian scholars to distinguish between spiritual Confucianism as philosophical tradition, politicized Confucianism as tradition of ways to deal with state affairs, and popular Confucianism as everyday tradition (Xi 2011: 196). Historian Thomas Lee (2000: 35-36) points out that the term came up earlier in Japanese scholarship in reference to the populism in (Confucian) education in the post-Song period and relates to the orientation of Confucian orthodoxy to the commoner’s needs.

In the context of classics reading education and the core of this study, popular Confucianism refers to projects of reviving tradition among common people in China today.

Given that classics reading activities involve common people on grassroots level and are also oriented towards common people and their wisdom, they are anchored on popular level. A distinction to academics is also actively performed by popular actors in their anti-intellectual attitude which occasionally even calls for a negation of the value of efforts towards traditional revival on the academic level (Dutournier / Ji 2009: 68, 73; Billioud / Thoraval 2007: 15; Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 63f.). Such strong claim of Confucian tradition *by the people for the people* is best explained by Dutournier's and Ji's (2009: 67) differentiation of "Confucian" and "Confucianist" character of popular action: while "Confucian" referred to contents and structure of action, "Confucianist" referred to "dynamics of identity;" action in Confucian projects accompanied by conscious demands, by claims towards the Confucian contents for personal aims, is characterized as "Confucianist." In distinction to political initiatives, Billioud and Thoraval (2015: 7) attribute popular classics reading activities their own dynamics:

Projects launched by the authorities to cherry-pick and rehabilitate specific aspects of the cultural tradition (that could for instance serve as resources for moral and educational indoctrination) only very partially overlap with the objectives and activities of Confucian activists. Those activities do not relate to any abstract ideology but consist in practical projects in which the properly Confucian ideals play a pivotal role. Enterprises carried out in the name of popular Confucianism share indeed little with official projects. (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 7)

Complementary to the National Studies craze on academic level, enthusiasm for reading the classics developed into a tradition-oriented craze on popular level – the so-called "classics reading craze" (*dujing re* 读经热, He 2009: 23, 25).

Billioud and Thoraval (2015: 3-13) cover classics reading education in their long-term research project (2005-2013) on Confucian revival and treat it as a movement<sup>32</sup> and as part of an overall revivalism of Confucian thought and action among Chinese people in the new millennium. Their research on popular Confucianism encompasses revived practice of Confucian ritual, traditional education, the religious dimension of Confucianism as well as officially initiated activities such as celebrating Confucius' birthday as national holiday. Their study is based on data collected in ethnographic field research and a solid historical background of Confucianism in China which is the ground for further philosophical and social considerations on the phenomenon. Sites of research are four traditional-style private schools

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<sup>32</sup> The character of the classics reading movement as movement is not further elaborated on. It mainly consists in a joint dynamic among Confucianism-enthusiasts or activists who work on the common agenda of Confucian revival out of different personal and collective motivations. Dutournier and Ji (2009: 67) also mention the element of mobilization within Confucianist activity. Such characteristics hint to a social movement (Price et al. 2008: 129). However, social movement theory as emerged from social contexts in societies located in Northern countries on the globe (with a focus on European) would usually regard activism as some kind of (opposing) interaction with a nation state (Price et al. 2008: 131) which is not the case in popular Confucianism. This aspect is discussed in chapter 2.

(*sishu*), temples, restaurants, and companies where Confucianist activities on popular level flourish.<sup>33</sup> They mainly interviewed new experts and specialists among common people in China who lead Confucianist activities: people of rather modest (non-elite) backgrounds, i.e. ordinary employees and workers whom they refer to as “activists” due to the high dynamic of their activities in Confucian revival and the common agenda they subsequently all contribute to (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 13). People of higher positions or of a privileged class (students, cadres, businessmen) appear mostly in the role of supporters for popular activities.

The movement is presented as ‘popular’ (*minjian* 民间), but the commitment of local cadres has made the authorities more tolerant of instruction presented as ‘extracurricular interest classes’ (*kewai xingqu ban* [课外兴趣班]), and they even provide classrooms free of charge. (Billioud / Thoraval 2007: 10)

The children classics reading education movement is presented by Billioud and Thoraval (2015: 41) as “one of the most visible dimensions of the reactivation of Confucian references within society” that started to develop in the 2000s. Confucian revivalist activities in the new millennium aimed at “national renaissance” (*minzu de fuxing* 民族的复兴) based on “cultural renaissance” (*wenhua de fuxing* 文化的复兴, Billioud / Thoraval 2007: 10), starting from individual moral self-cultivation in study halls and academies.

In 2004, at the beginning of their research, the movement around these educative facilities was “amphibious,” but grew considerably until they published their study – despite difficulties such as an unclear legal status and the dependence on own financial and social resources to support classics reading education. Given that many study halls and academies operate in an “underground way” (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 51), numbers of activists and participants are hard to measure. Estimations are that at the end of the 2000s, a few ten thousand students were *enrolled* in classics reading educational facilities (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 48); a few million children might be involved in such an education, but the overall number of private activists is unclear (Billioud and Thoraval 2015: 41; Billioud 2018: 8). The headmaster of an academy in Beijing estimates that there are a few million students in Beijing who read the classics and about 5,000 academies and traditional private schools (*sishu*) in China in total.<sup>34</sup>

In practice, classics reading education knows many manifestations and even enters religiously inspired realms to support Buddhist ideals of peace and harmony. Dutournier and

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<sup>33</sup> In Guangdong, the researchers met a teacher of a public school who offers extracurricular courses on reading the classics; they visited a Buddhist temple that offers joint study of Confucian classics each Saturday afternoon for around 200 children (with many non-Buddhists among them); and they visited private businesses that offer classics reading classes for children in the neighborhood. Although money can be earned with traditionally focused educational activities, the researchers suggest to not overrate the commercial aspect of the whole educational project (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 43, 45-47).

<sup>34</sup> Conversation with the headmaster, Beijing Academy A, January 20, 2016; PK16001.

Ji (2009: 68) researched the Lujiang Cultural Education Center in Anhui province, founded by Xu Yehong 徐業鴻 (\*1927), or the Venerable Master Jingkong 净空<sup>35</sup> in 2005. Although the founder is a Buddhist, their pedagogy is based on the core values of Chinese tradition, which are filial piety (*xiaodao* 孝道) and of respect for the teacher (*shidao* 师道; Dutournier / Ji 2009: 73, 74). They have canonized the *Rules for Disciples* (*Dizigui* 弟子规), a typical elementary teaching book for children in mid-Qing dynasty, which is the only classics they are teaching (Ji 2018: 62f.). “Cultural education” at Lujiang does not aim at in-depth study “but rather to accede to an essential intuition, the possession of which is supposed to provide the key to all moral action” (Dutournier / Ji 2009: 73, 74). The activity of the center has a clear regional focus; activists hoped to create a *harmonious* village, a “prototype of a micro society where cultural diversity and mutual understanding would be real” (Dutournier / Ji 2009: 70). Starting from the village onwards, one could build a harmonious township and a harmonious Lujiang and so forth. Since February 2006, the center gives lectures with the title “Building a town in Tangchi that is a model of harmonious society” which hundreds of participants attended (Dutournier / Ji 2009: 76).

As mentioned before, a harmonious society is a goal that also the government strives for. However, Confucian and Buddhist activists have drawn the dream of harmony into another setting and approach it differently. For Jingkong, the major goal of his institution is to be having cultivated 50 sages in ten years; new Confuciuses, Menciuses and Shakyamunis could then enter society and change China (Dutournier / Ji 2009: 76). Although having a focus on education, the center is not registered as a people-run school as introduced before, but as a “non-entrepreneurial unit managed by the people” (*minban feiqiye danwei* 民办非企业单位), a legal status of private enterprises that was legalized in 1998 to regulate non-profit NGOs and certain types of private schools<sup>36</sup> (Dutournier / Ji 2009: 68). Tangchi as model town for social harmony has already become destiny of thousands of pilgrimages every year (Ji 2018:

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<sup>35</sup> Master Jinghong has made quite an interesting cultural journey in his life and engaged in promoting Buddhism on many continents:

In 1949, after the Communists triumphed over the Nationalists, he fled to Taiwan where he met Fang Dongmei 方东美 (1899-1977), a new Confucian philosopher and contemporary of the already mentioned Xiong Shili. Xu studied philosophy and Buddhism; he converted when he was 32 years old. In the 1960s and 70s he engaged in activities of the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC); in 1977, he started to promote Buddhism. After having immigrated into the USA, he founded the Dallas Buddhist Association in 1985; in the same year, he set up the Foundation for Buddhist Education in Taiwan (1989-1995); in 1988, he started activities to spread Buddhism in South East Asia. In 2001, he had his focus on Australia, founding the Pure Land Learning College (Dutournier / Ji 2009: 69).

According to Dutournier and Ji (2009: 70), Xu’s experience with Buddhism drove him towards Confucian traditional culture; he wanted to be a “representative of Chinese culture in general” and promote tolerance and cultural diversity not over religion but (Chinese Confucian) culture.

<sup>36</sup> This regulation emerged prior to the laws on people-run schools (*minban xuexiao*) in 2002 (see chapter 1.3).

75) and is even referred to as “modern Taohua Yuan [桃花源] (utopia)” (Chung 2018: 140, note 20).

Many aspects coalesce at this point: people engage in activities that aim at Confucian revival; they create space(s) for this purpose, e.g. establish study halls and academies; they do this in a legally insecure environment; they invest large sums of financial and other resources into an education that is not even acknowledged by the state; they send their own children into study halls and academies to have them educated by common people or grassroots scholars. They are dissatisfied with public education, a product of social, political, and intellectual turbulences of the last 100 years, and that drives them into alternative spaces which seem misplaced in today’s society and disjoint academic and professional discourse. Popular Confucian education in a Buddhist environment appears to enhance a utopian architecture of society, as the case of Tangchi shows. However, not only Buddhist influence drives Confucian activist to attempts of creating utopia on China’s grounds.

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#### 1.5. RESEARCH QUESTION: CLASSICS READING EDUCATION AS PROCESS TOWARDS A CONFUCIAN UTOPIA?

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In the research of Billioud and Thoraval as well as Dutournier and Ji as described above, classics reading education is treated as part of popular Confucianism. This is very helpful for localizing classics reading education within the area of Confucian grassroots activism in contemporary China and for mapping the dynamics of the Confucian revival into and within the popular sphere. Billioud’s and Thoraval’s (2015: 61) four case studies in Beijing, Taiyuan, and Dongguan give insight into classroom, teaching material, educational ideal, and the ambitions behind running such a *sishu*: educating new sages for a better society in China. Dutournier’s and Ji’s work offers insight into the spiritual realms of moral education. A differentiation of popular projects from the academic and political dimensions of Confucian revival makes up a large part of their research endeavors. On popular level, Confucian activities seem very scattered and unorganized in the sense that it is difficult to gather the variety of activities and motivations behind them under a unitary conceptual umbrella. This is also true for the classics reading movement as introduced by Billioud and Thoraval. Although activists follow a certain common educative agenda, they do so in very different ways.

As Billioud (2018: 1) has only recently emphasized, ethnographic research on popular Confucian practice is still very limited; numerous actors with different backgrounds and motivations (workers, peasants, craftsmen, employees, businessmen, military officers, school teachers, students, scholars etc.) participate in Confucianist activities, and there is not yet a



“systematic ‘grammar’ of the actors’ motivations. A systematic enquiry into the issue could be a valuable direction for a future project” (Billioud 2018: 3f, note 6). Furthermore, Chinese research programs that are launched on the topic also still seek basic understanding of traditional educational initiatives and institutions in contemporary China are still running. For example, in 2017, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Research Institute, a think tank in Beijing, and the Dunhe Foundation, administered by the Civil Affairs Department of Zhejiang Government, have launched a joint research project on traditional education in China today; the project title is “Report on the development of China’s contemporary traditional culture education” (*Zhongguo dangdai chuantong wenhua jiaoyu fazhan baogao* 中国当代传统文化教育发展报告). Results are expected for April 2019.<sup>37</sup> For the preparatory work of this study, there was not much research based on (qualitative data of) specific cases in the field. For the classics reading movement, a first “grammar” of motivations in attempted to be pointed out in this study.

Apart from this Chinese research program, there are currently other singular research projects carried on in the context of classics reading education. Wang Canglong 王苍龙 (PhD student at the University of Edinburgh) focuses on education in one particular study hall from the perspective of cultural citizenship. In his MA thesis (Wang 2013), he combines the theory of individualization under the guidance of the Chinese government (*guojia guanli xia de getihua lilun* 国家管理下的个体化理论) and the theory of cultural citizenship (*wenhua gongmin shenfen lilun* 文化公民身份理论) and examines how teachers and students within classics reading education undergo a process of personal change and self-control through education governed by self-reflection that leads to developing a consciousness of power and responsibility. This thesis has developed into a PhD project on Confucian citizenship which he is still working on. Zeng Yukun 曾毓坤 is a PhD student at the University of Chicago in linguistic anthropology who focuses on the social use of language. He examines practices and ideologies of the reading practice in classics reading facilities as well as social realities as presupposed and entailed by such practice. Sylvia Elizondo is a PhD candidate at the

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<sup>37</sup> Main questions to be answered within the research program are: (1) what are traditional education institutions and how is their education characterized? (什么是传统文化教育机构以及其教育形态? ); (2) what is their scope of development? Where are they successful, what are the obstacles they have to meet? (其发展规模如何? 取得了哪些成就以及面临怎样的困境? ); and (3) which practical value is pursued by their development? How is their contemporary character composed? (其发展实践价值追求是什么? 如何构建其现代性? ). Results of this research project will be presented and discussed in April 2019 on the LIFE education innovation summit (LIFE Jiaoyu Chuangxin Fenghui 教育创新峰会) organized by the 21 Century Education Research Institute. The basic character of the questions shows that basic information on the popular educational approaches is still needed. (21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Research Institute: “Dangdai chuantong wenhua jiaoyu zenme zuo? Women zhuisu qi qianshi jinsheng 当代传统文化教育怎么做? 我们追溯其前世今生.” Online: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/DVJ9OtQMhB4djzcVVh8AWA> (last access: August 10, 2018).

Université Paris-Diderot working under the guidance of Sébastien Billioud. She focuses on a traditional Chinese study hall which does not perform Confucian education.<sup>38</sup>

This study seeks to answer different questions. Why did classics reading education develop into a full-time educational approach? Why did people not leave it at the level of interest courses or weekend reading groups, especially considering that traditional education entered public schooling and National Studies can be studied at university? The first steps towards an answer can be found in Billioud's and Thoraval's (2015: 36, 39f., 71f., 111-113, 162-165) study. They have already put much emphasis on personal spiritual journeys; personal motivations behind engagement in Confucian education take humanistic as well as fundamental or quasi-religious forms:

Whereas in its most liberal forms - exemplified here by *sishu 2* - the establishment of a traditional school results from a concern to promote a more fulfilling and humanistic education model, in its most extreme forms (*sishu 4*) it proceeds from a radical social critique and a quasi messianic vision of Confucianism understood as a salvation path for the country. The tension with both the legal and educational system and the usual goals of compulsory education (acquisition of the knowledge to integrate oneself in society, molding of the socialist citizen) then reaches a climax. (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 62)

Reading the classics in study halls and academies is not necessarily only a personal choice for education. The case of *sishu 4* as stated above indicates an embedding in a broader web of hopes and desires that tackles a utopian level: some parents consider their own children not only their own but humanity's children; they believe that Confucian education could turn them into saints and sages who would be able to change society. Parents choose Confucian education for their children to realize a transgenerational dream of (Chinese and global) harmony. Society itself is perceived as a space of pollution, mass media and medial communication are carriers of bad influences, and children need to be protected from that. It seems as if adults would paint a thought-image of a social dystopia in contemporary which needs to be balanced with a Confucian utopian vision that can be reached through reading the classics. Billioud and Thoraval (2008: 92) mention that this stream of thought within classics reading education would run danger to turn into a sect. Altogether, the rejection of current society and public education is "shifting from a critique of the existing society in the name of Confucianism to the invention, at the margins of existing society, of an imaginary Confucian society that seeks to be a resource for the achievement of a millenarian vision for the future all of humanity." (Billioud / Thoraval 2008: 100)

Another example for a utopian direction of Confucian projects in the face of disillusion is located within academia. Billioud and Thoraval (2015: 143f.) refer to the utopian project of

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<sup>38</sup> Information on each others' PhD projects was exchanged in emails in August and September 2018.

Beijing University Professor Zhang Xianglong 张祥龙 who proposed the construction of an “area of protection of Confucian culture (*Rujia wenhua baohu qu* 儒家文化保护区, 144) in the style of a nature protection park (*ziran baohu qu* 自然保护区, 144) where people could lead a Confucianist life, inspired by the pure and traditional way of life of the Amish community in the United States.

To some extent, Zhang’s project is the logical consequence of a fundamental dissatisfaction about modern categories and institutions. Given, on the one hand, that Confucianism cannot be reduced to an academic disciplinary field, a political ideology, or an institutionalized religion, and, on the other hand, that its quintessence can flourish only in daily life, within an organic space that would recover knowledge and practices inherited from tradition, is it not tempting to figure out the possibility of reestablishing such space within the modern world? (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 143f.)

Study halls and academies as known Chinese institutions of education from a Chinese past that focus solely on classics reading education also reveal characteristics of a closed environment in which only the classics, a classical lifestyle, and a classics-oriented social order are acceptable. Reading the classics at home with parents, at university with classmates, or in the evening with friends brings Confucian culture into ordinary everyday life; reading the classics in study halls and academies gives life an orientation along Confucian classics and culture.

There are critics of classics reading education who ascribe the label of “utopia” to study halls and academies because they consider the teaching approach from the past in today’s environment a fundamental mismatch – study halls and academies seem to be *misplaced*. Parents who send their children study halls or academies allegedly flee from public education to a “hidden paradise of peace and prosperity” or “utopia” (*shi wai tao yuan* 世外桃源<sup>39</sup>, Cao 2012: 19). But the paradise criticized in this article is not a golden one; the author draws an image of children isolated from the outer world who are not prepared for exams, for university, or for life. Classics reading education in this sense would rather mean harm for their potentials and a hindrance for development of creativity and intelligence (Cao 2012: 19-20). The article “How can education return to the utopia of the old-style private school?” (*Jiaoyu zen neng huigui taohuayuanshi “sishu”* 教育怎能回归桃花源式“私塾”, Young

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<sup>39</sup> The term “*shi wai tao yuan* 世外桃源” literally means “the Peach Spring beyond this world” and derives from the famous *Records of the Peach Blossom*, a story by Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 (365/372-427) on a fisherman from Eastern Jin 晋 dynasty (265-420) who got lost and tried to find his way back home through a peach blossom forest. On this search, he walked towards the mountains where he discovered a little hole, enlightened with searing light, and when he stepped through the hole, he found a world of peace and prosperity where everyone was dressed like in ancient times. The peoples’ ancestors fled from Qin 秦 dynasty (221-207 AD), a time of war, and settled in this place to establish a different way of life in a hidden paradise of harmonious life infused by ways of the past. When the fisherman wanted to bring his contemporaries to this utopian place, he could not find it again. The term “*shi wai tao yuan*” turned into a dictum (*chengyu* 成语) referring to a place of beauty and wilderness, peace and prosperity, or simply a utopia (see Tsai 2009: 151).

*Literator* 2014: 22–24) draws an idyll image of learning in a peaceful and remote environment. Cities were too loud and unsafe for the children; their natural capabilities could only be developed in a pure, *humanistic* and natural environment. Parents who lost trust in governmental education dreamt of their children being educated in contact with nature and being able to develop independent thinking. Learning should take place free from seductive influences of materialism by retreating into an “imaginary paradise” (*shi wai tao yuan* 世外桃源) cut off from society, based on Chinese traditional Confucian thought. However, this was only the imaginary which classics reading educators had of their retreat into silent idylls for educational purposes. The author criticizes that teachers and parents claimed to be doing “homeschooling” while they would use children as “guinea pigs” (*shiyanpin* 试验品) for trying out their educational visions. Since the children could not get a diploma in the study halls, this dream was lived by sacrificing the children’s’ futures because later access to higher education was inhibited for them (*Young Literator* 2014: 22-23).

The transgenerational dream that Billioud and Thoraval talk about, Zhang’s Confucian protection zone and the utopias mentioned in the two articles on classics reading education once more point to the utopian and visionary qualities of classics reading education. Classics reading education is not only a theory but an approach to be implemented into practice; the movement of reading the classics provides people’s force to drag visions from a metaphysical and futuristic distant utopian level into present practice. As the historians Gordin et al. (2010: 2) specify,

Every utopia always comes with its implied dystopia – whether the dystopia of the status quo, which the utopia is engineered to address, or a dystopia found in the way this specific utopia corrupts itself in practice.

Utopia can have a bright and idyllic face, but also one of darkness and isolation. Classics reading education wants to be a tool to create morally upright Confucian gentlemen, yet its utopian characteristics point to the danger that in practice, things might turn out differently and maybe even completely opposite.

This research aims at grasping the characteristics of classics reading education as grounded utopian movement to single out how educational practice is torn between utopia and dystopia, between hopes and disillusion, and how historical and present developments in Chinese society have their share in such a phenomenon. Multi-sited field research delivered broad data and allowed for many different voices to speak up. It is, therefore, not possible to trace life paths of singular interviewees in-depth. Rather, the study is a snapshot of the various actors engaged in the circles of classics reading education that were approached within research and shows their common agenda for a common higher goal – which may be

implemented into practice differently, but in different practices, a set of common ideals, values, hopes and dreams is visible.

## 2. AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF *READING THE CLASSICS*: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO CHILD EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY STUDY HALLS AND ACADEMIES

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Research on contemporary study halls and academies is scarce. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the phenomenon mostly appears within research on the broader issue of Confucian revival in China. Clear numbers which would be useful to define the field, to have an idea how small or large the classics reading movement might be, do not exist; they are subject of estimation by those who have conducted qualitative research. This research is no exception; informants and interviewees can only guess the overall numbers, the scope and impact of facilities that are engaged in classics reading education. Some interviewees hold the view that study halls and academies are a phenomenon in the margins, “It’s a small percentage, so small that one cannot even talk about it. Because... because in China, there are so many students nowadays, really a huge number, but the percentage of study halls is really so small that you don’t even need to mention it, it’s really, really small.”<sup>40</sup> Others are more positive that the situation will change: “There will be more and more academies, that’s for sure.”<sup>41</sup> This study is based on data gathered in study halls and academies that take various different approaches to classics reading education.

Although the utopian characteristics of classics reading education appear already in the discussion of existing research in the introduction, it should be mentioned at this point that this research did not start with the hypothesis that classics reading education was a movement that was in essence utopian which simply needed to be proven. Rather, at the very beginning, the utopian vision behind educational practice appeared at the side of teachers’, parents’ and headmasters’ high hopes concerning their efforts in Confucian education. Partly, such idealism could have even derived from the character of Confucian education itself: Lee Wing On (1996: 25) – who is famous for his work in comparative education, citizenship education, and moral and values education – points out that Confucian ethics praise “human perfectibility and educability” which explained the positive attitude towards learning and self-cultivation in Confucian (and Chinese) education. A person should seek internal perfection

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<sup>40</sup> “很小很小的比率，微不足道。因为，因为中国这个.....这个现在的学生数量，真的是很大的，然后私塾占的比例，真的是微不足道，很少很少。” (TS15003)

<sup>41</sup> “就是这样的书院越来越多，一定是越来越多的。” (XM15005)

(which relates to the concept of sagehood which Mencius regards as part of every human being); however, as the person is always set in relation with others, the internal dimension of education correlates with the external performance of what has been learned: a good scholar needs to strive for a good position in society to be able to extend his own goodness or his good influence on society (Lee 1996: 37). Perfection and utopia have in common that they can never be reached and (only) offer a very high standard towards which people can develop.

One year of interviewing and observation in study halls and academies started quite unspectacular with the idea to find out what exactly classics reading education was and why people invested time and money for an education which did not even enable their children to access higher education and why they would even risk afflictions with the law. At the very beginning, classics reading education as *education* in terms of teaching contents, methods, models and learning on the students' side was at the core of research. However, recitation and memorization in study halls and academies turned out to be the same every day and did not vary a lot between different facilities. Personal motivations behind reading the classics as well as the high hopes connected with this everyday-the-same monotonous education appeared to be a mismatch – the focus shifted towards the connection between (Wang Caigui's but also the headmasters' self-developed) educational theory and educational practice as observable in the facilities. Educational theory combined with images of futurities embodied in people's identities and everyday actions fill the recitation of the classics with life and reveal the meaning of classics reading education as full-time educational approach in addition to reading groups, weekend classes, and increase of classics in classes in public schools. The utopian lens helps to answer the question why the additional, heavily committed format of reading the classics is (or feels) necessary for the people.

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## 2.1. MAPPING THE WORLD OF CLASSICS READING EDUCATION: SITES, INTERVIEWEES, AND THE RESEARCHER

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Initial contact to people engaged in classics reading education took place in winter 2014 in a short two-week visit to Xiamen (Fujian province). Contact data were available in the online data base on the websites of a classics reading promotion organization called Shaonan Culture (Shaonan Wenhua 绍南文化) with headquarters in Xiamen.<sup>42</sup> First talks with local activists brought new connections with other engaged people in Xiamen, but also across the borders of

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<sup>42</sup> *Dujing Jiaoyu* 读经教育: Dujing Jiaoyu Xinxi Pingtai 读经教育信息平台. Online: <http://www.dujing.org/CICms/xinxi.asp> (last access: January 3, 2019).

The explorative phase of field research in December 2014 started at this promotion center. From there onwards, at least the Xiamen network of study halls and academies became accessible.

Fujian province. Classics reading educators and parents are well connected via social media, especially on the communication platform WeChat which was also used by the researcher to get in contact with relevant people.<sup>43</sup> Classics reading educators and parents, the main target groups of this research, were very helpful in suggesting who else would be important to visit and establishing new connections. Given that classics reading education is a movement basically underpinned by private engagement and information and knowledge on classics reading education still mostly circulate among these engaged people, it was crucial for the success of this research to gain insight into the field through those who are active within it.

### 2.1.1 – RESEARCH METHODS AND THE RESEARCHER’S POSITION IN THE FIELD

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As mentioned before, the field of classics reading education was entered basically with an open approach to the people and their activities in the field of classics reading *education*. Keeping in mind that *educational* facilities are in the focus, aspects of education such as teaching methods, classroom interaction, modes of learning etc. were in the foreground. However, it soon turned out that the educational matter is part of something superordinate which, within further research and analysis, would be identified as the utopian character of the classics reading movement. The interview guideline was not prepared upon such suppositions. It encompasses a pool of 15 to 20 core questions tailored to three different groups of activists in classics reading education: parents, teachers, and headmasters. Some teachers and headmasters are also parents; some headmasters are also teachers and/or parents. According to the situation and the interview partner, open-ended questions from the previously prepared pool were asked to guide the general direction of the talk.<sup>44</sup> Sometimes the interviews were starting points for deeper conversations on single matters off record; such conversations were incorporated in the field notes. Before starting their interview, the interviewees answered a questionnaire<sup>45</sup> on their personal backgrounds; headmaster also gave information on their study hall or academy. This information is the basis of the tables 13 (basic information on research sites) and 14 (interviewees) in the annex (see pp. 311, 312).

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<sup>43</sup> WeChat users (e.g. a study hall headmaster) can create a site on their company in WeChat which interested parties can follow and receive regular information; users can create groups (e.g. for all parents whose children go to a specific academy) which can be used for mutual information exchange; one can use the platform to browse for the names of the study halls and academies found online on websites and connect with them.

<sup>44</sup> The pool of the interview questions is attached in the annex, p. 300.

<sup>45</sup> A dummy of the questionnaire in Chinese with English translation is attached in the annex, p. 309.

All interviewees gave their informed consent to participate in this research, to record the interviews and to process their data for research purposes. Some parents and teachers encountered in the field refused to give a (recorded) interview because they did not consider themselves as “representative” enough or did not think that they could provide much information on classics reading education. Some also stated that they had not thought a lot about the educational approach. One teacher in Suzhou refused a formal interview because she did not want to speak for the study hall at which she was employed, but she was very open to talk off the record about her own thoughts and concerns. Providing valuable content for this study, she appears in the overall listing of interviewees, even though there is no formal record of the conversations. Such indifferent cases are reflected in the overview of interviewees. The transcriptions of the interviews were produced with the help of a native speaker (a Master student of the Chinese supervisor of the field research at Xiamen University) who sometimes prepared a basic transcription and sometimes provided an extra ear when expressions on record were not easy to grasp for a non-native speaker. All transcripts went through an editing process by the researcher before coding.

Naturally occurring talks in the field delivered very valuable extra information on classics reading education in a less “advertising” mode.<sup>46</sup> Many headmasters talk very positively about their educational approach, of course, because they have an interest in developing their educational facility and attracting more teachers and students. Amidst the overall enthusiasm for classics reading education, reactions like that of the teacher in Suzhou also reflect uncertainty and doubts about one’s choices. Similarly, the leading teacher of Shenzhen Study Hall A<sup>47</sup> was quite unhappy when the researcher once chose an interviewee without consulting her before; she intended to select interviewees that were more in line with the ideals of the study hall – and therefore more representative for transmitting a positive image of their educational approach. This is also the reason why participant observation in the facilities was a crucial factor: it helped to critically review the interviewees’ narrations based on what is observable in practice. Furthermore, it was possible to comprehend how ideals are implemented into practice, brought into physical space, and embodied in personal identity. For example, interviewees would talk about ideal learning environments; a tour through the premises of the respective educative facility would then reveal in which assets headmasters or teachers would see which of their idea(l)s implemented. Simultaneously, it could also reveal where real circumstances limit abstract ideals.

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<sup>46</sup> Naturally occurring talk is referred to as “conversation with...” in the footnotes.

<sup>47</sup> Study halls and academies are not referred to by their real names but are encoded by type of facility and place of operation. An overview with more details on the encoding procedure is available in chapter 2.1.3, p. 48.



Apart from a few exceptions, educators were quite eager to share their stories, and one important reason was that the interviews were carried out in Chinese. Many interviewees reported that it was good to be able to talk in Chinese because they could not express themselves in the same way in English, and they would not know how to translate philosophical concepts behind classics reading education or Chinese culture in general into English.<sup>48</sup> For a small number of people, it was also valuable to communicate with a foreigner in Chinese on a topic that they did not expect foreigners to be interested in – it meant to be (personally and culturally) appreciated and respected.

It was openly communicated to all research participants that the researcher is a German PhD student interested in traditional culture and education who would like to find out about people's motivations to engage in classics reading education. Scholarly interest was largely welcomed, but openness and sharing (personal) experiences also came with expectations and requirements. For example, many study halls are eager to engage in reading foreign classics, but they lack teachers with adequate language skills. Occasionally, the researcher was approached with requests to work as an English classics reading teacher over a longer period of time. The biggest offer came from Shenzhen: a ten years contract as classics reading teacher for English and German classics if there was commitment to engage in further studies of Chinese tradition. However, given that teachers in classics reading facilities are required to show a certain personal commitment to the educational approach, the researcher stayed away from long-term engagement in the same facility to retain a certain distance to the activities.

Being both a foreigner in China and a stranger within the classics reading world did allow for certain distance and for not being associated with a specific approach to or group of classics reading education. There is, for example, a partition of people following the pure classics reading approach according to Wang Caigui and the circle of people who distance themselves from it. However, the researcher occasionally disturbed the social environment in educational facilities that have constructed an internal traditional hierarchy. Being neither teacher nor student nor staff nor relative of anybody, the researcher was either addressed by variations of her Chinese name (Ji Shanrong 季珊蓉) such as “Dr. Ji” (Ji Boshi 季博士), “Miss Ji” (Ji Xiaojie 季小姐), or simply with the forename “Shanrong 珊蓉” in the role of a “big sister” (*jiejie* 姐姐) or “aunt” (*ayi* 阿姨, meaning not the aunt as a relative but a woman of higher age than the students). However, for the headmaster of Shanghai Study Hall, all

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<sup>48</sup> In preliminary research in North-Rhine Westphalia (Germany), the author met a Chinese mother of Chinese-German children who teaches her children Confucian classics at the weekends. Even though we could have spoken in German, she preferred Chinese. Classics reading education is conceptualized in Chinese language relying on Chinese (philosophical and educational) concepts; it is easily communicated in Chinese. She herself does not know many German translations of the topics we discussed which is why it is also difficult for her to explain the educational concept in-depth to her German husband.

these possible forms of address seemed inappropriate, so he chose a literary name to refer to the researcher. Such a name was common in ancient China to address scholars in their formal position as scholars whereas their personal names were only used by family relatives and close friends. The headmaster chose the name “Child of Virtue” (Dezi 德子) for the researcher. After a first visit to the study hall, the issue of the name was discussed on the phone so that the researcher could be addressed appropriately during the next visit right from the start.<sup>49</sup> This reflects that in everyday matters, small complications arise from the difference between the structure of the classics reading world and the outside world.

Although the general attitude of interviewees was open, the researcher was also approached with suspicion in some facilities: a headmaster in Shenzhen doubted her identity of a researcher and assumed that she was a journalist because she neither had a child to be educated with classics reading education nor did she aim at opening her own study hall after finishing her research. This was a thought the researcher met quite frequently: among many classics reading educators, it was not clear why one would engage in one year of research “just” to find out something about the topic and without wanting to implement it in practice. The headmaster in Shenzhen refused a formal interview and wanted to talk off record only.<sup>50</sup> He was the only person to refer to the methodology of classics reading education as actual brainwash (*xiniao* 洗脑) which was the main reason why he thought this education was so effective.<sup>51</sup> The headmaster of Suzhou Academy thought that the researcher as external person could be dangerous and refused talks at first, sending a teacher to meet her first. After a few hours, he then changed his mind about talking, but insisted that the researcher would not enter the teaching area and stay away from the students. Not much data from this visit is processed in this study because observations on actual teaching practice as additions to the interview data are very limited.<sup>52</sup>

The interviewees share their insights into their own world(s) with the researcher and the researcher needs to analyze and interpret data to make sense of it – awareness and reflection of interpersonal relations are part of the interpretation process (Eriksen 2001: 27) which is why reflections on them were an important topic throughout field research. The interviewees construct the classics reading world with their narrations and the subjective meanings of their actions and experiences within this field (Creswell 2014: 8); the researcher traces these meanings through the analysis of the gathered data (Strübing 2008: 14, 16). While

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<sup>49</sup> Conversation with the headmaster of Shanghai Study Hall (on the phone), June 17, 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Information on Shenzhen Study Hall E (see Table 13, annex p. 311) is therefore incomplete.

<sup>51</sup> Conversation with the headmaster of Shenzhen Study Hall E, March 17, 2016.

<sup>52</sup> SZ15005 is not cited directly.

constructionalist assumptions have a large share in the process of this research, classics reading education is not a construct in an otherwise empty space but is a phenomenon that occurs in certain social, historical, and political contexts (see also Creswell 2014: 11). The utopian perspective sheds light on how imagined futurities lie within an understanding of the past in the present – this perspective needs a more pragmatic approach taking in measurements, material and data as needed according to questions that arise from the research itself. Field observation to critically review the interviewee’s narrations, historical studies to critically review how people remember the past and how they relate it to the present, and comparisons within singular and within the selection of interviews which allows for tracing inconsistencies and contradictions proved to be good methods to deal with the colorful narrations encountered in field research.

### 2.1.2 – FIELD RESEARCH AND SELECTED SITES

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The actual field research was carried out between September 2015 and July 2016 and encompassed visits of 27 facilities that are related to classics reading education. 21 of those are privately run study halls and academies. The other six facilities visited are the editorial office of a magazine that promotes classics reading education, *Dujing Zazhi* 读经杂志 (subsequently referred to as *Dujing Magazine*), a company related to Shenzhen Study Hall A that promotes prenatal and early childhood classics reading education and sells related equipment (referred to as *Dujing Baby Company*), one private Buddhist academy, one *sishu* focused only on courses after school, after work, and on weekends, and three state-run academies. While the 21 private study halls and academies are the core of this study, the six other facilities played their parts in marking the field of research and in figuring out the character and position of classics reading education within the broad field of efforts on reviving traditional education.

The *Dujing Magazine* head office was useful as information vessel to receive names of prominent study halls, academies, and parents well-versed (or highly engaged) in classics reading education who gained a little fame in this field, but it did not become a major part of this research. *Dujing Baby Company* also serves as pool of information on a rather outstanding part of classics reading education which involves humans who cannot yet read or understand written language. The company is directly related to a core study hall within the field of classics reading education which is why the company and its employees are also a relevant part of this research. The private Buddhist academy marks the very permeable line between classics reading education and Confucian educative initiatives in the context of

religious aspirations, just as Dutournier's and Ji's (2009: 68) study of the Lujiang Cultural Education Center in Anhui province reveals. It has not been chosen as stand-alone research site, but as part of the environment in which one of the teachers of Xiamen Study Hall A is active: she is also a volunteer worker in the Buddhist academy. Different forms of Confucian education show actors who perform different rituals while embodying similar beliefs within the different environments: in Xiamen Study Hall A, students have to be disciplined and respectful towards the teachers; in the Buddhist Academy, adults critically review their own behavior, especially in terms of piety towards their elderly parents. Such information is also crucial for analysis of the spiritual dimension of study halls and academies.

The small *sishu* with a non-full-time approach to traditional education was worth a visit because the headmaster, being passionate about Confucian education himself, does not share the *commitment* of activists in classics reading education; he thinks that they dwell in an illusion or fantasy.<sup>53</sup> This outsider perspective (on full-time classics reading education) from an insider of Confucian education underlines the special character of the *movement* of reading the classics and it seems once more justified to call those engage with the approach "activists" because they are *committed to a certain agenda* or plan which they want to implement with joint forces. The social scientists Hunt and Benford (2004: 433, 438) point out that micromobilization, solidarity, commitment, and collective identity are the crucial chain elements that work together in social movements; commitment and solidarity among classics reading educators become even more discernible in this comparison with involved people who do not cater to the same agenda. Finally, the state-run academies that do not offer full-time classics reading education but only family reading courses and reading groups after school or work and on weekends were visited to see how the state occupies the field of traditional education on levels outside of public compulsory education and to see if there are any opinions on the popular initiatives in the field.

At the core of this study are private facilities that offer classics reading education in a full-time approach that appears to be a challenge for public education in China – or a challenge for the authorities who are responsible for education and who have to deal with a new phenomenon appearing as alternative to public schooling. Among these, there are (at least) many hundreds which could have been chosen for this research. A few basic criteria on the selection of research sites were applied:

- (1) Sites should be situated in different provinces to avoid the impression that classics reading education is only a regional phenomenon;

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<sup>53</sup> SZ15006.

- (2) Study halls and academies with differing target age groups should be chosen to avoid the impression that classics reading education is only meant for children at a certain age (which was the very first impression of the researcher when encountering many classics reading facilities in Xiamen for children under the age of six);
- (3) Both small- and large-scale study halls and academies should be chosen to explore the possible facets of education in facilities of different extents.

As said before, informants in the field also played a crucial part in the selection process because they are much better informed about the actual conditions of the facilities and could support the researcher in keeping the above-mentioned variety.

Research carried out in a multi-sited field is different from an ethnographic in-depth (single case oriented) study. An in-depth study allows perusing and understanding one person, situation, or phenomenon on site in detail. Or, as the Danish ethnographer Susanne Bregnbæk (2018: 177) who has studied Chinese Christian believers in China and Scandinavia did, one can research one phenomenon in different sites. She followed the beliefs of her interviewees into different (local and global) localities. Similarly, choosing different sites of classics reading education gave the author the possibility to follow a certain conviction, ideal, or vision through different places and to different people to figure out the effects on actors and their environment. It sheds light on the different kinds of activity are produced by this vision in different places. Considering that classics reading education is researched along the profile of grounded utopian movements, multi-sited research delivered broad information on the diverse spatial implementation of permeating visions, i.e. the diverse embodiment within actors and their actions as well as the diverse integration into physical environments.

The 27 facilities related to classics reading education are distributed in ten cities (Beijing 北京, Chengdu 成都, Fuzhou 福州, Guangzhou 广州, Qufu 曲阜, Shanghai 上海, Shenzhen 深圳, Suzhou 苏州, Taishun 泰顺, and Xiamen 厦门). Most of the research sites are in the Eastern area of China – the part with more population density and a larger gross regional product.<sup>54</sup> People in classics reading education need to have a commitment to tradition, but also finances to be able to act upon their commitments – the backgrounds of the research participants are further explained in chapter 2.1.4. Visits at the 21 core facilities varied between one day, a couple of days and two weeks, depending on the facility's capacity to host a researching visitor and the willingness to open up to a foreign academic. Due to the high popularity of social media communication in China, the flow of information extended periods of physical presence: after the visits, exchange of information continued in most cases. The

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<sup>54</sup> National Bureau of Statistics of China: Annual by Province, National Accounts, Gross Regional Product. Online: <http://data.stats.gov.cn/english/mapdata.htm?cn=E0103&zb=A0301> (last access: November 11, 2018).

remaining six facilities that are not at core of the research were visited either for a couple of hours or one day.

Field research revealed in its process that facilities from different regional backgrounds differed *regionally* in their approach to classics reading education. In Xiamen and Fuzhou (Fujian province), activists acknowledge Wang Caigui's classics reading approach but largely stay away from its "pure" implementation (which is further explained in chapter 2.3). Only five facilities in the whole province are known to follow Wang Caigui.<sup>55</sup> Activists within the "Fujian Traditional-style Private School Association" (Fujian Sishu Lianyihui 福建私塾联谊会) develop their own teaching approaches based on their experiences and their own considerations on children's needs.

Shenzhen is another outstanding case: many study halls and academies have settled in a village close to Mount Wutong (Wutongshan 梧桐山). Some follow Wang's "pure" classics reading approach; some have developed their own roadmap of education, and some are working towards merging with the public education system. The local government is known among activists to be open to classics reading education which is considered to be a form of cultural business, and the people who move to Shenzhen to engage in classics reading education are also open to constructive influence on their educational ideas. Shenzhen itself as business metropole is a city with a lot of newcomers who move there for business, and the local government is open to emerging business fields – classics reading education is considered as one of these emerging fields.<sup>56</sup> Even though Shenzhen is not most famous for its culture, the city hosts the "Hall of the Saint Confucius" (Kongshengtang 孔圣堂) which was founded in 2009 in Donghu 东湖 Park. Equipped with an altar with an image of Confucius and incense, the scenery is open for rituals, music, readings, and courses in Confucian tradition.<sup>57</sup>

While Shenzhen as business metropole offers the open attitude and environment for cultural developments, Suzhou is valued as a city with tradition and with a long history full of cultural achievements. Famous scholars emerged from the region due to excellent education. The Confucian Temple in Suzhou was the first temple school in China (Zhang 2002: 103) and the city is famous for its landscaping and garden art. Both the tangible physical environment and the intangible cultural and intellectual environment seem, according to a female headmaster in Suzhou, very suitable for business in cultural education, i.e. running a study

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<sup>55</sup> XM16001.

<sup>56</sup> WTS15001.

<sup>57</sup> Billioud 2010: 209-210.

hall.<sup>58</sup> Qufu as birthplace of Confucius also has good grounds for a tradition-oriented academy. The characteristics of classics reading education as tool to implement a vision of a better China in concrete circumstances are also produced by the physical environments of the educational facilities, by perceptions of the surroundings, and by historical accounts of the region (this is further presented in chapter 4).

### 2.1.3 – GENERAL OUTLINE OF SELECTED STUDY HALLS AND ACADEMIES

Study halls and academies visited within this research carry wonderful names of which some paint beautiful and lofty images of a traditional past. For the protection of the interviewee’s privacy, this study does not use the facility’s or people’s real names, especially because many facilities are very small or only have few people in key positions. If only people’s personal names were encoded, labels like “headmaster of study hall xyz” or “leading teacher of academy abc” would easily reveal people’s identities. Wang Caigui is an exception. His conviction is that classics reading education is for everybody and nothing about it needs to be hidden. He is referred to by full name, and his academy is also mentioned by name. Teacher D, headmaster of a study hall in Shenzhen, is the creator of prenatal and early childhood classics reading education and a celebrity within the world of reading the classics. She is referred to with an altered name, especially because quite a few interviewees refer to her by name. The remaining 20 core facilities are renamed according to type of facility (study hall or academy), place, and, if more than one facility is referred to, they are distinguished by “A”, “B”, “C”, and so forth. For facilitation of reading, a *detailed* list of all facilities is attached in the annex (Table 13, p. 311). Interviewees are referred to by their positions in the facilities (headmaster, teacher, parent, and employee); a detailed list is also attached in the annex (Table 14, p. 312).

TABLE 1: SHORT OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH SITES

City	No	Type of Facilities	Reference/ name within this study
<b>Beijing</b>	2	Academies	Beijing Academy A Beijing Academy B
	1	Study Hall	Beijing Study Hall
<b>Chengdu</b>	1	Study Hall	Chengdu Study Hall
<b>Fuzhou</b>	1	Study Hall	Fuzhou Study Hall
<b>Guangzhou</b>	1	Study Hall	Guangzhou Study Hall

<sup>58</sup> SZ15007.

<b>Qufu</b>	1	Academy	Qufu Academy
<b>Shanghai</b>	1	Study Hall	Shanghai Study Hall
<b>Shenzhen</b>	5	Study Halls	Shenzhen Study Hall A Shenzhen Study Hall B Shenzhen Study Hall C Shenzhen Study Hall D Shenzhen Study Hall E
	1	* Prenatal and Early Childhood Classics Reading Company (affiliated Shenzhen Study Hall A)	<i>Dujing Baby Company</i>
<b>Suzhou</b>	2	Study Halls	Suzhou Study Hall A Suzhou Study Hall B
	1	Private Academy	Suzhou Academy
	1	* Public Academy	/
	1	* Private school for weekend and evening classics reading and classical arts classes	Suzhou Study Hall C
	1	* <i>Dujing Magazine</i> ( <i>Dujing Zazhi</i> 读经杂志) Editorial Department (later they moved to Wang Caigui's academy in Taishun; original name used)	<i>Dujing Magazine</i>
<b>Taishun</b>	1	Academy	Wenli Academy
	1	Study Hall	Wenli Study Hall
<b>Xiamen</b>	2	Study Halls	Xiamen Study Hall A Xiamen Study Hall B
	1	Private Academy	Xiamen Academy
	2	* State-run Academies	State-run Xiamen Academy /
	1	* Buddhist Academy	/

(\*) marks the six facilities which are not at the center of research but delivered interesting information to further explore the field of classics reading education. Only *Dujing Magazine*, *Dujing Baby* company and the state-run academy in Xiamen are referred to in this study and therefore have a short code name.

All 21 facilities opened in the 2000s, except for Shanghai Study Hall that opened in 1998 for the first time. There is a balance of new openings between 2000 and 2015: around one third opened between 2000 and 2005, one third between 2006 and 2010, and the last third between 2011 and 2015. This allows for data collection in both newly established as well as in more



experienced facilities. Four facilities have two opening dates:<sup>59</sup> Qufu Academy started in Shenzhen in 2001 and moved to Qufu in 2009; Wenli Academy opened in 2012 in Beijing and moved to Taishun in 2015. Shanghai Study Hall and Suzhou Academy offered weekend classics reading courses in the beginning (first date) and changed to full-time classics reading education later (second date). These two cases reveal that classics reading facilities can develop from scattered activities or study groups to a (comparatively) structured educational program.

Most facilities have only one headmaster; if there are two headmasters, it is usually a married couple running the facility. Headmasters occasionally also teach. Wang Caigui is nominally in charge of both teaching and running his academy, but he has administrative staff for support in the latter task. Administrative staff as well as housework staff (cooking and cleaning personnel) in the facility is not part of this research. People under consideration are solely the drivers of classics reading education, the activists who implement educational programs and those who support them by personal participation or sending their children for participation, i.e. parents, teachers, and headmasters.

Student numbers vary a lot: there are small study halls with five to 20 students and large academies that train 100 to 250 students. Student-teacher ratios show that classics reading teachers focus on a small number of students in class; a teacher has an average of around 3.5 students (the range going from one to six students per teacher). Wenli Academy is an exception because students are required to learn completely by themselves; Wang Caigui is available a few times per day for answering their questions. This reflects the high consideration on individual teaching in study halls and academies.<sup>60</sup> Teachers' salaries are quite low, the average being 2,800 to 3,800 RMB per month (approx. 400-540 EUR). Qufu academy is an exception: they employ one teacher who is well-versed in canon studies

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<sup>59</sup> See annex, Table 13, p. 311.

<sup>60</sup> As a comparison, in public schools in 2015, the overall national average of student-teacher ratio was one teacher on 17.05 students in primary school, on 12.41 students in junior secondary school, on 14.01 students in regular senior secondary school, on 20.47 students in a secondary vocational school, and on 17.73 students in regular institutions of higher education.

(China Statistical Yearbook 2015: Education, 21-31 Student-Teacher Ratio by Level of Regular Schools by Region. Online: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2016/indexeh.htm> (last access: November 8, 2018)).

But these are only average statistical numbers; complaints about overcrowded classrooms appear frequently in the media (Lin 1999: 52). *The Economist* has reported about the high peak of 120 students in a class in Hebei province and according to the *China Daily*, average classrooms in China's most populated province Henan reached 100 students.

(The Economist: "Anger grows in China over school crowding." Online: <https://www.economist.com/china/2018/09/13/anger-grows-in-china-over-school-crowding> (last access: January 4, 2019). China Daily: "Chinese urban schools strive to 'slim' oversize classes." Online: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/29/content\\_24167862.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/29/content_24167862.htm) (last access: January 4, 2019))

(*jingxue* 经学) and therefore has the highest position and the highest salary (15,000 RMB per month).<sup>61</sup> However, all study halls and academies are full-time (*quanri zhi* 全日制) educative facilities which means that teachers can eat there at least two times per day. Study halls and academies which are boarding schools also offer housing for teachers; they do not necessarily need to rent a flat or house in the area and can keep their expenses low. Some teachers though, especially those who have a family, do not want to live in teachers' dorms. Beijing Academy B was therefore expanding their teachers' living space in 2016, building apartment flats in which teachers can live with their spouses and maybe even small children (until they can enroll at the academy and stay in student dorms).

Study fees are comparatively high. In public education, nine years of compulsory education are free of charge.<sup>62</sup> Classics reading education costs parents between 20,000 and 70,000 RMB per year (average: approx. 43,000 RMB).<sup>63</sup> Teachers who are also parents and send their child(ren) to the study hall or academy where they work – which is a common case – normally get a reduction of the regular school fee given that the fees are high but teachers' salaries are rather low. Families who are interested in classics reading education are basically urbanites and have an income that positions them among middle class families or higher. Some interviewees report about having grown up in a village, but all have or had a life in a city or close to a city. Classics reading educators are largely on the move; there is a trend to move from the city into the countryside – or at least into suburban areas or villages – to have a more peaceful environment for studying.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> QF16001.

<sup>62</sup> Although public schools do not charge school fees, there can be miscellaneous fees for textbooks, uniforms, examination papers, mandatory purchase of extra exam preparation materials, and so forth; especially in rural households, such extra fees still impose a financial burden on parents (Lin 1999: 43-45).

<sup>63</sup> As a reference: in 2016, the disposable income per capita in households nationwide, organized into five categories from low income to high income households, reads as follows:

Low Income Households: 5,528.7 RMB  
Lower Middle-Income Households: 12,898.7 RMB  
Middle Income Households: 20,294.4 RMB  
Upper Middle-Income Households: 31,990.4 RMB  
High Income Households: 59,259.5 RMB

The region with the highest incomes is the Eastern region (30,654.7 RMB) and the lowest disposable income is available in the Western region (18,406.8 RMB; National Bureau of Statistics of China: “6. People's Living Conditions, 6-2 Per Capita Disposable Income of Nationwide Households by Income Quintile”. In: *China Statistical Yearbook 2017*, online: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2017/indexeh.htm> (last access: November 11, 2018)).

<sup>64</sup> The headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A started her journey into classics reading education as a journalist which is how she gained a good overview of present conditions of classics reading facilities as well as dynamics in the field since the movement started. She reports that many study halls and academies were still located at least close to cities because economic conditions of families and resources in bigger cities (such as Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Nanning 南宁, Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing 重庆, Wenzhou 温州, and Shanghai) facilitated operating a classics reading business. There are more people who could help to promote the education and more

Subjects taught in study halls and academies are very much centered on the Confucian classics; most of the day is spent with reading and reciting the *Analects*, *Mencius*, the *Book of Changes*, and so forth. In Xiamen Study Hall A, they also include the *Rules for Disciples*. English classics are occasionally added; books and texts encountered most often in the visited facilities are the Bible and Shakespeare (selected sonnets and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). Shenzhen Study Hall A has shifted from direct recitation of English texts to courses in pronunciation and basic vocabulary first because children struggled with learning the foreign language only via recitation as suggested by Wang Caigui.<sup>65</sup> Calligraphy and playing traditional instruments is added only occasionally to the courses. In Xiamen Study Hall A and B, drawing, storytelling, and playing happens frequently in between short reading sessions given that there are many children under age six. Physical exercise such as martial arts, traditional gymnastics, or outdoor activities (e.g. going to a park or a playground) aims at keeping body and mind in balance. Beijing Academy A integrates subjects from the regular school curriculum into their own; English and mathematics, arts and music are also part of teaching. Arts would be oriented towards classical paintings or classical techniques of painting.<sup>66</sup> Among the other facilities, only Xiamen Study Hall B, Xiamen Academy and Shanghai Study Hall consider mathematics as subject for their curriculum, and they consider to teach along the Greek classic, Euclid's *Elements* (*Jihe yuanben* 几何原本), and the most influential Chinese classics in math, the *Nine Chapters on Mathematical Arts* (*Jiuzhang suanshu* 九章算术).<sup>67</sup>

The classics reading movement is a collection of very diverse educational activities, and the facilities that host such activities are just as diverse. If one attempted to define the categories “study hall” and “academy”, one could try and state that study halls are mainly focused on children from kindergarten to elementary school age (3-13) and are normally smaller in scope than academies, i.e. they have less students and teachers and reach out mainly to local children. Academies should, subsequently, focus on training children starting

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parents who might send their children to such a facility (SZ15004). However, nature and the rural are appealing for classics reading activists.

<sup>65</sup> Field observation, Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 8, 2016. Wang's idea of learning foreign languages via recitation is explained in chapter 2.3.

<sup>66</sup> Field observation, Beijing Academy A, January 20, 2016.

<sup>67</sup> Field observations, Shanghai Study Hall, June 20, 2016; Xiamen Study Hall B October 26, 2015; Xiamen Academy, February 29, 2016.

The *Nine Chapters on Mathematical Arts* have been collected by many different scholars in pre-Han China, but the introduction of the latest version has been written by the Chinese mathematician Liu Hui 刘徽 (225-295) who lived in the state of Cao Wei 曹魏 during the Three Kingdoms period (220–280) in the year 260. In the nine chapters of the book, 246 problems are introduced; they are concerned with surveying land, proportions of millet and rice, mensurations in relation with engineering, city walls, rivers and so forth (Needham 1959: 24-26).

from age 13 (occasionally earlier) just as in Wenli Academy and would be bigger in scope such as the academies in Beijing. However, the academies visited in this research do not quite fit this attempted categorization: one academy offers education from kindergarten age (3/4) to secondary school age (15/16), another one from age 13 to age 23 – it is hard to describe a “model” version of study halls and academies. One study hall in Suzhou has five students and two teachers, another has 40 to 50 students and eight teachers. Many study halls receive students older than 13; they even accept students in their early twenties who want to engage in further studies or become a classics reading teacher. Numbers on each study hall and academy as provided in the annex<sup>68</sup> show the whole diversity of the facilities visited. Shenzhen Study Hall E lacks most basic information; the headmaster was reluctant to give any details about his facility and talked more about his ideals in education. Even though they did not contribute much content to this study, his case is crucial because it shows that ethnographic research on sensitive and personal matters has its limits.

#### 2.1.4 – PARENTS AND PRIVATE EDUCATORS AS MAIN DRIVERS IN CLASSICS READING EDUCATION

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Within the total of 27 facilities, 36 people have participated in semi-structured interviews. While all data gathered in the process of field research has been considered in the process of categorizing and coding the data during and after the actual field research, not all accounts and interviews are referred to in detail in this study. Xiamen Study Hall A was one of the first facilities visited. While the interviews were a good entry point into follow-up conversations, field observation and naturally occurring talk during the visits proved to deliver much more information for this study. Shenzhen Study Hall C is referred to as case as such only.<sup>69</sup> One interview in Wutongshan (WTS16007) started as a conversation and then turned into an interview. The interview was not recorded; information was fixed in form of notes. Two participants belong to a state-run academy in Xiamen (XM15003, XM15004); they fall out of the frame of private classics reading educators or parents who send their child to a private facility. Only one of the interviews (XM15003) is used in this study. One interviewee (SZ15006) is headmaster and teacher in a *sishu* which offers classes in the evenings and on weekends only. The remaining 33 interviewees belong to the three main target groups of headmasters, teachers, and parents, and are considered in the following overview of classics reading activists. Educators are those who run the study hall or academy (headmaster, as

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<sup>68</sup> See annex, Table 13, p. 311.

<sup>69</sup> XM15001, XM15002 and WTS16005 are not cited from their interview records.

translation of the term “tangzhu 堂主” which they use for this position, lit. “head of the hall”), teachers, and leading teachers who have a position in between the headmaster and teachers. They take over a leading position in the facility’s organization, especially in the absence of the headmaster, but are still required to act according to the headmasters’ prescriptions. One exception among the interviewees is the employee of *Dujing Baby* who fits none of these groups, but (1) he is well-versed in the mechanisms of classics reading education and (2) he became a father a few months after our conversation and was already preparing for his father’s role according to classics reading ideals.

In practice, the “roles” according to the three main groups can fall together. As mentioned earlier, teachers are occasionally also parents who either teach their own child or have it instructed in the study hall or academy where they work. Headmasters, too, can be parents – very often, parents initially just taught their own children and then extended into study halls and academies. If they would continue to teach, their roles would cover all three target groups of this research. In practice, most of the research participants had more than one role. 19 headmasters took part in the research, 17 of whom are also parents, in addition to eight teachers of whom four are parents and six people who are just parents (five mothers and one father). Only two of the headmasters (Suzhou Study Hall A, Beijing Study Hall) opened their study hall only for the sake of engaging in classics reading education without concerns for their own child since they had none at the time they founded their facility. When they were interviewed, however, they were parents, too, and educated their children according to classics reading ideals. Most of the teachers have children themselves; only four out of the 33 interviewees in the private classics reading facilities are childless. Living and learning, personal and work life are closely interwoven in classics reading facilities.

Most interviewees are born in the 70s (15 of 33) or 80s (5 of 33); only a few are older, being born in the 40s (1 of 33) or 60s (4 of 33).<sup>70</sup> One participant is younger and born in 1990. More than half of the research participants were in their 20s or 30s when the research for this study took place; they are university graduates, young parents, and young professionals. Some participants already had a few stations of work behind them when they settled in classics reading education. Many of them were formerly employed in the cultural and educational sectors, e.g. journalism, teaching (at public schools, universities, or in further training facilities), publishing, and promotion of classics reading education. Others have experience in banking, administration, running a business, or sales. The least related to classics reading education are teachers and headmasters from the fields of animal medicine, cosmetics, or

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<sup>70</sup> Seven interviewees did not state their date of birth.

plant genetics, but given that enthusiasm and the will to learn are valued more than university qualification in the classics reading movement, lateral entry is possible and very common.

The majority (27 out of 33) of classics reading educators and parents has a degree in higher education, most of them a bachelor's degree, and a few a master's degree and even a PhD (all in philosophy). Only a few (6 out of 33) have a vocational training or only a high school degree. One interviewee dropped out of school very early to become a soldier: Teacher D. And she is one of the major forces in pushing forward classics reading education as a wholesome system, having further developed prenatal and early childhood classics reading education. Her dream is to establish an alternative training system for Chinese people, being wholly based on the classics, a system one can be born into.<sup>71</sup> 13 headmasters have a BA degree, one has a MA degree, two have a PhD in philosophy, and four have no degrees. Five teachers have a BA degree, one has a MA degree, one has a PhD in philosophy, and one has no degree. Among the parents, two have a BA degree, one has a MA degree, and three have no degree in higher education. BA degrees are the most common among all research participants. Four interviewees are trained in the field of education. All interviewees went through China's public education system at least for a while.

The intertwining of formal education and family life (or family education) in classics reading facilities is quite high. 13 interviewees have one child, 18 have more than one child (four are childless of which one was a father-to-be), i.e. half of the interviewees have more than one child. The husband of the headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A is convinced that parents who have more than one child have thought about education a lot and were more likely to send their children to study halls and academies.<sup>72</sup> 30 of the 33 participants state that their partner works, and more than half of the partners working (17 out of 29) are employed in the same study hall, academy or classics reading business (e.g. *Dujing Baby*). 16 of the 33 interviewees both work in classics reading education and have their children educated in the same facility.<sup>73</sup> Parents, teachers and headmasters are not only concerned with the organizational matters of education but spend a lot of time on studying the classics, too. Reading the classics and engaging in a matching lifestyle dedicated to studies occupies most of their time.

In addition to the willingness to spend time and money, people are quite willing to move to other places to be able to send their child(ren) to the study hall or academy they

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<sup>71</sup> WTS16006.

<sup>72</sup> Conversation with headmaster's husband, Suzhou Study Hall A, November 13, 2015.

<sup>73</sup> In other cases, the employees might not yet have children, children are too young for education, or are already at university. Only in one case, the child deliberately decided against learning with the parents and sacrificing school life and meeting friends and stayed in her public school (SZ15007).

deliberately picked. Qufu Academy started in Shenzhen, and when the headmaster moved to Confucius' birthplace Qufu, many parents continued to send their children to the academy. Suzhou Study Hall A has students from distant provinces like Sichuan 四川; the leading teacher of Shenzhen Study Hall A sent her son and joined in later from Liaoning 辽宁; the leading teacher of Xiamen Study Hall B resettled from Wuxi 无锡 to Xiamen. Parents either make it possible to visit or rent a place close to the facility (the latter being very popular among parents in Beijing Academy A and B and the study halls in Shenzhen) or they move and join the facility as in the two cases just stated above. A Chinese mother from Germany went the longest way: married to a German, she raised their two children in northern Germany, but dissatisfaction with the German school system and the inefficiency of teaching and learning in the children's school paired with the wish to let her children learn something about their mother's culture made her take children off school (high school/ German "Gymnasium") for two years and settle in Taishun with them. She works as a volunteer teacher in Wenli Study Hall, and the children study the classics there. The classics reading movement sets people in motion not only spiritually and intellectually, but also physically: they actually move to another place to engage in another life(style).

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## 2.2. THE PERSPECTIVE OF UTOPIA

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Utopia as a term was coined by the Englishman Thomas More (1478–1535) in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the Age of Renaissance. Utopias came up in thought experiments, philosophy, and literary genres. However, they are also incentives for social and political movements (Gordin et al. 2010: 1; Winter 2006: 2). Behind utopian action stands the core belief that social action could eliminate problems, conflict and misery altogether to create a better world (Winter 2006: 3). Imaginations of a better world behind the concept of "utopia" as active within social and political movements should be distinguished between a form of utopia that is forced on people from above and a form of utopia that is developed by the people on grassroots level. Historian Jay M. Winter (2006: 4f., 208f.) speaks of "major utopian" projects founded on a totalitarian vision which does not know any limits on the path to implement the beneficent future; politicians like Adolf Hitler (strong Germany based on a pure German race) and Mao Zedong ("Great Leap Forward", 1958-1961, "Cultural Revolution", 1966-1976) took many lives to implement their ideologies among the people and conducted a state-led social engineering. "Minor utopias," on the other hand, are smaller in scale, pointed towards partial transformation, and do not aim to eliminate all social conflicts and obstacles. People sketch out a utopia based on the dream of liberation and freedom that differs from the world as it is

now and seek a convergence with it. Minor utopians rethink the nation state and its situation but do not negate it.

Utopias and dystopias are, according to Gordin et al. (2010: 3) unfashionable in “Western science”, however, as historically grounded analytical categories, they “promise great potential in reformulating the ways we conceptualize relationships between the past, the present, and the future” (Gordin et al. 2010: 2). Utopian projects show how historical actors understand their specific contemporary circumstances, how they interpret their historically developed presence under the perspective of a possible future – the conditions of the imaginability of a future are based on “localized historical moments” (Gordin et al. 2010: 2, 3, 4). Therefore, the utopian’s impression of the present circumstances cannot be regarded as coherent diagnosis of the society’s condition (Gordin et al. 2010: 5).

Utopia is a discourse in two contradictory parts. First, it is a narrative about discontinuity. It is a story through which men and women imagine a radical act of disjunction, enabling people, acting freely and in concert with others, to realize the creative potential imprisoned by the way we live now. But secondly, since the narrative is written by men and women rooted in contemporary conditions and language, it inevitably shows where they are, even as it describes where they want to be. Utopias force us to face the fact that we do not live there; we live here, and we cannot but use the language of the here and now in all our imaginaries. That is why the work of the imagination is such a powerful entry point into the historical contradictions of this (or any other) period. (Winter 2006: 3)

Utopian thinking interrogates established ways of thinking and acting, it interrogates their frontiers, and the analysis of utopian thinking supports an understanding of the mechanisms of how and why things change (Gordin et al. 2010: 6, 13). “Everywhere we turn, historical conditions continue to throw up utopias and dystopias as ways to shape, understand, and critique our contemporary world.” (Gordin et al. 2010: 13) Efforts to revitalize native and traditional culture after periods of war, oppression, and neglect for a better future can correlate with imaginations of a better future that touch utopia.

### 2.2.1 – UTOPIA AS METHOD

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Utopia as a theoretical lens supports the further abstraction of the categories that emerged from the data gathered in field research. As outlined by the sociologist Kathy Charmaz (2006: 178) in context of her constructive approach to grounded theory, the directions for theorization derive from interpretation of comparisons within the process of analysis, and not from external prescriptions. Successive levels of abstraction are at the core of a grounded theory analysis, and comparisons with other studies are of help in this regard: “situating grounded theories in their social, historical, local, and interactional contexts strengthens them.” (Charmaz 2006: 180) The grounded theory approach starts from data fragments to infer theoretical claim from them, it is fruitful for dealing with utopian thought which is also



scattered in data and bits of information and needs an open method to flexibly deal with them (Jameson 2010: 25; Strübing 2008: 14-16). This suits the interpretation of utopian thought which involves dealing with lots of fragments; it is a “detective work of a decipherment and a reading of utopian clues and traces in the landscape of the real; a theorization and interpretation of unconscious utopian investments in realities large or small, which may be far from utopian.” (Jameson 2010: 25) The utopian characteristics of classics reading education which slowly emerged in field research and analysis are best singled out by this grounded theory approach.

A closer look at the analytic handling of the data shows the gradual shaping of categories and concepts that would later link to grounded utopian movement theory. As Charmaz (2006: 46) points out: “Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding, you *define* what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means. The codes take form together as elements of a nascent theory that explains these data and directs further data-gathering.” The coding process is, thus, the key to develop data into theory. For this study, the detailed coding process started after the field research; however, topical frameworks started to evolve during field research and reflection sessions directly after interviews and observation. The process of writing clean copies of hand-written field notes set the interviews and reflections into perspective and was also part of the early framework development. The following paragraphs give a short overview of (a) the topics which developed during field research, (b) the development of the researcher’s perspective on the research sites, and (c) the detailed coding and category building process. All three steps played their role in the category formation which paved the way for a closer dialogue with grounded utopian movement theory.

*a. Capturing the main topics in field research*

Post-interviewing notes captured the main topics or concerns that came up during an interview. Directly after the interview and before one looks at the detailed transcription, one has enough information to summarize them and enough distance from the literal expressions to see the “big picture”. Out of these reflection processes grew a selection of the following topics and sub-topics:

- **Religion** (with sub-topics such as the function of classics in people’s lives; faith and spiritual guidance; ceremony and rites; prayers; self-cultivation)
- **Identity/ lifestyle** (with sub-topics such as values; knowledge systems; the classics reading circle and a feeling of belonging (identity); the individual; the body in terms of health, control over the body, clothing)

- **Nature and Surroundings** (with sub-topics such as the learning environment, local culture, the role of the rural, e.g. as retreat or place for an alternative society)
- **View/ Conception of History** (with sub-topics such as how to look at one's own tradition; role models in history; searching for the own roots; and establish a feeling of belonging (see also in 2.))
- **Family** (with sub-topics such as the concept of family and the role of the mother; family values; the background of parents; the role of children in the family)
- **Government** (with sub-topics such as its role (should it support or intervene) on local and central levels; the attitude opposing state education)
- **Individualization** (with sub-topics such as its relation to content of education and self-cultivation; educational choices by parents and people's roles in governing classics reading education)
- **Classics Reading Education** (with sub-topics such as related concepts and ideals, e.g. Wang Caigui's; Wang Caigui's role; the value of and trust in the classics)
- **Working in Study Halls and Academies** (with sub-topics such as the qualification and role of teachers and the question if people intend to simply make money with the new facilities)
- **Confucianism** [*Ruxue* 儒学] (with regard to the fact that classics reading education is more concerned with practice than with research on theory)
- **Involved People** (with sub-topics such as inclusion into and exclusion from the classics reading circle; self-help in terms of: people create new education as they are unsatisfied with what the state offers)
- **Education** (with sub-topics such as pluralism of educational forms; isolation and exclusion; dissatisfaction with public schools; the question of brain washing in education)
- **Language** (with sub-topics such as Literary Chinese (*wenyanwen* 文言文); communication with people outside of the classics reading circle; and the question if language environment shapes individual(ity))

This collection of topics grew over the time. It sometimes captured topics which were only relevant in one or two interviews, and is, thus, far from being comprehensive or structured. Terminology was not yet very precise and captured the topics only shortly in form of bullet-points. However, it showed where things were going, and was a tremendously helpful framework for the researcher: the *terra incognita* of the classics reading world slowly became graspable and understandable. The process of writing up field notes from participatory observation was an add-on for this process: hand-written field notes were written into digital

files with a chronological order of things and conversations happening. Photographs taken during field research were inserted into these files (1) to illustrate the notes and (2) to have the right context for certain photographs. At the same time, going through the experiences in the field again for writing them up and in relation to topical reflection of the interviews helped to find small cases in the data, i.e. see how topical bullets and field cases were related.

*b. An Interim Result: The Spatial Lens*

At a certain point during research, it became clearer and clearer that the *place* or *sites* where things were happening (the surroundings of the study halls and academies, but also the facilities as surroundings for learning and living) play a crucial role for people. Once having stepped into a classics reading facility, behavior and interaction between people were guided by their own set of rules, by daily rhythms, rituals, food habits etc. Many items that define a place as a *place* (e.g. social relations and spatial practice, narratives to give it a meaning, symbols to represent this meaning, see also Robertson 2010: 19-20) were quite peculiar. Study halls and academies viewed from a spatial perspective appeared to serve as:

- spaces of cultural production (where people develop new ways around what they perceive should be cherished as traditional culture),
- spaces of coping with the past, present and future (where memories of the past, perception of the present and responsibility for future generations showed their intertwining),
- spaces of spiritual sharing (where people engage in rituals together to find spiritual fulfilment and a space to put their minds at ease),
- spaces of learning (for children and adults, with regard to the classics),
- spaces of living (in a family-like manner, but without parents – which puts a question mark to underlying family ideals),
- spaces of working (where the institution of the teacher is in the foreground).

At this stage, first knots were bound between the topics which came up in the field (interviews, talks, observation) and the specific places where things happened, and topics were anchored (in action, spatial designs, the history of sites). This was a first skeleton for making sense of the surroundings in which the research took place.

*c. Coding the Data*

In the initial phase of detailed coding of the transcribed interview data, codes were applied very closely to the data: they either summed up **content** of what had been said (e.g. “moral decline of society”, “teaching methods of the past”, “negative examples from own history”, “revival of Chinese (educative) tradition”, “father’s role/ function”), stated the **attitude** with

which content was stated or verbally described (“passion for China’s history”, “proud of long history”, “trust in / fan of leader of academy or study hall”, “dissatisfaction with outcome of school or study time”), and rarely also referred to different **qualities of narratives** (“emotional experience”) and indicated the **action** (of speech) being done (“story about friends’ success”, “success story about (own) child”). Codes either referred to statements, units of meaning or a short paragraph of the interviewee’s narration. Singular codes are short and not too detailed to make them applicable to more than one interviewee (e.g. “teaching methods of the past” rather than, for example, “teaching methods in the Zhou dynasties”) to find overlapping topics in between the interviews.

The individual short codes were, in the process of ongoing data coding, subsumed under larger topics and themes which (1) took into consideration the context of the content within the interview and in between interviews, or (2) were developed as “headline” for singular codes. For example, (1) the code “father’s role/ function” came up within a narrative on prenatal and early childhood education which became to form the overarching topic under which other aspects such as “acoustic sensibility, acoustic effect”, “communication with the baby in the belly”, “creating silent babies” and many more subsumed. Prenatal and early childhood education as it is understood in the classics reading movement was a new topic to the researcher; as overarching category, it served well to provide an overview of the subtopics (sub-codes) related to the phenomenon and as referred to by the interviewees. All codes, being provided by different interviewees, assembled into an informative red thread on how to understand this new concept. Other examples of such categories facilitating understanding of new concepts are “*dujing* and the effect on the individual” with further specifications such as “*dujing* and the effect on the individual - condition of the mind” and “*dujing* and the effect on the individual – shaping one’s own path”.

“Headlining” proved to be useful for topics related to history: the code “passion for China’s history” is a small code which could, together with others like “destruction of classical culture”, “success of *sishu* education”, “tradition as obstacle for modernization”, “traditional culture was not accepted in this time” and others be subsumed under the broader topic of “China’s past/ history, tradition”. Such categories with a subsuming function helped to gain an overview of the basic concerns behind the detailed narratives of different interviewees and, thus, mark the overlaps between interviews. Other examples of such categories are “memories of one’s own past”, “parents, family” with further specifications such as “parents, family - child towards family” [meaning: child’s role within family and in relation to parents] and “parents, family - family as cell of care for children”. Initial codes changed in the process of further coding or got reassembled into different categories –

especially when new ones opened up. Early coding is more “provisional” (Charmaz 2006: 48) and becomes solid over time. At the later stages of coding, single codes were already existing and ready to be applied to data; categories that had been emerging all the way along were also there and data was directly subsumed via the codes.

The list of the overarching categories having emerged from the subsuming and abstracting process of structuring the codes reads as follows:

- Academies and study halls - educational ideals and practices
- Academies and study halls - places of social dreams
- Academies and study halls - ritual, regulated, structured actions - life and learning
- Academies and study halls - roles (teachers, students, headmasters, parents...)
- Academies and study halls - school life
- *Dujing* (tradition) circle, *dujing* activities
- *Dujing* (tradition) friends, *dujing* (tradition) circle
- *Dujing* and the effect on the individual
- *Dujing* and the effect on the individual - condition of the mind
- *Dujing* and the effect on the individual - shaping one’s own path
- Environment of or around the study halls and academies
- Good person as educative outcome
- Good person within a social network
- Knowledge and science vs. wisdom and emotions in the learning process
- Mainstream society / bad characteristics of today’s society in China
- Mainstream society / *sishu* and society
- Mainstream society / social development and the impact on the people
- Memories of one’s own past
- National Studies *guoxue*
- Parents, family
- Parents, family - child towards family
- Parents, family - family as cell of care for children
- Prenatal and early childhood education *taijiao*
- Public schools and state education
- Public schools and state education - *dujing* in public schools
- Public schools and state education - special items (e.g. quality education *suzhi jiaoyu*)
- Regular person, regular child
- Religion and spiritual aspirations

- Role of the government: *dujing* >> state
- Role of the government: state >> *dujing*
- The Sages
- Time (e.g. use of time, fate)
- Time - perception of time (e.g. waste of time, time in life passing by hastily)
- Time - time of reading classics (e.g. life-long learning, commitment for a longer period of time)
- Wang Caigui and his education
- Wang Caigui and his education - conformity with ideals?
- Wang Caigui and his education - motivational factors
- Wang Caigui and his education - teaching
- Western culture / tradition / influence
- Western culture / tradition / influence - benefit for the West (e.g. negative examples from Western history (need for moral / Confucian education))
- Western culture / tradition / influence - benefit from the West (e.g. studying abroad)

The codes subsumed under each of these categories are left out here since they are not crucial for explaining the process of further abstraction (some are mentioned in brackets to help make better sense of the categories themselves).

The categories as such are vessels that hold together coded content and that give structure to events and narratives in the field. Putting the categories in relation to each other makes them “speak to each other”, unveil tensions and carve out the story that connects the underlying concerns behind singular narratives, as a few examples shall highlight: The category “Mainstream society / bad characteristics of today’s society in China” has certain topical relations with codes in the category “Public schools and state education”.

*Selected examples (relation between singular codes and packages of codes):*

<b>Mainstream society / Bad Characteristics of Today’s Society in China</b>	<b>Public Schools and State Education</b>
corruption among cadres and officials	corruption among teachers in public schools
no cultural roots, no knowledge of own tradition ignorance	dissatisfaction with content of learning easy knowledge for living in normal society
moral decline of society chaotic society, pollution	teaching in public schools is meaningless grades-oriented learning
consumer oriented	education (just) to get a (good) job

Corruption as perceived social problem is an issue in both the category on mainstream society as well as in public education. Lack of knowledge on one's own tradition, consumer-oriented lifestyle, ignorance, moral decline of the society and a chaotic and polluted society on the one hand is mirrored in dissatisfaction with content of learning (where tradition and moral values could be anchored) which relates to statements that only easy knowledge for everyday life is gained (in grades-oriented learning processes) and education would just serve to find a job; teaching in public schools appears meaningless.

The story of these combined categories (A) is in tension with the categories

- Wang Caigui and his education – motivational factors,
- *Dujing* and the effect on the individual, and
- Good person as educative outcome (B):

Categories (A)	Codes (A)	Codes (B)	Categories (B)
<b>Mainstream society/ dad characteristics of today's society in China</b>	bad foundation in own upbringing	(concept for) basic education ( <i>qimeng jiaoyu</i> ) Confucian (ideal, idea, concept of) education	<b>Confucian culture and learning</b>
	moral decline of society	Confucian values impact / position of morality overcome the self ( <i>keji</i> ) self-cultivation effect of good person / junzi on society / surrounding Shield against bad influence social harmony / harmonious interaction	<b>Good person as educative outcome; Good person within a social network</b>
	social relations, positions, values remain unclear or are not good enough	Confucian (inspired) hierarchy, social relations	<b>Confucian culture and learning</b>
<b>Public schools and state</b>	no cultural roots, no knowledge of own tradition easy knowledge for living in normal	passion for traditional culture suitable for human nature / developing human nature	<b>Wang Caigui and his education –</b>

<b>education</b>	society education (just) to get a (good) job		<b>motivational factors</b>
	dissatisfaction with the system of public / national education	Wang Caigui Study Hall System	
	teaching in public schools is meaningless	inspiration / driving force for people responsibility for the next generation	

Being dissatisfied with one’s own upbringing, (the) Confucian (ideal, idea, concept of) education and its inherent concept of basic education (*qimeng jiaoyu*) appear as resources to make improvements. The perceived moral decline of society is met with Confucian values; morality is of importance; people need to overcome and cultivate themselves – a good person influences the whole society, has inherent shields against bad influence, and social harmony and harmonious interaction would be at the center of a well-regulated society. While social relations, positions and values remain unclear or are not good enough, Confucian (inspired) hierarchy and related social relations are a resource to create a new structure in times of uncertainty and lack of structure. Society’s lack of cultural roots and knowledge of the own tradition has no place in the activists’ passion for traditional culture. Public education, with a focus on easy knowledge for living in society today and education with the goal to “just” get a job, is contrasted with Wang’s educational approach which is seen as suitable for (developing) human nature. Dissatisfaction with the system of public education is met with a new educational system – Wang Caigui’s Study Hall System. Whereas teaching in public schools is seen as meaningless, Wang Caigui appears as an inspiration or driving force for people to engage in education and take over responsibility for the next generation. This process of viewing categories and codes in relation is similar to axial coding (Charmaz 2006: 60ff.) with the difference that it is not about categories and subcategories, but about the dialogue between categories and the tensions among categories as indicated along the comparison of codes. Those tensions described in the table above were crucial for the development of chapter 3. *Dynamics Towards Classics Reading Education: Confucian Visions in Response to Social Problems*, as the titles of the subchapters also show:

3.1. *Shortcomings of China’s Society and Imaginaries of a New Confucian-Based Society*

3.2. *Disillusion over Public Education and the Turn to Classics Reading Education.*



Categories being viewed together, in comparison and in mutual dynamics to each other, was one way to carve out the lines for further theorization; putting categories in relation to cases or actions noted down in participant observation was another. The code “Academies and Study Halls – ritual, regulated, structured actions – life and learning” refers to spatial practice (which is also shown by cases and illustrated by photographs); it is in close relation with narratives in the category “Religion and Spiritual Aspirations”. This is how the chapter 5.4. *Intersections of Rules and Ritual: The Spiritual Dimension of Life in Study Halls and Academies* took shape. Furthermore, it once again set the focus on the spatial component, the importance of places, the grounds where living and learning are anchored. At this point in the coding process, the frameworks developed during field research gained a second purpose: topics from interview reflections being put together with the spatial reflections in the field and the categories from the detailed coding would set things in broader perspective:

<b>Topics from Interview Reflection</b>	<b>Spatial Reflection of Research Site</b>	<b>Overarching Categories from Coding Process</b>
5. Family	space of living	Academies and Study Halls - roles (Teachers, students, headmasters, parents...)
		Parents, family
		Parents, Family - Child towards Family
		Parents, Family - Family as Cell of Care for Children

Family appeared as important topic quite early. Study halls and academies are places where students and teachers live together – how is this space of living conceptualized and framed? The roles of teachers, parents, headmasters, students and family concepts as singled out in the coding process could give some answers – which would find entrance into chapter 4.2. *Parental Ideals in Classics Reading Facilities and the Impact of Shifting Family Values and Structures*.

Last but not least: the detailed coding process revealed three categories that are explicitly concerned with time: “time” (e.g. use of time, fate); “time as perception of time” (e.g. waste of time, time in life passing by hastily); and “time as time of reading the classics” (e.g. life-long learning, commitment for a longer period of time). Taking other time-related categories such as history, view on history, memories of one’s own past, and hopes for the future into account, there is quite a strong emphasis on different strings of time. This opened the field for dialogue with the category of utopia – which emerged at the last stage out of the interplay

between intermediate categories from coding, field research frameworks and cases as noted down in field notes. In combination with the focus on place (or physical space) as mentioned above, concepts and structure of the *grounded utopian movement* theory were met.

Further abstraction of the theory emerging from grounded theory analysis leads to proximity to *general* theories, as Charmaz (2006: 180) argues: “The generality arises here from scrutinizing numerous particulars and after developing a substantive theory may include analyzing and conceptualizing the results of multiple studies to construct a formal theory.” The emerging theory of the classics reading (education) movement as grounded utopian movement might even allow for further generalization. Proximity of the classics reading movement to other movements bearing similar characteristics allows for a broader view on the underpinning tensions of social change and transformation of social orders which are not only existing in Chinese society. In the last chapter of this study, for example, the Gülen movement in Turkey which also suits a few GUM characteristics is chosen to give an outlook on utopian thought beyond China’s national borders.

### 2.2.2 – GROUNDED UTOPIAN MOVEMENTS

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The anthropologists Charles Price, Donald Nonini and Erich Fox Tree (2016: 134-138) have studied social movements in the Americas, such as Ghost Dance (1889-1920 in the Great Basin and Great Plains in the United States of America), Rastafari (emerging in Jamaica in the 1930s), and the Maya Movement (Guatemala in the 1980s). Ghost Dance refers to a practice of Native Americans in North America who engaged in trance dancing with the goal to enter a new world where they could happily reunite with their ancestors. In their ideal world, there was no space for the white man who invaded their lands. Rastafari activism consists in scattered clusters of people who imagine a better world as free of oppression which was present in a past of slavery and racism:

Ritual gathering focused on extinguishing evil, deep introspection and contemplation, spiritual discipline, discourses of communalism, and rejection of status quo trappings are primary tactics – not membership drives, fund raisers or analyses of political opportunities. The key resources involved are not buildings, elites and funds, but cultural resources and ideologies around which movement commitment is built. (Price et al. 2016: 137)

While the Rastafari do not seek representation in parliament, the Maya Movement of Guatemala is striving for acknowledgement of their indigenous culture, identity and languages, especially in form of political and academic participation. Today’s Maya activism is directly related to the historical caesura that came along with imperial invaders:

Contemporary Maya activism has been variously portrayed as a new social movement, an identity movement, a civil rights struggle, and most generally, as a ‘revitalization movement.’ Yet ask

contemporary Maya activists when the Maya Movement began, and many answer that it began in 1492. For many Mayas, cultural activism in Guatemala, Mexico and the United States since the 1980s is only the 'Maya Movement of today,' the most recent phase of a centuries-long struggle for autonomy and cultural survival. (Price et al. 2016: 138-139)

The historical contexts of these movements have in common that ruptures and cultural oppression in the past resulted in imaginaries of a better world or ideal future in which formerly oppressed cultural elements could be active and appreciated again. European colonial rule brought a period of turbulence followed by resurrection and restoration. State formation and nation building after colonial rule faced a merge or even a clash of the own or "indigenous" (social, political, and cultural) elements that preceded foreign rule and "foreign" elements that were imported by European rulers (Price et al. 2016: 132). Such movements of revitalistic or nativistic character are, according to Price et al. (2016: 128), a special form of social movements that make innovative use of cultural resources (e.g. religious beliefs) to create new cultural formations and meanings as a response to exterior threat to what is perceived one's original cultural foundation. A tight hold on what people believe to be "original" culture often results in them evolving utopian aspirations. Movements with utopian aspirations furnished with dreams of the past have long been neglected in scholarly studies as "archaic cults"; such a perspective denied their relation to modernist institutions and processes of modernization. The desire of searching for an ideal place is "generated under conditions of imperial duress which threaten an entire cultural group, people or community" (Price et al. 2016: 134); action is therefore propelled by present perception of an oppressive past or presently felt oppression (Price et al. 2016: 145-146).

Utopian search and activity are not limited to a certain area; it can be cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, or political action. Although driven by utopian images and imaginations, the movements are characterized as "grounded," as pinned down to "real" ground:

*By grounded* we mean that the identities, values, and imaginative dimensions of utopia are culturally focused on real places, embodied by living people, informed by past lifeways, and constructed and maintained through quotidian interactions and valued practices that connect the members of a community, even if it is a diasporic one. (Price et al. 2016: 128-129)

Given that they seek to establish alternative realities, Price et al. (2016: 145 f.) suggest understanding grounded utopian movements (GUMs) in their own rationalities. Past experience of the people behind the movement are crucial to understand their action.

The perspective of the grounded utopian movement was brought up by the authors to criticize and complement the theory of new social movements that only focused on contexts of the post-industrial Western Europe and North America (Pall 2013: 37; Price et al. 2016: 130) and therefore lack of explanatory basis for movements outside of this regional scope:

[T]he dominant approaches to social movements give central priority to and take for granted the modern nation-state and capitalist markets as either the objects of strategic contention by social movements or as the fields of contention within which social movements arise and develop. In this sense, social movement political practice, organization, and mobilization are assumed to be instrumentally oriented toward achieving change transforming capitalism or the formal political institutions situated within the 'container' of the nation-state. (Price et al. 2016: 130)

Activists in newly emerging social movement would, thus, not seek for recognition of governmental or capitalist institutions. Price et al. (2016: 130) argue that GUMs “seek to build a more satisfying society by pursuing alternative cultural practices in the face of (and as a cushion against) repressive state actions and capitalist exploitation.” GUMs seek to establish alternative realities that go beyond the scope of governmental and capitalist institutions, and they do so by reclaiming their traditional heritage with respect to former or current oppression, e.g. empire-building, colonization, or segregation. The emerge of utopias is, as Winter (2006: 5) argues, preceded by upheavals and war, and the scope of GUMs suits Winter’s (2006: 4f., 208f.) concept of “minor utopian projects”. Furthermore, the claim on traditional heritage emerges in context of responding to a novel situation in the present with which actors are dissatisfied. In the light of Hobsbawm’s (1983: 2) *created traditions*, such a claim suggests that we are rather dealing with a tradition constructed for a certain present purpose, as a product of the current situation, than with an original piece of the past that is been reused. GUMs in their activities are reclaiming the past for a novel purpose and even enrich them with an imagination of a (better) future.

Apart from the obvious elements of being “grounded” and “utopian,” Price et al. (2016: 145-149) ascribe the following characteristics to GUMs: they are amorphously structured and can therefore act spontaneously which makes the movements difficult to grasp. Occasionally, the movement might appear ephemeral, small, localized, and it might be judged that the movement is only recently emerged, fluctuant in its organization, and therefore vulnerable so that it might perish soon. However, Price et al. warn against such evaluation; a fluid social formation could be a germ for long-lasting movement activity; short movements might be part of a broader movement simmering below the surface.

GUMs may be here today and gone tomorrow, only to return another day. When a particular GUM is not visibly active, it may be going through a period of quiet self-maintenance, or it may have in fact disintegrated as a movement. Only careful diachronic investigation can ascertain which. (Price et al. 2016: 149)

Hierarchies in GUMs do not need to be solid and are labelled as “heterarchical” (Price et al. 2016: 146) Charismatic leaders and categories of social order might be existent, but not in all forms of interaction. Networking as social interaction is crucial for GUMs to promote group solidarity (Price et al. 2016: 146). The classics reading movement around Wang Caigui’s

classics reading education shares a lot with the structure of GUMs, especially in the historical background of ruptures and upheavals that were caused by foreign influence into state matters and affect nation building in the specific country and in the dynamics of creating traditions – or: a new traditional lifestyle – to cope with the present.<sup>74</sup>

### 2.2.3 – THE CLASSICS READING MOVEMENT AS GROUNDED UTOPIAN MOVEMENT

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A traditional simple way of life that is not occupied by consumption, technology, and the media, but by reading, appreciation of beauty and nature, regulated by one's own values, Confucian values of social interaction, is embraced by those who engage in classics reading education. Imaginations of a harmonious society rooted in Chinese values and worldviews stand at the end of studying the Chinese classics. Western classics such as the Bible and Shakespeare's works are seen as preparatory tools for harmonious interaction with other cultures in the world and the end of war.<sup>75</sup> Their common set of mind brings them together as a small diasporic community, the classics reading circle (*dujing quan* 读经圈<sup>76</sup>), in the classics reading world (*dujingjie* 读经界<sup>77</sup>). Networking among the activists to share experience and expertise is highly involved which also helped the author to contact people in the field. The common ideal of a better future society generated through Confucian education is drawn into real educational space, into classroom action of reciting the classics and training students in moral discipline. Even spatial features, such as choice of place for the respective classics reading facility or their interior design, is influenced by the visions which educators strive to implement through their approaches. Intertwining of ideal spatial creation and ideals of education as implemented in practice are the key to understand classics reading education practice.

Educative projects in the context of the classics reading movement are scattered over China. GUMs are movements which are fluid in character; they are occasionally activated in

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<sup>74</sup> It would lead too far away from the actual focus of this study to analyse this in detail, but it might be worth mentioning that only recently, a whole volume of *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* (Vol. 25, No. 2) has been published on the topic of youth, subjectivity and Utopia in the Global South, including China. Similar current social phenomena in a certain area might have emerged from similar historical fates; historical caesuras are still visible and experiencable among today's youths (Salemink et.al. 2018: 125-139). In the same logic, children who go through classics reading education today do so as part of the consequences of China's chaotic past.

<sup>75</sup> TS15001.

<sup>76</sup> Conversation with staff members of *Dujing Magazine* (at that time affiliated to Suzhou Study Hall A), November 12, 2015; SZ15007.

<sup>77</sup> This term is used frequently by Wang Caigui and his close colleagues.

their network structure, and occasionally not. Furthermore, activities in different places are not uniform simply because they are all classics reading activities. Many study halls and academies operate strictly according to Wang Caigui's theory on classics reading education which requires a high level of dedication to studying: children need to study the classics for at least eight hours each day. Additional subjects of the curriculum such as calligraphy and classical music instruments (e.g. the Qin 琴) should only be offered after the learner has reached the primary goal of having learnt 300,000 characters of Chinese and English language.<sup>78</sup> Wang's teaching approach is called "honest and large quantity classics reading" (*laoshi daliang dujing* 老实大量读经)<sup>79</sup> or "pure classics reading" (*chun dujing* 纯读经)<sup>80</sup> amongst people in the field. The characterization of "honest" and "pure" studying resembles the essential and original character of the education and a nativistic character of Wang's approach. The latter is widely acknowledged in the field of classics reading education and implemented, *grounded*, in study halls and academies.

Within the process of grounding, several headmasters altered his original thought into an approach that seemed more appealing to them according to their own educational, ethical, and religious ideas – while still appreciating the charisma of Wang as a leading head in classics reading education. For example, Xiamen Study Hall A and Shenzhen Study Hall C are run by Buddhist headmasters who also share their knowledge on Buddhism with their students and integrate exercises such as meditation (*jingzuo* 静坐) into the school day. Shenzhen Study Hall C engages, on top of the Confucian classics, in the reading of Buddhist classics (*Fojing* 佛经) in the way monks would recite them: in joint humming. Xiamen Study Hall B is focused on children age three to seven; teachers take the liberty to play a lot in between the classics reading parts.<sup>81</sup> With such diverse and subjective focuses, the classics reading movement is in no terms a solid and easily graspable movement but appears in the amorphous shape of the GUMs described by Price et al. (2016).

Oppression, upheavals, wars, and ruptures in history as drivers for the emerge of utopian thinking plays a role in the Chinese case, too. The necessity to revive Confucian tradition within classics reading education and make it approachable for everybody in China has a solid

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<sup>78</sup> Nobody in the field could explain what the term "character" (*zi* 字) would refer to in English language which consists in letters (*zimu* 字母), not characters. The best guess would be "words" (*ci* 词), because children have to learn 100,000 English "characters" which cannot be the 26 letters of the alphabet.

<sup>79</sup> SZ15004.

Variations of this ideal are possible; Suzhou Study Hall B decided to leave out the large quantity and chose an "only" honest classics reading (*laoshi dujing* 老实读经) approach; SZ15007.

<sup>80</sup> PK16004, TS15001; see also SH16001.

<sup>81</sup> Field observations: Xiamen Study Hall A, October 2015; Xiamen Study Hall B, October 2015; Shenzhen Study Hall C, March 2016.

ground within historical events of the last 100 years in China that came with drastic incisions that were chronologically close together. Although China was never under colonial rule,<sup>82</sup> China's soil sporadically came under foreign control in the imperialistic age in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Opium Wars (1839-1842; 1856-1860) ended in treaties that granted foreign powers to be treated under their own law (extraterritoriality) and conduct trade at fourteen treaty ports without having to act under Chinese jurisdiction. German diplomat and author Konrad Seitz (2000: 130) describes the following period from 1861 to the establishment of the PR China in 1949 as the "long process of dying of a great culture." In 1842, the Chinese lost the first Opium War against Great Britain, the second against Great Britain and France in 1860; in 1885, China was defeated by France (and lost Annam which was part of French Indochina from 1887 to 1954) and in 1895 by Japan. This was especially humiliating because it showed that even Japan, a former satellite state of China, was stronger than China (especially in terms of military technology).

Sequential defeats in wars came along with (and were also result of) Chinese inferiority in terms of practical (technological) knowledge. The aftermath of the Opium Wars led to the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861-1895) that aimed at acquiring knowledge on superior Western technology to become stronger; Western engineers were employees, shipyards and weapons factories were built, schools with technological focuses and translation offices were opened (Seitz 2000: 130-133). Despite these efforts, China suffered the mentioned defeat by Japan in 1895. Another wave of reformatory attempts followed: The Hundred Days' Reform (1898) that was propelled by nationalistic thought and aimed at saving the Chinese nation and culture in the face of imperial penetration into Chinese lands and minds. After 100 days, the reform was stopped by Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧 (1835-1908, grand aunt of the last emperor of China). After a short time though, the imperial court around the emperor initiated reforms again, trying to save the dynasty. Within the reform process of the education system, imperial examinations were abolished in 1905. This marked the end of the Confucian education that had been the constant foundation for training Chinese officials and creating scholars for many centuries (in a systematic manner at least since Song dynasty (960-1279). New intellectuals took the place of Confucian scholars who were open for all kinds of foreign influences; they specialized in new subjects such as natural sciences, engineering, and management (Seitz 2000: 135-139).

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<sup>82</sup> Asia expert Oskar Weggel (2000: 154) refers to China as "semi-colonial" country. Whether one approves of the accuracy of the term for the political conditions in China or not, it indicates that foreign power was there, that it was very present in making claims, and what is even more important: it drove the Chinese to make huge changes in their intellectual world and their educational system – which again influenced their intellectual world.

Defeats and shortcomings at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have constantly been answered with reforms and movements that aimed at restructuring, reshaping, and repowering the Chinese nation in the area where a lack of something had been detected. The ruptures and changes within China's intellectual world and educational systems have already been mentioned in the introduction. American and Soviet models shaped the form for education while Western thought and socialist subjects alternated to occupy the curriculum for a certain period of time. The May Fourth Era marked a serious struggle of Chinese intellectuals with their own tradition and the adoption of new ideas from foreign and former imperialistic powers. Changes came with mixed aims of modernization, adoption of ideology, and dealing with the past – educational reform at the end of Qing dynasty, as just mentioned, was a response to perceived backwardness in comparison with the Japanese facing defeat in war in 1895. The Cultural Revolution (1966-76) with its cultural destruction left China with a “tabula rasa” (Seitz 2000: 145). Classics reading education is a measurement that can fill the blank spots that have opened in cultural identity and the lost touch with tradition with new hope and ideals.

The Danish ethnographers Susanne Bregnbæk and Mikkel Bunkenborg (2017) have published a whole ethnographic study on the tensions between lack and emptiness in today's society in China which is historically rooted and comes along with a lot of uncertainty, anxiety, and disorientation (or: lack of orientation) in life.

The societal transformations of the post-Mao era in China have been accompanied by increasing anxiety about the quality, authenticity and value of people, goods and words. While China no longer suffers the general lack of vitality and modernity that once made the country appear to be ‘the sick man of Asia,’ a century of political and economic sea changes has produced more specific states of lack and uncertainty as to what is true, beautiful and good. (Bregnbæk / Bunkenborg 2017: 1)

On the one end, the state started a discourse to shape the population's quality from above; Hu Jintao aimed at a “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) while Xi Jinping brought the “Chinese dream” (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦) on the national agenda – topics that also appear in the context of Confucian revival. Such slogans draw images in opposition of social reality (Bregnbæk / Bunkenborg 2017: 1-2) – rich and vivid imaginaries which could also have an aftertaste of utopian visions. On the other end, people face difficulties in everyday life, in housing, in self-definition and identity, and in finding moral standards. A spiritual and moral vacuum in Chinese society has been “diagnosed” as being there since Mao's times. Narratives about uncivil individuals and subjectivities without moral consistency have grown large, and people are on the rise into private journeys towards new morality, new moral values, new sources of identity and self-value. The outside world is perceived as meaningless, immoral, and/or empty (Bregnbæk / Bunkenborg 2017: 1; 4).



Emptiness and lack are read by Bregnbæk and Bunkenborg (2017: 5-6) as the first step beyond nothingness: something that is characterized as empty could also be full, it might be regarded as an emptiness that *should* even be full. Something is out of place, something that could (should) be localized within the emptiness is missing – it must have been there before. Being dissatisfied with the feeling of lack and emptiness drives people into a productive state from which they hope to gain the result of filling the blank spots. In the case of classics reading education, a whole educational instrument has been developed to work on the (moral) quality of the whole society, starting by a few children and parents. The emergent utopian character of the movement with all its rich future social visions becomes a bit clearer in the light of emptiness as introduced by Bregnbæk and Bunkenborg.

One specific case study in the light of filling emptiness has very close overlaps with the classics reading movement: the Han clothing movement (*Hanfu yundong* 汉服运动) as researched by the Australian-based sinologist Kevin Carrico (2017). Young people in urban China participate in this Han ethnicity focused nationalist movement that emerged in the past decade with the aim to revitalize the Han nationality by wearing the right clothes – the traditional Han garments *Hanfu*. Activists believe in conspiracies by the Manchu against the Han, i.e. in form of replacing correct Han garments with barbarian Manchu clothes such as the typical Qipao 旗袍 or the equestrian vest Magua 马褂 (Carrico 2017: 85–87). While in the Mao era, Manchus are believed to have been finally defeated, activists circulate conspiracy theories on the internet claiming that after 1978, the government was infiltrated again by Manchus and the one-child policy must have been implemented by a descendant of a Manchu with the aim to destroy the Han ethnicity (Carrico 2017: 89, 97).

In its own self-description, the Han Clothing Movement is dedicated to popularizing a traditional uniform for the Han nationality, along with the promotion of ritual, etiquette and Confucianist education, all directed towards the goal of restoring the Han nationality and its Chinese nation to their imagined past glory. It is a movement structured around and intertwined with identity, represented, stabilized and fulfilled through these various cultural practices. (Carrico 2017: 87)

Confucian education is important for Han Clothing Movement activists, and vice versa, Han clothing is also a topic among classics reading educators. A headmaster in Suzhou got in contact with classics reading education when she encountered the new value of Han clothes and started to understand that from Qing dynasty onwards, the Manchu dynasty, Chinese “original” culture started to decline. Both movements are born from caesuras in history, disillusion towards society and government, a perceived emptiness and meaninglessness, and the aim to fill the gaps with something from what they consider is (or: should be) their own culture.

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### 2.3. UTOPIAN CHARACTERISTICS OF WANG CAIGUI'S THEORY ON CLASSICS READING EDUCATION

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Apart from the characteristics of the movement, utopian elements also lie within the theory that shapes classic reading pedagogy, lifestyle and ideals. Wang Caigui set the impetus for the movement in 1994; he has written most of the literature on this movement, and all people in the field know his theories – some more, some less. Even though not everybody agrees with his standing, his theory is an important starting point for activists to engage in classics reading education. Wang's string of thought is therefore taken as basis for lining out the utopian characteristics of classics reading theory as such: Wang Caigui aims at reactivating traditional education and Confucian values for an idealized harmonious social interaction in a better future Chinese society. When he was about 16 or 17 years old, the wish to teach Chinese classics came up. At that time, he states, Chinese people had stopped to read the classics for over 80 years already. He describes this as a huge mistake that arose from foreign influence: foreign countries had already stopped to read their own classics, and China learnt to push aside her own tradition from the foreigners in a time in which foreign thought ruled in China.<sup>83</sup> In this course, Wang criticizes the governmental decision in 1920 to remove the Chinese classics from the national curriculum.<sup>84</sup> His approach to revive classical education anchors in a time when foreign occupation had been in the foreground and oppressed this education.

Wang further claims that after this decision, the Chinese education system drifted towards “American utilitarianism,” an approach that would see the purpose of education in being prepared (only) for the practical side of life. Wang traces this approach back to the American educational reformer John Dewey (1859-1952):<sup>85</sup> children were required to learn each topic from simple to complex, based on the idea that this meant to follow the development of the

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<sup>83</sup> TS15001.

<sup>84</sup> See also Wang n.d. a: 8.

The date which Wang refers to is not quite correct. In 1912, the Republican government decreed already to reform the education system towards modernity and progressivism; Chinese classics were removed from the curriculum and “Western subjects” (e.g. natural sciences) were integrated into it. In 1922, it was then decided to restructure the whole educational system according to the American model: six years of elementary schooling (with a basic junior (4 years) and a senior more complex level (2 years); Pepper 1996: 61-62).

<sup>85</sup> John Dewey visited China from May 1919 to July 1921, starting his two-year stay right within the upheavals of the May Fourth Movement. Numerous speeches on his educational concepts and close interchange with influential Chinese intellectuals paved the way for American education in China. His chief disciple was Dr. Hu Shi, a May Fourth intellectual who was highly critical towards the usage of Confucian classics in Chinese education. Hu saw China's way to a modern era in “Western” education (Wang 2007: 1-3). In talks and speeches in 1921, Dewey stated that a classical education which focused on values such as filial piety (*xiao*) and obedience nurtured passivity, and even though it could bring about long-lasting and stable characters and behavior, there was no ground for spontaneous morality and flexible action that met with society's current or situative needs (Wang 2007: 25).

abilities of the children. Wang is convinced that the outcome of such an educational approach was very weak because this way, every child would only learn what it was able to understand now and gain knowledge which was needed for present practical concerns, with no regards to the future. Dewey's approach would not teach anything useful for life (on the long run). Wang considers his own approach with a focus on transmitting the wisdom of the sages to children as most useful and fruitful. The learner would absorb content that cultivated her/his natural disposition, aesthetic sensation, and knowledge. Returning to the Confucian classics could be a measurement to repair what had been damaged in the course of history under foreign influence. With the establishment of traditionally oriented study halls and academies, Wang hopes to train a new generation of Confucian oriented and morally upright gentlemen (*junzi*) as germ cell for a better society (Billioud / Thoraval 2008: 100; Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 44f.).

We need to reverse time, we need to transform this age. How do we do that? Actually, we don't transform it directly and do the opposite of how it is, but we let time go back to peace and impartiality, return to impartiality. You have to take the middle [moderate] path, and you cannot claim things from hearsay because you don't have any knowledge. So I also don't approve of... of course, I am opposed to the May Fourth Movement, but I also don't want to go back to tradition completely. Of course I am against Westernization, but I also don't completely reject Western knowledge; I still learn Western knowledge, it's like that. Very liberal, very moderate and impartial, not tending to a certain side, like this, it is this attitude. In the process of becoming a [good] person, we need to have this attitude, and think about having such an attitude. I want to educate talented people like this, I want to educate a few thousand or a few ten thousand of such people, and they need to walk into the world, and this way, they could influence the whole world.<sup>86</sup> (Wang Caigui)

Turning back time and making things right again for future China is the utmost goal; making the whole world a better place is a subordinate goal. Wang's statement shows a clear intertwining of the past (where failures and mistakes happened) with a possible future that can be reached through present transformation enhanced by the right kind of people that would emerge from his education.

Correction of historical mistakes is done via education. Wang considers Chinese classics to be most suitable for a child's education because they were books of the highest value which contained the essence of Chinese culture and ethics as well as common rules for a person's life (Wang n.d. a: 11). Cultures everywhere had their own classics, their own books of highest values, which could be agreed upon to be the most important works of that culture. Their value would be determined without objective criteria but rather based on agreement *ad*

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<sup>86</sup> “我们现在是要反时代，是要改造时代。那么改造时代，其实改造时代不是直接的，直接的跟他相反，而是使时代归于和平中正，归于中正，你要走中正的路，不能因为没有学问道听途说，所以我，我也，我也不是赞同，当然我是反对五四，但是我也不是完全回归传统，我当然反对西化，但我也并不完全排斥西方学问，我还是要学习西方学问，就这样。就是很大方，很中正，不偏不倚，这样，有这样的态度，我们做人要有这样的态度，思考有这样的态度。我要培养一批这样的人才，要培养几千几万个这样的人，要他走向全世界，这样他就可以影响全世界。” (TS15001)

*personam*: if all intellectuals throughout history would agree that a certain work was a classic (*lishi shang suoyou zhishi fenzi gongren de 'jingshu'* 历史上所有知识分子公认的‘经书’, Wang Caigui 2009: 5), then it was a classic. Apart from the Confucian canon, the Bible and Shakespeare’s work (sonnets and the *Midsummer Night’s Dream*) are part of the canon of classics in the context of classics reading education. Shakespeare is acknowledged as important writer, thinker and philosopher in the European renaissance. A child is believed to be able to absorb contents of a certain culture through corresponding language. In this logic, a child could enter European Renaissance via Shakespeare’s English. The European Renaissance is regarded as crucial pivot point in European history that navigated European culture out of the Middle Age into a time of insights and enlightenments. The Bible is considered as the ground for European or Western ethics. Acquiring Shakespearean English and reading the Bible is therefore regarded as basis for understanding Western culture.<sup>87</sup> In his own academy, Wang aims at teaching works in all major languages: Sanskrit, Latin and Greek as classical Western complements to classical Chinese and on top of that, English, German and French as important languages for today’s world and preparation for intercultural dialogue.<sup>88</sup> Wang Caigui wishes to base intercultural exchange in a globalized and modern world on the classical works of each culture. He welcomes “the classical West” but rejects Dewey’s educational theory and consumerism from the modern and contemporary “West”. Foreign influence is only allowed if it plays along Wang’s rules.

Accumulation of the contents of the classics (both English and Chinese) happens in a determined scheme. Wang is convinced that a human being has two major learning abilities: (1) the ability to memorize (*jiyili* 记忆力) and (2) the ability to understand and comprehend (*lijieli* 理解力). Until age three, a child would slowly develop the ability to memorize and between three and six, it would develop even faster. Between ages six and thirteen, Wang localizes the “golden years” (*huangjin shidai* 黄金时代) of memorization during which it should practice frequent rhythmic and fast recitation (*songdu* 诵读). After the age of 13, memorization abilities decreased while the capacities for understanding would increase (Wang n.d. a: 21; Wang Caigui 2009: 16). With a constant challenge to their comprehension, their ability to understand would be constantly trained and the child would have the possibility to learn thousands of useful characters in a period that was “naturally” made for such learning (Wang n.d. a: 19). Wang claims that 50% of the children who went through one

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<sup>87</sup> Wang n.d. a: 25-26; TS15001.

<sup>88</sup> TS15001. In 2015, readings in Sanskrit were already established as warm-up reading practice in the morning in Wenli Academy. The German husband of a Chinese teacher occasionally visited to teach German. Wang also already hosted guests from an Italian academy where everybody only speaks Latin (see chapter 7).

to 1.5 years of classics reading teaching were able to only look at things once and know it by heart right away (“*guo mu bu wang* 过目不忘”, Wang n.d. a: 22).

Wang does not state any scientific sources for these numbers, but Billioud and Thoraval (2015: 86–89) have traced Wang’s periodization to educational theory in Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties: Ming-Qing scholar Lu Shiyi 陆世仪 (1611-1672) holds the view that the years before puberty are best for learning because children are not troubled by sexual emotions. Ming dynasty author and official Xie Zhaozhe 谢肇淞 (1567-1624) claims that rote learning is important to the learning process while Qing literate Wang Yun 王筠 (1764-1854) doubts this and adds that learning focus on comprehension. Yuan dynasty Neo-Confucian scholar Cheng Duanli 程端礼 (1271-1345) advocated reading of the original text versions of the “Four Books” and “Five Classics” and suggested to cast aside the mass of commentaries to the originals that have accumulated over centuries. Reading the classics today is accompanied by learning rites such as dressing neatly, greeting adults with a bow and so forth, a practice which is inspired by Confucian scholars as Zhu Xi (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 89). Having developed into an adult based on the recitation of Confucian classics, Wang claims, people would at least not turn into violent extremists (*baoli fenzi* 暴力分子); they would have a basic standard for action in their lives, and only based on the classics, people could change the world (*shijie cai neng gaibian* 世界才能改变).<sup>89</sup>

Contact with the classics should start as early as possible and can begin with *listening* to the classics even before the age of three. Both reading and listening was important in reading the classics, and with early listening to the classics, a child could already grasp basic words and sentence structures before it would start to actively and accurately use a language; that was true for Chinese as well as for foreign languages acquired through reading the classics (Wang n.d. b: 45). While Wang Caigui’s assistant claims that Wang had already covered each development stage of a human being with his educational approach, a female headmaster of a study hall in Shenzhen, Teacher D, is known for having developed a prenatal and early childhood classics reading approach. In a company affiliated with her study hall called *Dujing Baby* she sells equipment for this approach. It is basically oriented towards the development status of the baby’s senses. Being in the mother’s belly, the fetus is believed to be sensitive to sounds: the parents’ voices, classical music, and readings of the classics. A mother should create a sound environment of the classics as soon as she knows that she is pregnant.<sup>90</sup> The father’s contribution was primarily aimed at taking good care of the mother, making her feel good and safe, and talking to the baby in the belly. An employee at *Dujing Baby* and his wife

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<sup>89</sup> TS15001.

<sup>90</sup> WTS16003.

even chose a fetus name for the child – with the help of Teacher D. Not knowing if it was going to be a boy or a girl, they chose “De’er 德儿” as name for the fetus which translates into “virtuous child”. The father-to-be who talks to the fetus every evening is able to refer to the fetus specifically with the pre-birth name (which will not be kept after birth).<sup>91</sup>

The wife of the headmaster of Beijing Study Hall tried prenatal and early childhood classics reading education and reports that prenatal classics reading affected the mother’s mood (*xinqing* 心情) which would consequently be milder (*bijiao pinghe* 比较平和). The child in the mother’s belly would first develop its sense of hearing. Audio input in this period would penetrate the fetuses’ brain development (*ciji danao de fazhan* 刺激大脑的发展). It would also be possible to enable the fetus to appreciate arts and painting via a technique called “mother-child-resonance” (*muying gongzhen* 母婴共振), meaning that the mother looks, for example, at a picture, closes her eyes, imagines the picture in her mind, and sends this impression down to the baby (or fetus) through imagination to equally shape (or cultivate) the baby’s (or fetuses’) emotions (*xuntao xinqing* 熏陶心情).<sup>92</sup> The mother’s womb is the first environment to implement the right sound structure; the mother furthermore seems to be in the position to influence the character building (cultivation) of her child by keeping herself in a good condition, and by actively creating a fruitful sound and imagination-image environment inside of herself for her offspring. Therefore the employee of *Dujing Baby* suggests starting preparation even before getting pregnant – to prepare such an environment before the baby (or the starting point for the baby) arrives.<sup>93</sup>

According to the wife of the Beijing Study Hall headmaster, the listening part in prenatal and early childhood classics reading education can be extended to 24 hours per day seven days a week. After the child is born, it slept most of the time anyways, so audio input was the basic step for a wholesome classics reading education. From the fourth month onwards, one can show pictures and images to the child as well as paper cards with Chinese characters. In the months four to eight, babies already have their eyes open and cannot move a lot which makes it the best time for first visual input. From month nine to 1.5 years, the child was able to crawl and walk; the tendency to move a lot would make three hours of classics reading education per day possible: one hour in the morning after getting up, one hour in the afternoon after the afternoon nap, and one hour in the evening before going to bed. Her own child would initiate joint reading session by herself: after getting up, the child would pick up the book, walk to her and say “reading (*dushu* 读书)”. She also states that her daughter was able to talk

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<sup>91</sup> WTS16003.

<sup>92</sup> Conversation with headmaster’s wife, Beijing Study Hall, January 23, 2016.

<sup>93</sup> WTS16003.

when she was eight months old, speaking single words at first, and now putting words together already. Although her daughter was a premature baby (*zaochan'er* 早产儿), she thinks that her daughter is comparably intelligent (*congming* 聪明) and active (*linghuo* 灵活) and has an open and calm character – classics reading children were more settled and calmer, as she believes. Some of her friends did not believe in this kind of education, but now that they see what it did to her daughter, they would also start to believe. Concerning valuable audio input, there was already scientific proof of a positive effect on the child and brain development, but for the Chinese classics, there was no proof so far.<sup>94</sup>

Music and a good sound environment as well as aesthetic paintings will also play a part in children's classics reading education in study halls and academies, especially when it comes to creating a fruitful study environment for the children. Classics reading education is not solely based on recitation of the classics; headmasters and teachers are involved in a well thought out overall spatial design that should facilitate the implementation of their high educational ideals. Penetration of a child's senses with positive input is seen as beneficial within the development towards a gentleman (*junzi*) from the earliest moments onwards, and the older the child gets, the more relevant reading and reciting the classics will become. Starting with prenatal classics reading education, sending the child to a study hall, and later to an academy to engage in self-study of the classics is the ideal way of education as pictured by many activists, but, of course, not the path that many people have already chosen. Many students enter classics reading education somewhere in the middle or leave after a few years and do not go through with the whole program – which would last 23 years: early childhood education until age three, instruction in a study hall until age 13, self-study in an academy until age 23. More than two decades of personal investment is needed per person to become the tool that could change Chinese society “backwards” in the future.

The utopian characteristics of Wang's education lie within the entanglements of past and future within the present. A rich and utopian vision of a better future society created out of the meaninglessness of the present and the images of mistakes in the past as perceived by the activist will be shown in chapter 3 in detail. The utopian thinking inherent of activists in the classics reading movement does not draw a precise image of the situation of Chinese society but is a powerful tool to highlight areas which deserve criticism in the activists' eyes and which they seek to actively approach with counter proposals.

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<sup>94</sup> Conversation with the headmaster's wife, Beijing Study Hall, January 23, 2016.

### 3. DYNAMICS TOWARDS CLASSICS READING EDUCATION: CONFUCIAN VISIONS IN RESPONSE TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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Turning towards utopian imaginaries can be seen as critique of the present by underlining what the present *is* not (but could be). As Gordin et al. (2010: 6, 13) point out, utopian thinking interrogates established ways of thinking and acting and, thus, supports an understanding of the mechanisms of how and why things change. A newly designed Confucian society for the future is a utopian image people turn to because the present does not appear to be a wishful place to dwell in. Bregnbæk and Bunkenborg (2017: 1; 4) emphasize the characteristics of uncertainty, anxiety, and disorientation (or: lack of orientation) in Chinese society of the post-Mao era. People lacked sources that helped their self-definition, feeling of identity, and moral guidance in their hearts – the outside world was perceived as meaningless, immoral, and empty.

Classics reading educators and parents have experienced these uncertainties and lacks in their personal lives; they share common dissatisfactions and disillusionments in the fields of interpersonal relations, social and moral values, and education. Negative perception of China's society is a reason why parents rather want to keep their children in an environment which they can better control, especially in terms of influence that the child will be exposed to (chapter 3.1). Negative perception of public education and negative memories from the own educational past drive parents to consider alternative paths to fulfill their educative duties (chapter 3.2). Confucian education with a focus on (re-)structuring interpersonal relations and moral upbringing inspires people to explore traditional educational approaches; study halls and academies give such new paths a solid ground. Dissatisfaction drives Confucian activists into a productive state in which they use cultural resources from the distant past to reflect on the present; the present is simultaneously seen as outcome of failures in the nearer past (chapter 3.3). Entanglements of strings of time play a role in the design of a better future. Since private educators cannot draw on governmental support, they join forces in different forms of reading the classics (chapter 3.4) to create a common direction into a better world (chapter 3.5). It is the present dystopia of society in combination with the hope of a better world through classics reading education that drives people to an alternative education – based on reading the classics.



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### 3.1. SHORTCOMINGS OF CHINA'S SOCIETY AND IMAGINARIES OF A NEW CONFUCIAN-BASED SOCIETY

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Among classics reading activists, China's fast economic growth is seen in direct relation with loss of values; striving for capitalism, consumerism, and the empty idolization of materialistic goods moved into the limelight and the texture of social interaction is neglected:

Look, economically, China developed really quickly in the last few years compared to other countries in the world. But other countries don't have trust in China and don't have respect. That is because we developed our economy in the last few years, but have lost our culture, so we Chinese people have a lot of problems in all aspects of cultural cultivation. Look, against the backdrop of such problems, if we are not persistent and don't have moral integrity, we don't fear anything and dare to do everything. We don't have a spirit over our heads, we don't have a god, we can do everything – you say it: how can others trust us? People are like this, and countries and nations are also like this, so our nation needs to have a national culture; only then we can gain trust and acknowledgement of other nations. So, from the state's viewpoint, we need to study Confucianism extensively and learn Chinese classics; we need to be able to fully grasp the classics and embody them as a person. Our children are the earliest bunch [of students]. We have made a huge contribution to the country, that's what it is. We have not used any national educational funds.<sup>95</sup> (Headmaster of Qufu Academy)

Loss of culture is conjoined with loss of reputation as a nation and moral decline of society; without cultural rules, people are not considered as “cultivated” anymore. The absence of a spiritual source for behavioral restraint and prescriptions for ethical behavior makes a culturally delivered (Confucian) ethics through education even more important – and it is considered as contribution to society and the nation state. However, as the same headmaster in Qufu continues to tell, learning about one's own cultural tradition was refused by many young Chinese because they considered tradition as too complicated. Western learning and culture became prevalent in most areas of education and life. As a result, the outlines of the Chinese as people or as one nation vanished; one could “hardly see the shadow of the Chinese anymore” (*yijing hen nan kandao Zhongguoren de yingzi* 已经很难看到中国人的影).<sup>96</sup> Establishing study halls and academies is, in this light, an approach to bring back *proper* education, and with this, the people's character and identity. Reading the classics as main activity within this education shall give the empty shell of the Chinese a new cultural and moral essence.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> “你看我们中国现在经济上，在世界其他国家来讲呢，这几年发展很快，经济上都起来，但是其他国家对我们中国人并不那么信任，并不那么尊重。这个关键在于我们这几年发展经济，但是我们自己把文化丢失了，所以我们中国人自己的文化修养，各方面，都是有问题的。这种问题背景之下，你看我们也，假如没有持守，没有操守，我们没有畏惧什么都敢干，我们头顶没有神明，没有上帝，什么事都敢干，你叫别人怎么信任我们呢？是，个人是这个样子，国家、民族也是这个样子的，所以我们民族必须有一个我们民族的文化，我们才可以在这个世界上得到其他民族的信任、认可。所以站在国家角度，以后是需要大量学儒学的，学经典的，能够把经典通透，完全体会透的人的，其实我们的孩子就是最早一批。我们为 国家做了最大的贡献，就是这样的。我们没有动用国家的教育基金。” (QF16001)

<sup>96</sup> QF16001.

<sup>97</sup> QF16001; PK16002; WTS16004b.

Another huge topic among classics reading educators is money – materialism and a lifestyle oriented towards money. It was widely acknowledged that in China’s society today, a good position and a high salary turned into the highest goods to be pursued.<sup>98</sup> A headmaster in Suzhou regards a shallow lifestyle as a consequence of this: “Today’s people, Chinese people play Mahjong, sing karaoke, or do BBQs, but they do not lead a cultivated life.”<sup>99</sup> Overly stressing profit and money could lead to moral neglect and tackle people’s everyday safety:

When we go shopping on the market today, we cannot really say that it is safe. [...] For example, maybe you heard of the Gutter Oil case. [<sup>100</sup>] [...] Well, there is nothing that we can do, now, in this age, when everybody is just running after their own benefits; there is no trust to talk about, and when there is no trust, there can emerge problems everywhere.<sup>101</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Study Hall)

The example of the polluted oil is raised to show that business people are willing to sacrifice other people’s health for making personal profit. The headmaster of Beijing Academy A mentions cases of additives in milk powder and other food supplies. He thinks that unhappiness and fear about financial losses could drive businessmen to such cruel measurements. By doing so, they would forward their own unhappiness to other people: their health would be at stake when consuming polluted food which would also make them unhappy.<sup>102</sup>

Greed for monetary profit is seen in direct relation with destruction of nature – the ground for mankind’s survival.<sup>103</sup> Money required production, production required factories, and factories polluted the environment. A teacher from Beijing Academy A traces the concept of material property back to Zhou dynasty (c. 1050-221 BCE) when material civilization was at a developmental peak. Confucius faced a reality in which the ways of ancient times were not continued anymore and allegedly referred to the situation as “*li ben yue huai* 礼崩乐坏,”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> XM16001.

<sup>99</sup> “但是我们现代人，就是，像中国人就经常去打麻将啊、卡拉 OK 啊、或者烧烤啊，就没有那种文雅的这种生活。” (SZ15004)

<sup>100</sup> Added by the author: “gutter oil” refers to processed waste cooking oil, used frying oil or oil extracted from discarded animal parts such as skin and organs. In the gutter oil scandal, it was revealed that used oils were collected, processed, and sold as cheaper cooking oil (see: Lu / Wu 2014: 135; Liu / Cui / Liu 2017: 75-78).

<sup>101</sup> “现在市场里面买回来的，我们不能严格说它是安全的 [...] 我就举一个例子，您可能也听说过，叫地沟油 [...] 那我们没有办法，就是因为，在这个时代，如果因为大家都去追求利益没有信任可以谈，那没有信任的时候，各个环节都可能出问题“ (PK16004).

<sup>102</sup> PK16001.

<sup>103</sup> FZ16001.

<sup>104</sup> The expression has become a Chinese proverb for decay of morality and subsequent social disorder. Originally, it described the decrease of feudalistic structures and rites. “Li 礼” refers to the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhou Li*), a codex for correct social behavior and guideline for established social customs; “yue 乐” refers to ritual music in temples which is a symbol for order and carrying out rituals in the proper way. When both pillars of order are lost, there is chaos.

meaning that social and moral order in society was destroyed. Confucius saw the necessity to re-establish both via education and political strategy. Today's situation in China is put in relation to the situation Confucius faced when he started his political and educational work in Zhou dynasty.<sup>105</sup>

Having money and power can also become an issue when people holding these resources do not know how to apply them adequately – or worse, believe that money and power could immunize them against legal punishment. The fact that spiritual guidance by a power from above (which is not the law enacted by the nation state) is lacking is, again, mentioned as core loss in such a situation:

Today there are developing quite a few second-generation *nouveau riches*, and second-generation officials [i.e. children of officials] who create all kinds of troubles. You are not in China for a long time, but maybe you have watched it online, for example ‘My Dad is Li Gang’<sup>106</sup>. [...] And there are students from Peking University who went to the Zoo and poured vitriol over animals and so forth. [...] If everybody would lack that... they do neither fear heaven nor earth, they do not have anything which they feel awe and respect for. It is a tragedy for the family and terror for society, right?<sup>107</sup> (Headmaster of Xiamen Academy)

Not only *nouveaux riches*, but also party cadres are criticized; the headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A states that the most fearful government would be one of “too many corrupt, stupid, and naïve people”.<sup>108</sup> China's high corruption rate among officials is seen as outcome of insufficient moral education.<sup>109</sup>

Society is depicted as chaotic and immoral; people in present day China were largely acting without reference to an established social order which was quite dangerous.<sup>110</sup> Even though China was not at war, it would be similarly chaotic, as a teacher from Beijing Academy A points out. If there was a common set of rules and ethics in Chinese society, a common faith (*xinyang* 信仰), it would be less dangerous. A common ethic (*jiazhi* 价值

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<sup>105</sup> PK16006.

<sup>106</sup> Added by the author: “my Dad is Li Gang” has become a catch phrase referring to youngsters related to officials who act recklessly, feeling safe as their family relations could prevent them from legal consequences. Li Qiming, the son of Li Gang, the Deputy Director of the Baoding City Public Security Bureau, coined this phrase when he drunkenly drove his car on a university campus and hit two girls of which one died the day after the accident in October 2010 (see: Li Mingyu 李明宇 (2018): “Yan Shuji Shijian yichu ‘wo bas hi Li Gang’. Li Gang xian yi shizong 严书记事件引出‘我爸是李刚’。李刚现已失踪”. In: *Epoch Times*, online: <http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/18/5/18/n10405936.htm>, last access: November 28, 2018).

<sup>107</sup> “包括现在会出现那么多富二代和官二代，都会闹出各种各样的问题，你在中国来的虽然不长，但在网络上看过，比如说“我爸是李刚”。[...] 还有包括中国北大的学生去动物园泼硫酸到动物的身上等等 [...] 如果大家这个都没有，天不怕地不怕，什么东西都无所畏惧，对家庭而言是个悲哀，对社会而言，那更是恐怖，对不对？” (XM16001).

<sup>108</sup> “贪官太多，昏沉的人太多，或者说愚笨的人太多。” (SZ15004)

<sup>109</sup> PK16001; PK16003.

<sup>110</sup> GZ16001.

观) could only be established by the system of the Chinese classics (*jingdian xitong* 经典系统).<sup>111</sup> Classics reading education could be the instrument to re-establish the cultural essence within society; here, the headmaster of Xiamen Academy agrees with the headmaster of Qufu Academy<sup>112</sup> and Fuzhou Study Hall: “Studying can create a nation’s spirit, and it can change a nation’s atmosphere.”<sup>113</sup> Better understanding of the causalities of the world (*yinguo guanxi* 因果关系) would make people less greedy and insatiable and the world more peaceful.<sup>114</sup>

The starting point for the better world is the individual. In rejection of China’s current society with all its deficiencies and issues, parents and classics reading educators turn towards the Confucian classics to seek a new direction for their lives. Reading the classics in this context involves reflection about the self, former and current ways of thinking, living, and making choices for life. Working out a new directive according to the Confucian classics is an applied form of self-cultivation – with quasi-therapeutic elements, considering that young people use the classics to figure out what they want for their lives when they feel that they are disoriented or stuck: a common situation for turning to Confucian classics is the phase of orientation in life in young age:

I didn’t know whom to confide to because my friends didn’t have a feeling towards their way either, so until one or two years after graduating from university, I was very confused. And as far as my profession is concerned, I didn’t know which choice to make either. <sup>115</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A)

Actually, I was at university for many years, and I remember very clearly that while I studied my MA, I was very depressed in my heart, I couldn’t find the direction for life. Because I always liked to study literature, I studied a literature MA. At university, I was in the Chinese department. When I was a graduate MA student, I had a phase of huge confusion, because I didn’t know what the meaning of life was.<sup>116</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy B)

Reading the classics brought enlightenment into disorientation: Confucian classics entailed moral values and wisdom; they could guide personal action and individual choices<sup>117</sup> and they could give strength (*gei ni lilian* 给你力量)<sup>118</sup> when facing problems. Masters of Chinese

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<sup>111</sup> PK16005.

<sup>112</sup> Compare with citation by the headmaster mentioned above.

<sup>113</sup> “读书真的是可以塑造一个民族的精神，改变一个民族的风气。”(XM16001)

<sup>114</sup> FZ16001.

<sup>115</sup> “那我又不知道该找谁去倾诉，因为身边的朋友也没有对路那样的感觉（呵呵），所以我一直到大学毕业之后的一、两年之内我其实都是很迷茫的。就是我在职业的选择上，我也不知道应该选什么样的职业。”(SZ15004)

<sup>116</sup> “其实我上学很多年，我记得很清楚，在我上硕士的时候，心中啊，是很苦闷的，就是找不到人生的方向。因为我一直是喜欢文学，读硕士也是研究文学，大学读的也是中文系，啊，就是在读硕士研究生的时候，曾经有一段时间非常的迷茫，啊，就是不知道人生的意义。”(PK16002)

<sup>117</sup> GZ16001; WTS16006; SZ15004; SZ15007; CD16001; PK16001.

<sup>118</sup> TS15002.

tradition such as Confucius, Mencius, and Shijiamouni 释迦牟尼 (Buddha) inspire people with their broad knowledge and enlighten about the meaning of life and death.<sup>119</sup> When people felt a lack of orientation, they could turn to the great masters (or: sages) to seek for help; they could find an example for actions and choices among them and seek to become a gentleman (*junzi* 君子) by imitation of their actions.<sup>120</sup>

There is a high trust in the quality and the effect of Confucian classics. The classics are believed to have the power to improve interpersonal relations, especially within the family (parents, spouses, children), but also with colleagues.<sup>121</sup> As the female headmaster of Wenli Study Hall states, reading the classics gave her self-confidence for her own career. Before reading the classics, she used to be afraid of failure and making mistakes which caused her nights without sleep. Reading the classics helped her to trust her team more and work better with them.<sup>122</sup> Another headmaster tells about the change of thought and thinking he experienced when he started to read the classics in comparison to the kind of thinking he learned at university, and he believes that others could experience the same improvements:

In our former university studies and our former experiences, our analytical skills and understanding of many questions was quite weak and superficial. Thought applied on a certain question or issue would neither be very broad nor deep. There were quite a few questions that we didn't think about very clearly, and we would only follow blindly, follow blindly. But after reading the classics, my own ability of thought has increased a lot which means that I can think more profoundly about issues, I am more understanding and my abilities are also getting better: the personal ability to articulate yourself, your ability of thought – it seems that big change has happened. [...] Change is big, and this change has, of course, many other aspects; one can even say that in our generation, there are still many common opinions that need to be overthrown and reconsidered. Our education and our lives need reconsideration, and these changes will be induced by the classics.<sup>123</sup> (Headmaster of Chengdu Study Hall)

It seems as if he took his own fate back into his own hands when he found out that he could better navigate through his own life without relying on what had been taught to him by others. This is what he himself experienced when reading the classics; he learned to think about issues of life autonomously. This mirrors the self-help effect of popular Confucianism as discussed in the context of Yu Dan's interpretation of the *Analects* – with the difference that

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<sup>119</sup> XM16001.

<sup>120</sup> PK16002.

<sup>121</sup> WTS16001; CD16001.

<sup>122</sup> TS15003.

<sup>123</sup> “我们之前的大学的学习，包括以往的经历，那对很多问题的一种分析能力和这种见解都很弱，就是很浅，就是，对一个问题思考不能够很宽阔，也不能很深入。包括一些问题想不清楚，就会盲目地跟随，盲目地跟随。但是读了经典以后呢，我们自己的思考能力有很大的提升，就是对问题能够想得更透彻，能够更明了，能力也提起来了。就个人的这种表达能力，你的思考能力，感觉都有很大程度的变化。[...] 变化很大，这个变化当然还会有很多方面，甚至于说，我说我们这个时代的很多的，大家认为是很普遍的观点，可能都需要把他颠倒过来，重新做一个思考。我们的教育，我们的人生很多都需要重新思考，这个对经典的，这个经典给我的变化就是这些。” (CD16001)

in classics reading education, people read the original text and do not rely on commentaries when linking the classics with their lives. Yu Dan delivers her own interpretation of the text in combination with intuitive everyday wisdom which people could, then, directly take over (DeBlasi 2015: 74-78; Hammond 2015: 104-106).

Apart from life directives, reading the classics also enlightens Confucian activists on the meaning of life. This is connected with faith (*xinyang* 信仰) – not as part of a specific religion, but as part of culture: Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist thought is subsumed under the broad umbrella of Chinese culture which is regarded both as worldly source of humane thought and metaphysical source for spirituality.<sup>124</sup> A division between culture and religion is not seen as necessary but even impractical because all different strings of thought are considered to be united in one large entity: culture. In this sense, the leading teacher of Xiamen Study Hall B has found a substitute for religious faith in Confucian culture and education:

I think that when you are a child, there are many things that you can't understand. You feel pain easily and you don't know how to deal with that. Indeed, I have also constantly been seeking for something like... because here, we don't have any religion. I have constantly been seeking for a place where I can make my soul feel at home – that means, searching for a religion. Well, or for something that is like a religion. So I searched, and I searched. At that time, I didn't find anything, but the day that I found it [this educational approach], I thought hey, this is good! This tells me how I can deal with future problems, and slowly, I think that my feeling of safety is more and more definite and my abilities to deal with problems is also getting more certain. And the perception of what is going on inside of me, ehm – my ability of self-reflection – increased a lot.<sup>125</sup> (Leading teacher in Xiamen Study Hall B)

Confucian classics offer a solution for what Chinese society today has not yet or cannot provide. Having faced a lack in problem solving and crisis management, adults who decide to study the classics for personal improvement, individual growth, and working on their (personal) issues decide independently and freely for a new form of self-cultivation guided by the sages of the past to enhance personal resilience. They deliberately choose Confucian classics, traditional mores, and the voice of the sages to govern their worlds. It is believed that from the starting point of the individual, the whole society could be influenced by such new thought. As a first step, one's own children should enjoy new thought through classics reading education – to prevent them from the shortcomings and lacks which the parental generation has faced.

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<sup>124</sup> Emphasized especially in: FZ16001.

<sup>125</sup> “我感觉就是，小的时候很多东西你不明白。然后比较容易痛苦，也不知到怎么去处理。实际上我也一直在寻找一个类似于.....因为我们那个地方没有什么宗教的。我一直在寻找一个心灵安身的地方，是找一个宗教。那或者类似宗教信仰的一个东西。那一直找、一直找。当时是没找到，但是一旦找到我觉得呢，这个很好呢。告诉我将来我需要遇到问题是怎么去解决，慢慢地就会觉得自己的安全感越来越准，然后对这个问题解决的能力呢，也越来越准。[...] 对自己内心的一些觉察，还有，哦，自己的反省能力会更强。”(XM15005)

Especially *mothers* have talked about their hopes for their children's later lives. Mothers who turn to classics reading education hope that their children will be calm and balanced, modest, loyal and good,<sup>126</sup> obedient to the parents and intelligent;<sup>127</sup> that they will be able to establish good relations with other people and know how to interact well with others; that they will know to differentiate between good and bad;<sup>128</sup> that they will have a structured and peaceful approach to life without too many internal struggles.<sup>129</sup> Having less problems or knowing how to deal with them well enough would enable children to lead a happier life;<sup>130</sup> social conflict could be overcome with wisdom from the classics.<sup>131</sup> Reading the classics is seen as support for the children to set up personal life goals<sup>132</sup> and to develop autonomy and morality;<sup>133</sup> to be able to pursue their goals while keeping good social relations.<sup>134</sup> Social skills and abilities which enable to deal with one's own emotions are strongly intertwined. The classics are believed to give strength to develop an attitude that copes harmoniously with social conflict: to be forgiving, to be able to accept others the way they are, with all their shortcomings, and to be compassionate with others, to help others and have grateful heart (*gan'en de xin* 感恩的心); this would lead to a lifetime of happiness.<sup>135</sup> One mother relates improvement in her child's development directly to reading the classics: in the process of studies, she realized that her child's character opened up (*xingge kailang qilai* 性格开朗起来). "I hope that my child will be able to grasp the 'Four Books' and 'Five Classics', and will then have an upwards directed heart, an optimistic and active attitude, a good heart, in its life."<sup>136</sup>

A mother of Chinese-German children who moved into the mountains of Taishun to have her children educated in Wang's Wenli Study Hall for two years looks forward to the

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<sup>126</sup> SZ15002.

<sup>127</sup> PK16003.

<sup>128</sup> SZ15002; SZ15004.

When a child reads the classics and studies history, it gains a multi-faceted outlook on things in the past and the present; this enables to make differentiations (*fenbian* 分辨) so that one knows when facing a bad person (SZ15004).

<sup>129</sup> SZ15004.

<sup>130</sup> PK16003; TS15002.

<sup>131</sup> TS15002.

<sup>132</sup> SZ15001.

<sup>133</sup> SZ15003.

<sup>134</sup> SZ15002.

<sup>135</sup> TS15002.

<sup>136</sup> “我是希望我的孩子能够通过读这些四书五经哈，他以后，他有一颗向上的心，乐观积极的一个心态，然后一颗善良的心，去面对生活。” (SZ15003)

establishment of a more substantial outlook on life than that of children who go through public education:

The teachers in my son's class [in the study hall] talk with them about issues of life on a regular basis, or when they have trouble, the teachers encourage them in overcoming the trouble. So I think that classics reading children won't be as common as normal children who, when they are grown up, really want to earn a lot of money, or think that buying a house or a car is very important. Children who read the classics won't be like that. The teachers won't explain the world and life to them in such terms. As a parent, I also talk to my children about what is most important in life.<sup>137</sup> (Volunteer teacher and mother, Wenli Study Hall)

Classics reading education is believed to equip children with a different set of values than that perceived in contemporary society – in both China and Germany, considering that this mother is unsatisfied with the German school system in northern Germany where the children grew up. Choosing an alternative education for one's children, thus, already means to turn away from consumerism, materialism and the pursuit of money; classics reading parents do not wish for their children to participate in such lifestyle and choose those things in life. Having a solid basis of traditionally inspired values, morality, and directives in life, classics reading children are believed to be less vulnerable to mishaps and bad social influence.<sup>138</sup>

Wang Caigui is convinced that reading the classics enabled children to honestly love others, to be able to interact and negotiate with people and behave like a morally upright person, a gentleman (*junzi*). It could also turn bad children into good children (*huai haizi bian hao haizi* 坏孩子变好孩子).<sup>139</sup> The headmaster of Beijing Academy B who is a strict follower of Wang firmly believes that the classics were adequate resources to instruct children in proper social conduct (*zuoren* 做人), to handle issues and deal with things in life in general, and to hint towards the abilities that a person should further develop – meaning that children should establish their own *accurate* personality (*shuli ziji zhengque de renge* 树立自己正确的人格) which could be guided by the classics only. Without studying the classics, a person might not find his or her real self. Based on the classics, the person having found his or her self would then establish the *right* set of values, different from those that children in public education acquired, and develop an *accurate* perspective on life (*zhengque de renshengguan* 正确的人生观).<sup>140</sup> Allegedly, there is one right way for personal development, and the

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<sup>137</sup> “像我儿子他们的班的老师经常会给他们讲一些这个人生啊，这些方面的。或者遇到困难的时候鼓励他们怎么想去战胜困难，这样的。所以我觉得学习经典的孩子他们不像是一般学校里边一般的孩子那么世俗，就是说，长大之后一定要赚多少钱啊，或者这种，房子啊，车子啊，很重要，这样的。像经典的孩子他们不会这样想。老师也不会这样给他们解释这个世界，解释这个人生。所以像我作为家长也是经常会告诉孩子这个人生到底什么是最重要的。” (TS15002)

<sup>138</sup> TS15002; PK16003; SZ15007; XM15005; GZ16001.

<sup>139</sup> TS15001.

<sup>140</sup> WTS16002.



Confucian classics embody this (one and only) correct path. While many classics reading educators so far have stressed the emotional and individual side of classics reading education, and especially mothers are concerned about the personal well-being of their children, this focus on strict rules and rightness appears in contradictory contrast with self-chosen and autonomous personal development along the classics.

Views on the internal processes in the course of reading the classics might be different, but the overall value of traditionally educated people for society is agreed upon in unison. Both adults and children who read the classics are believed to be human resources to reduce egoism, opposition and conflict in society and increase mutual care.<sup>141</sup>

Because their foundation and their abilities are unequalled by others, they have to lead the later development of our society. Actually, look at the children, including those at Wenli Academy, they have studied 300,000 characters of the classics – their expression is very different from others.<sup>142</sup> (Employee at *Dujing Baby Company*)

We believe that when one or two bunches of our children go out [from the school into the world], society and even the government will realize the situation of these students.<sup>143</sup> (Headmaster of Qufu Academy)

Children who grow up with the classics could carry a new attitude based on new values into the world and raise awareness for Confucian thought and education. Good influence by classics reading children and adults would first be extended to the family and then to society.<sup>144</sup>

When a well-educated person raises awareness for good education, the case looks similar to the scholars in imperial China who took their time in isolation for self-cultivation for a long time before, being in perfect shape, they would enter society and surprise others with one's wisdom (Lee 2000: 76). Such an ideal is again pursued by Guangzhou Study Hall: they practice isolated learning; children focus solely on studying – “the so-called ten years of study at cold window” (*suowei shinian hanchuang wu ren wen* 所谓十年寒窗无人问) – which means that ten years of intensive learning are lived with no visiting guests; the mind is fixated upon studies. However, once stepping into the world, one's name will be known (*you yi ju cheng ming tianxia zhi* 有一举成名天下知).<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> PK16001.

<sup>142</sup> “因为他们的基础、他们的能力是那些人远远都比不了的，所以说，他们应该去引领，引领后面的这个社会的发展。其实包括现在文礼书院的这批孩子，你看他们是读完了三十万字的这样的一个经典，他们的表现就跟别的很不一样了。” (WTS16003)

<sup>143</sup> “我们认为到我们的一批、两批孩子出来的时候，社会层面甚至国家层面，能看的到这些学生的状况。” (QF16001)

<sup>144</sup> SZ15007.

<sup>145</sup> GZ16001.

Such fame would not be without effect; educated and morally upright people are believed to be able change others by being a good example. The positive influence which classics reading children are believed to have on family and, on the long run, on society, is seen as the seed for social change, e.g. when classics reading graduates will be in leadership positions.<sup>146</sup>

We also hope that in the future, when the children have grown up, they can be China's leaders, and talking about the highest [position], can be China's national chairman.<sup>147</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Study Hall)

We hope that we can train more qualified people who hand down Chinese culture. [...] There are different types of talented people – first of all, thinkers, philosophers, ehm – like the sages of the past, like Confucius and Mencius. Secondly, it's politicians, people who can benefit the people of a certain region, a senior official of the people of a certain region. If, for example, he is a provincial governor, and he has this kind of character, he can nourish a province in a way that the region is prosperous, and the people are at peace. And finally, the third type is businessmen. We have, for example, a type of businessmen that is called 'Confucian Businessman' (*Rushang* 儒商) [...] who express Confucian spirit.<sup>148</sup> (Teacher D's husband)

We can really educate people who can transform China or can lead China in a better direction. This is a big contribution to the world. So I say that we need educators and we need thinkers – in China, we call philosophers 'thinkers' – and also politicians. The role of politicians is very important for the whole mankind. Yes. Of course, I mean Confucius-like politicians, Confucius-like thinkers, yes. One has to educate this kind of people. And I firmly believe that I will do this for the rest of my life. If this academy can really produce a future politician, produce a philosopher, or produce an educator, I think that my life is very valuable.<sup>149</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy A)

Social change is believed to be possible in a proactive approach by morally trained individuals. Profound social change in large scale is believed to be set in motion by a few singular people; it is even believed that these new moral individuals get as high as the country leadership. Corrupt politicians and unethical businessmen who inflict food and health security being criticized in current society are mirrored in a better future as wise and educated leaders who seek the benefit for the people and who make business on fair and ethical terms. A few "missionaries" of Chinese culture, philosophers and educators, will also be among the human resources for a better future Chinese society.

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<sup>146</sup> See also PK16002.

<sup>147</sup> “我们也期待啊，假如将来，将来这些孩子长大了能够从政，然后能做国家的领导人，假如说最高的吧，能做中国的国家主席。” (PK16004)

<sup>148</sup> “希望培养更多的能够传承中国文化的人才。[...] 人才分几类啊。第一等，第一等：思想家、哲学家，就像恩.....恩历代的那些先贤，比如像孔子啊、孟子啊这些人[...]。第二等呢就是.....政治家，能够造福一方人，一方人的这么一个地方长官，比如他是一个省长，他有，他有这种人格，他可以养.....这一个省都能够国泰民安。然后，第三等呢，就是企业家，企业家呢，他有，比如说我有一种商人叫儒商，[...] 来展示这种精神，儒家这种精神。” (WTS15001)

<sup>149</sup> „就是真正能够培养，能够未来可以改造中国或者能够更多的引领中国，朝一个更好的方向，对这个世界的贡献也更大。所以我说需要教育家，需要思想家，中国人比相对于哲学家我们叫思想家，还有一个就是政治家，政治家对整个人类的作用非常之大，对。当然是孔子式的政治家，是孔子式的这个思想家，对。要培养这种人。而且我坚信不移，我就一辈子可能就做这一件事情，假如这个书院真的能在未来产生一个政治家，产生一个哲学家，产生一个教育家，我就觉得我的生命就很有价值。” (PK16001)

Hope for better leadership in ethical terms on political level implies criticism of the current Chinese leadership. A benevolent government which embodies Confucian ideals as accepted by classics reading educators does not (yet) exist in China. However, the critique of the quality of politicians and policy making does not entail wishes to alter the political system of China. This is revealed by the very fact that classics reading educators aim at improving politicians by creating better education and not at improving the system by suggesting alternative political architectures for China. Political criticism stays within the boundaries of the given system. As Price et al. (2016: 130) mention, GUMs do not seek to act against the government of a nation state but within its given structure. In the utopian dream of a better and morally upright society, the current political system would remain intact, but equipped with politicians who have had a better moral training on a traditional Confucian basis.

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### 3.2. DISILLUSION OVER PUBLIC EDUCATION AND THE TURN TO CLASSICS READING EDUCATION

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Public education is a main source for instructing people in morals, behavior, attitude and opinion making, and it is subject of rejection among classics reading parents and educators. Disillusion over the outcome of education under high competition and examination pressure is a major factor that drives parents to take their children out of public schools. Hopes for improvement are directed at the classics. This often starts with memories of dissatisfaction about one's own school time: the knowledge gained was either insufficient or not useful for life,<sup>150</sup> especially because it was only focused on examinations.<sup>151</sup> Education was nothing that could have been chosen freely; one had to learn what the government prescribed;<sup>152</sup> one had to choose a direction of study as prescribed by the results of the university entrance examinations<sup>153</sup> or the subject one was assigned to by the respective school.<sup>154</sup>

This is related to the complex assignment structure behind the university entrance examination: a student needs to have successfully passed the university entrance examination to access higher education. Each region has a fixed quota which has to be achieved to enter a certain university, e.g. students from Beijing or Shanghai have to reach a lower quota in the examination to be able to enter a university in their own region – a source for regional

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<sup>150</sup> XM15005; QF16001; PK16003.

<sup>151</sup> QF16001; XM15005; WTS16003.

<sup>152</sup> SH16001.

<sup>153</sup> SZ15004.

<sup>154</sup> PK16004.

inequality in educational opportunity. Before taking the exam, a student has to decide for a subject and a university (first and second choices can be made); if the student cannot reach the points as required by the chosen university for the respective subject, the student cannot study it (Glöckner 2013: 205). One would have to go to another university or study another subject. This is a large source of frustration and a possible reason why studying at a university does, in many cases, not lead to a clear orientation for personal and professional life. On the other side, when one studied a subject one did not really want to study just because of the numerical outcome of the central exams, further education meant to acquire in-depth knowledge on things one would not necessarily be interested in. Having the chance to study Chinese classics today by free choice is rated very positively; many interviewees regret that they did not have the possibility earlier.<sup>155</sup>

Based on personal educational experience as well as observations of today's public education, there is a general dissatisfaction among classics reading parents and educators about the goal, contents, material, time management, environment, and therefore the overall quality of public education. Public schools confronted children with too many different subjects in a too narrow schedule which created very short classes with a lot of input.<sup>156</sup>

Every day, [my daughter] would learn a little bit of something – a bit of fine arts, a bit of English, a bit of language, a bit of mathematics; a little bit of this and that. The timing in each day was very chaotic and you learn there.<sup>157</sup> (Mother of two girls in Beijing Academy B)

The headmaster of Beijing Academy B who used to be a teacher in a public school agrees that such a time management in education is not very beneficial for the learning process. Every teacher who teaches his or her one subject influences the child for 45 minutes and then leaves the classroom for the next teacher.<sup>158</sup> Parents and classics reading educators complain that this way, children would not have a chance to learn anything in-depth; in addition to that, they just absorbed information provided in class for the next exam.<sup>159</sup> Density of subjects and pressure to pass the next examination kept children busy from 7 am in the morning until late at night.<sup>160</sup> The students' only goal was to get good grades<sup>161</sup> to be able to enroll at a good

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<sup>155</sup> PK16003; WTS16006; CD16001; FZ16001; TS15003.

<sup>156</sup> PK16003; PK16002.

<sup>157</sup> “她每天一会儿学这个，一会儿美术，一会儿英语，一会儿语文，一会儿学数学，一会儿什么，就是每天，这个时间很乱，你在学。” (PK16003)

<sup>158</sup> PK16002.

<sup>159</sup> SZ15002; SZ15007.

<sup>160</sup> SZ15002; PK16003.

<sup>161</sup> TS15003; PK16006; PK16003; CD16001; TS15002.

university and get a good (high paying) job afterwards.<sup>162</sup> Chinese children would be able to get good grades but were unskilled for life in general<sup>163</sup> and would learn nothing with a deeper meaning for life.<sup>164</sup> This conclusion in combination with the fact that quite a lot of time is spent on learning, education in a public school is generally considered a waste of time among many classics reading educators.<sup>165</sup>

The public educational environment is perceived as very negative in the world of classics reading education, described in terms of being “deficient” or even “polluting”. The educational environment encompasses the teachers who create it socially, the teaching and teaching material that fills it with content and action, and the physical space of the classroom. Deficiencies are detected in the softer qualities of the educational environment, i.e. the social texture, interaction among students and teachers, and interaction with the teaching material. The only criticism that tackles the physical space is about classrooms being overly stuffed with students; a teacher would normally have to teach 100 students at a time.<sup>166</sup> This also influenced further qualities of education: teachers could not take care of so many children at the same time and the sum of their daily tasks was also too much for them.<sup>167</sup> Parents talk about bribery and how gifts could improve the teacher’s attention towards a child – a practice that is referred to as quite common in public education. However, classics reading parents would not want their children to be confronted with corruption.<sup>168</sup>

Additionally, many teachers in public education are marked as unqualified; they had no concept or ideal of education and used improper language in interaction with the children.<sup>169</sup> This way, teachers and common children in kindergarten and school created a social environment in which the own child would be “polluted” (*shou wuran* 受污染).<sup>170</sup>

Actually, schools are not just *not* reading the classics, but their environments are really shitty, and children are exposed to too much pollution. And when the children interact, they would also compare each other, whose parents are cooler, have a higher position, or more money. Here, we don’t care about such things, and it doesn’t matter whose parents are rich or poor; here, we are all the same, and there is

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<sup>162</sup> PK16001; PK16003; PK16005; XM16001; TS15001; FZ16001; CD16001; QF16001.

<sup>163</sup> SZ15002.

<sup>164</sup> PK16002; PK16003; WTS16001; WTS16004b.

<sup>165</sup> SZ15001; TS15002; PK16003; WTS16001; PK16002.

<sup>166</sup> WTS16001.

<sup>167</sup> XM15005.

<sup>168</sup> WTS16004a.

<sup>169</sup> PK16002; PK16003; QF16001.

<sup>170</sup> PK16002.

nothing to compare and compete (*panbi* 攀比) with. Children grow up more beneficial in this way.<sup>171</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy B)

Unwanted influence on one's child does not only come in form of wrong values (focus on materialism), but also in form of unbeneficial media input as disturbance of good education:

Our education today brought forth many problems – in the whole world; that's a problem. Today's environment is terribly polluted, polluted! [...] And what I am talking about [in this respect] is culture; the mind is easily corrupted and polluted. For example, when I was a child, I actually did not have a TV, so at that time, our people received better education. The teacher taught, and the child would learn. Today, pupils are swamped with information; they are polluted, they are made dirty. So, in this academy, it is not allowed to watch TV. Look, the children here are not allowed to watch TV, they are not allowed to use cellphones, we are afraid that they might be disturbed by that.<sup>172</sup> (Teacher at Beijing Academy A)

The third element of a public school's educational environment that is criticized among classics reading education is simple and shallow teaching material;<sup>173</sup> without the classics, classes were too knowledge-oriented without any focus on wisdom.<sup>174</sup> Public education used books for immediate usage, one of which was to write an exam about selected contents; thus, regular textbooks lacked a long-term learning perspective.<sup>175</sup>

The lack of adequate teaching material for Chinese purposes is related to China's history of education. Today's teaching material was compiled after 1978 within the Reform and Opening Era. Even though educators at that time might have been smart and put together teaching material which they considered as best and most valuable, their greatness could not be compared to Confucius' position for China's culture and education.<sup>176</sup> Therefore, the classics are the better choice. And secondly, today's school textbooks were rather shallow as they encompassed only contemporary thought, and this thought even developed under an overall educational directive which was not “original” Chinese:

Common text books are very shallow in level which is because they are based in modern educational thought, especially John Dewey's educational thought. His concept is that life equaled education, so he thought that education should largely be taken from life. For example, when a child is doing something

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<sup>171</sup> “其实学校他不只是不读经了，他那个环境太糟糕了，这个孩子受的污染太多。嗯，而且这个，像孩子，孩子与孩子之间，他也会比自己……谁的父母厉害，谁的父母有地位，或者有钱。那在我们这边都不管这些了，无论是你的父母是富贵人家，还是贫寒人家，在我们这边都是完全一样的，他没有什么好攀比的，这样对孩子的成长更有利。” (PK16002)

<sup>172</sup> “今天我们教育出问题，全世界出问题，就是这个问题。这个环境现在，就是说，污染太厉害 [...]我说的是文化，精神的大染缸，污染。你比如说我小时候其实没电视的，所以呢，那个时候我们的人比较受教育，老师教他就学。现在学生他接受的信息太多，他有时候就被污染了，被搞脏了，就是说。啊，这个呢，就是非常的，所以在，我们在[this / name excluded by author]书院他是不允许看电视的，你看，这孩子不让看电视。手机也不让他们用的，就是害怕他们受到手机的这些干扰。” (PK16005)

<sup>173</sup> SZ15001; PK16003; CD16001.

<sup>174</sup> XM16001; GZ16001.

<sup>175</sup> XM16001.

<sup>176</sup> XM15005.

in daily life, for example playing, we can give something that is understandable for the child through its life and do a little bit of education. So contemporary education is very shallow; Wang [Caigui] calls it ‘little cat and little dog’. This [label] is from the Republican Era, the time around 1912. Many Chinese, especially those who had studied the classics, labelled this after-reform education as ‘Cats-and-Dogs-Education’ (*maogou jiaoyu* 猫狗教育), things about cats and dogs. That was because many teachers thought that a three years old child could understand if you said, ‘This is a little kitten, this is a little doggy,’ but if you read the classics for the child, many people thought that they wouldn’t understand. So this is why today’s society educates their children with really shallow content. But education based on the classics (*jingdian jiaoyu* 经典教育) teaches the child with strong and profound [content]. That’s the difference.<sup>177</sup> (Headmaster of Chengdu Study Hall)

The headmaster of Chengdu Study Hall picks up Wang Caigui’s criticism of Dewey’s educational philosophy and claims that taking over such ideas within China’s educational reforms at the early 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in a useless educational system. Wang Caigui believes that an educational approach based on Dewey made people stupid:

So this is a very awkward thing, why do we practice education and open schools, but instruct our children so that they turn stupid? Because people don’t know how intelligent children can be – and that is Dewey’s thought: children are stupid, we can only teach them a little bit. In reality, children are very intelligent, they can learn a lot; they can learn their present knowledge and they can learn life-long knowledge. They are required to understand the knowledge at hand, but actually, their ability to understand things exceeds their schoolwork. There are people wondering why their children don’t learn anything in schoolwork, and well, that’s because they are made stupid. Therefore children’s grades are the best in first grade, a little bit worse in second grade and the worst in sixth grade. Do you understand? In first grade, you don’t need to test them, because they all get over 90 and up to 100 points. But the more exams they write, the more stupid they get, and why is that? Because the more you teach, the more stupid the children get. If you would let a child in first grade start to read books [the classics] autonomously, the teacher wouldn’t need to teach anything, and all children would be more intelligent.<sup>178</sup> (Wang Caigui)

Lack of “originality” in contemporary Chinese education is a problem widely acknowledged among classics reading educators.<sup>179</sup> Foreign (American) influence on Chinese education resulted in an approach that would not address children’s dispositions and could not support

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<sup>177</sup> “那普通的课本呢，程度就很浅，这个更多的是源于近代的这个教育思想，尤其是杜威的教育思想。那他的教育思想就认为生活即教育，所以他认为很多教育要从生活当中来。那比如说，这个孩子他在生活当中，他在这个做事啦，他在这里玩啊，那我们可以去给他，去透过它能理解他的生活，去跟他做一点点教育。所以现代教育就做得很浅，所以王教授说‘小猫小狗’。这个在民国时期，就是大概 1912 年以后，这个时期里头，很多的中国人呢，尤其是读过经书的中国人他们都曾经说，说这样的教育，中国当时也改革教育嘛，这样改革以后就称为“猫狗教育”，猫猫狗狗的事。因为我们这样，一般的老师也是这样认为的，你跟一个三岁孩子讲话“这是一个小猫咪，这是一只小狗”，他是能理解的，但是你跟他读经书啊，很多人都觉得不能理解。所以这个，所以就是，就现在社会都是以很浅的内容去教孩子，而经典教育是以很高度的，所谓很深奥地去教孩子。这是差异啊。” (CD16001)

<sup>178</sup> “所以说这个是很奇怪的事，为什么我们办教育、开学校，而还要把孩子教的那么笨？因为他不知道孩子是可以那么聪明的，就是杜威的思想，孩子是笨的，[...] 我们只能教他一点点。其实孩子是很聪明的，他可以学很多，他可以学他现在的知识，也可以学一辈子的知识，那现在的知识要了解，那他的理解力其实比学校功课还多的。但你有人是说，那有的孩子学校功课为什么都学不好呢？因为你把他教笨的嘛，所以所有学校的孩子一年级的成绩是最好的，二年级的成绩就差一点，一直到六年级是最差的。懂吗？所以一年级是你不必教的，一年级很多人都考九十几，一百分。但越考越糟糕，为什么越考越糟糕，因为越来越教，孩子越来越笨，如果让孩子一年级就开始自己读书，老师都不要教，所有孩子都比较聪明。” (TS15001)

<sup>179</sup> See especially: QF16001.

the development of their capabilities and abilities. It is usually argued that the high competition in today's Chinese education stemmed from the imperial examination system which "embedded a careerist attitude towards scholarship, which to a significant degree has shaped the education focus in today's China that is narrowly centered upon college entrance examinations (*gaokao*)" (Yi 2008: 26). Examinations allowed for upwards social mobility in China for centuries, and after the reestablishment of the university entrance examination in 1977, the focus on exams was stressed once again. Children today experience a high performance pressure in a "new examination hell," in character not quite different from imperial times (Yi 2008: 36f.). However, a teacher from Beijing Academy A traces the high competition in China's current system back to the foundation of the PR China when the political, social and educational systems were copied from the Soviet Union (see chapter 1.2):

Well, public education in today's system – I don't know if you have done any research on that yet – because China's public education, in the current system, has its starting point in inborn weakness. Because formerly, when the People's Republic of China was established, they used the educational system of the Soviet Union. You know, for example – if you look at it from the nature of nationalities, maybe the Germans are comparatively strict, and well, the Russians are more... well... full of visions. So from the very beginnings, their educational system had many problems. But because of political reasons, the educational system of the Soviet Union was completely moved into our country. But there was one problem: the basis of the people was not the same. There was a large difference between the number of people in Russia, in the former Soviet Union, and in China.

After spending a long period of time in the system, people's lives start to settle, the number of people grows, and it even exploded in the 60s and the 70s, and what did it cause? It caused that the capacity of higher education, in relation to the total number of people, was very limited. In our generation, the rate is not even at ten percent; not even ten percent can enter higher education. Well, and this produces many problems. [...] Because there is so much pressure behind the final university entrance examination, there is a small chance that you pass it.<sup>180</sup> (Teacher in Beijing Academy A)

An educational system taken over from another country with other people and a different number of people is not considered as a valid choice to cover educational needs of China. Higher education being able only to cater to the needs of a small number of people, of course, made places at universities highly competitive; the "examination hell" is not related to China's own tradition, but to the changes in the educational landscape after China lost its own original educational system at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>180</sup> “那么，目前这种体制内的教学呢，我不知道你有没有研究过，因为中国体制内的教学还是有他的一个，就现行的体制内，有他的这种，它的原点上的这种先天不足。因为当时中华人民共和国创立的时候，他的教育体制用的是前苏联的，您知道，比如说，从民族性来说啊，可能德国这个民族相对而言是严谨的，那俄罗斯这个民族呢，相对来说，就很……很充满创想，所以他这个教育体制一开始，本身有很多问题。但是当时因为政治原因，又把这个前苏联的这个教育体制呢，完全挪到了国内。但是有一个问题是什么呢？这个人口基数不一样，嗯，俄罗斯那边，前苏联那边，它面临的人口基数和中国完全是几何级的差别。那你在体制内通过长时间的推行之后啊，人民的生活开始安稳，人口呢，开始慢慢的增长，尤其是在七十年代爆发式的，六七十年代，它就导致了什么呢？导致了就是说，真正的高等教育，嗯，对于这个人口基数的承载能力比例非常有限。嗯，我们这一代人，这个比例大概不到百分之十，不到百分之十，能真正进入高等教育的。那么，这就会产生问题，[...] 就是因为就是你最终高考压力很大，你能录取的比例很少。” (PK16006)



The competitive and examination-oriented education requires a highly standardized educational system in which everybody goes through the same courses and the same examinations to be able to compare performances and select the best (see also Yi 2008: 37). Standardization in contents and measurements led to uniformity of thought – which is criticized from the side of classics reading education.

Being a young person in our generation and with today's school education is very dangerous, because everyone's thoughts are the same. When everybody's aesthetics and value orientations are all exactly the same, and even enforced by society, this society is very dangerous. Right? It's like the sorts of trees in a forest: when there is only one sort of tree in a forest, it is the most dangerous situation; there is only a singular type. If a bug or a plague of insects would occur and there would be only one type of trees in the forest, everything will be deadly swiped out. Because it wouldn't be ecological; there wouldn't be any circulation between them, there would be no mutual growth, and that would be bad.<sup>181</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy A)

A forest equipped with only one type of tree is not ecologically balanced and resistant against harmful influence. Similarly, state education is perceived as leaving the nation unprepared for change and challenge. Only a system based on reading the classics could provide the diversity among Chinese minds which was needed for society to embrace change constructively. Applied in a rather loose way and split apart from the examination system that posed pressure on students by requiring comparable examination outcomes, the classics appear as fruitful ground for the growth of a diverse intellectual world. Public education with a single focus on good grades leading to a place at a good university and a good job with a good salary is depicted in contrast to this image as monotonous and source of pressure and (unnecessary) stress for children; mere knowledge absorption in such a stressful system just to gain certain points for certain grades is regarded as meaningless<sup>182</sup> and a rather mechanical process.<sup>183</sup> With its extreme focus on (factual) knowledge and exams, state education is criticized for neglecting other core moments of education, such as morality, character building and personal development; the humane flavor of education was missing.<sup>184</sup>

Neglect of the human being as human being led to personal tragedies due to stress and pressure within education such as suicide. Focus on facts, knowledge input and exams stimulated the brain severely without offering counterbalance. Reconsiderations of the right

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<sup>181</sup>“现在的学校教育 [...], 当一个时代的年轻人, 他的想法都一样的时候, 这多危险。当每个人的那个所谓的审美、价值取向都完全一样, 甚至被社会裹挟的时候, 这个社会很可怕。是吧? 就像一个森林的木种, 森林里面只有一种树木, 是最危险的, 只有单一的品种, 比如说来一个害虫, 来一个虫灾, 全部会死光。因为他不是一个生态, 他之间没有一个循环, 没有一个互相生长, 就很麻烦。”(PK16001)

<sup>182</sup> PK16003; PK16004; PK16006; TS15002.

<sup>183</sup> SZ15004.

<sup>184</sup> PK16002; PK16003; PK16006; WTS16001.

mode of education needed to consider the person as a whole, not only with a mind, but with body, *psyche* and mind:

Once the brain in its development is overly stimulated, the damage for the child is even bigger, so in China, you see a lot of children who achieve high grades, become Master and PhD students, but they jump from sky scrapers. They cannot bear it, they cannot bear life. Of course, there are many more when you go down a level to high schools. China's university entrance examination is insane. For grades, the pupils sacrifice their sleep, sacrifice physical activity, so their bodies are very weak, and when the body is weak, diseases come easily. Now, everybody starts to think that even though you need to study at university, this could not happen at the expense of one's body; if one paid attention to the brain, one would also have to put attention to the body. But they still don't think about the *psyche* (*lingxing* 灵性) very much. So, to become a wholesome person, the child at least needs these three pieces to develop in harmony.<sup>185</sup> (Headmaster of Xiamen Academy)

Deficiencies in the educational system and personal consequences (or: consequences among persons) drive classics reading educators to call for educational reform (*gaige* 改革) based on the classics.<sup>186</sup> For over 100 years, Chinese education has not been able to produce people of great talent (*da rencai* 大人才);<sup>187</sup> only educational facilities in the past reached such high educational goals – and the talented men turned into gentlemen (*junzi*). Classics and traditional education, having proved to be successful over centuries, would therefore be the suitable resource to restructure present education.<sup>188</sup> Changes in the modern educational system under foreign influences calls for a return to a native type of education from the past that could promise a better tomorrow. As the headmaster of Shanghai Study Hall claims, “We think that classics reading education can nurture people who are loved by others, trusted by friends, embraced by the hearts of their parents, and the elderly could look forward for them.”<sup>189</sup>

For Wang Caigui, a reformed educational system would have education based on the classics (*jingdian de jiaoyu* 经典的教育) in schools. Entrance exams for secondary schools (*zhongkao* 中考) and universities (*gaokao* 高考) as well as those for public service in the national government (*guojia de gongwuyuan kaoshi* 国家的公务员考试) would contain a certain percentage of Chinese classics to increase the quality of people's moral character

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<sup>185</sup>“脑子的开发一过分、一偏激，对于孩子的创伤是越大的，所以你在中国应该是看到很多那种考上了很顶端的（孩子），成为研究生、博士但是从楼上跳下去的。他承受不了，他生命承受不了。当然更多的你要往下一点，高中啊，中国的高考是非常疯狂的，他为了这个分数，他牺牲他的睡眠，牺牲他的运动，所以他的身体是非常弱的，体弱多病的。那现在呢，大家越来越觉得反正读书是要读，但是一定比如说不要拿身体付出代价，会注重脑也会注重身。但是他关于心灵的那一块呢，对于灵性的那一块呢，他又未必是重视的。所以作为一个完整的人，他至少要三块是能够平衡的发展。”(XM16001)

<sup>186</sup> CD16001; PK16001; TS15001; SZ15007; XM16001; PK16003; PK16004; XM15005; PK16006.

<sup>187</sup> WTS15001.

<sup>188</sup> SH16001.

<sup>189</sup> “社会你不觉得最需要这样的人吗？我认为读经教育就是要培养这样的人：人能爱之，朋友能信之，好，父母能怀之，老者能向往之。”(SH16001)

(*pinde suzhi* 品德素质). Moral integrity developed through education could make it easier to employ morally upright people in the Chinese government. Such a system could change the face of China:

After ten years, the whole secondary school system would have changed, the atmosphere would have changed, and even the universities would have changed. After another 20 years, the whole society would be different. This is the meaning of ‘ruling a country’ (*zhiguo* 治国), and it is the fastest method to ‘govern a country’ (*zhili guojia* 治理国家). It is this easy; just let the children constantly read the classics, and don’t be concerned with anything else. The children will be smart [...] and later on, they will all be generous and scholarly people.<sup>190</sup> (Wang Caigui)

Changes, however, are not that easily and quickly applied. In fact, educational reform in China so far considered traditional education (see chapter 1.4), but not classics reading education in specific. Wang’s ideas are not incorporated within the state system directly, but he has the chance to induce change when his idea(s) are, first of all, embodied by people who would spread and develop them. In the beginning stage of his work, he is pictured as a small force within a world full of changes:

Well, Teacher Wang is a Sampan [<sup>191</sup>], he is a small boat, and his goal is to cross the mighty ocean. His goal is very good. He thinks that mankind – or let us say, Chinese people; we might not be qualified to talk about the whole world – well, from the perspective of Chinese people, from facing the cultural turbulences of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century over the invasion of the highly developed Western material civilization until the invasion into people’s minds and thought... I think that one needs to promote Chinese traditional culture; it is the best in the world, there is a lot of proof for that.<sup>192</sup> (Teacher D / headmaster of Shenzhen Study Hall A)

His work is considered as necessary cure of the harms that China experienced under foreign influence concerning the loss of the own culture while taking over non-Chinese systems, thoughts and mindsets.

Behind this big imaginary are people with their own individual experiences of life, their own past, and China’s past. Their involvement in classics reading education, if performed strictly according to Wang’s pedagogical rules or not, is often connected with an encounter either with Wang Caigui as a person or with teaching material or promotion material (such as online videos and speeches) by him. The headmasters of Shenzhen Study Hall A, Beijing

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<sup>190</sup> “那 10 年之后，那整个初中高中都变了，风气都变了，连大学都变了；再 20 几年之后呢，整个社会都变了。这是治国，是治理国家最快的方式。就这么简单，就让小朋友一直读经，什么都不要管，小朋友聪明，[...] 而且将来都是一个很大方的人。” (TS15001)

<sup>191</sup> A sampan is a flat bottomed Chinese wooden boat; some sampans include a small shelter on board and may be used as a permanent habitation on inland waters.

<sup>192</sup> “那么如果说王财贵老师呢，他的就是一条舢板，就是一个小船，为了.....目的都是为了渡过汪洋大海，目的都是好的。都认为人类社会或者说是中国人，咱们可能没有资格说地球，从中国人的角度来说呢，面临着这种二十世纪初期的这种文化动荡，嗯，到了后来西方的这个物质文明的高度的发达、发展和侵入，侵入人的那种内心和思想，认为呢，需要弘扬中国传统文化，是世界的一极，也是提供很多的参考吧。” (WTS16006)

Study Hall and Suzhou Study Hall A reveal the mobilizing force behind Wang's ideals. All three have put aside their former occupation and lifestyle to engage in the promotion and teaching of the classics – and all three have turned to this educational concept over personal and emotional experience with the classics.

Teacher D runs a large study hall in the mountains near Shenzhen. She is well-known in the classics reading community as she is founder of *Dujing Baby*, the company that promotes prenatal and early childhood education in the area of classics reading. Her ideal is a tradition-inspired educational system educating both parents and teachers. She thinks that China needs a new comprehensive system of classics reading education starting with education (of mother and fetus) during pregnancy and extending to primary (*xiaoxue* 小学) and secondary school (*zhongxue* 中学).<sup>193</sup> Such an early start of classics reading education would guarantee a better success in achieving the ideal goals of it. Her husband tells the story of her devotion to the classics in relation with Wang Caigui:

At the very beginning, my wife got in contact [with the classics]. At that time, she watched Wang Caigui's 'One Speech, 100 Years of Excitement,' and we think that there was an internal value to it. Our children were still small and suitable for this education. From then onwards, we got into this education and in the year of 2001, we invited the professor [Wang Caigui] into our home – that year, we were in Jinzhou 锦州 – to get into closer contact. We came to appreciate the charm of Chinese culture more deeply, and from then onwards, we started with this education. In the process of doing this education, we also needed to study, including the original texts of the classics, and books of a few contemporary thinkers, such as Mou Zongsan. I have read them all. After reading these books, I myself also grew continually.<sup>194</sup> (Teacher D's husband)

Teacher D tells the story of her start into classics reading education differently with much more magic and compassion:

Well, 16 years ago, I heard about reading the classics, and classics reading education. My hand picked up *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *Book Laozi*, and *Book Zhuangzi*, these classics reading books, and there was a certain intimate familiarity that is beyond description; I wanted to do things like this. It's indescribable, I don't know for which reason. I don't know – to use a Western expression without wanting to be impetuous: maybe it was enlightenment by God.<sup>195</sup> (Teacher D, headmaster of Shenzhen Study Hall A)

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<sup>193</sup> Field observations: Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 14, 2016.

<sup>194</sup> “这个最早是在我太太接触的。她当时是看了一个王教授的，王财贵教授的《一场演讲，百年震撼》。然后，我们看到了，在里面感受到它的价值，然后正好我们的孩子又比较小，正好符合这个教育。然后从那开始，我们就开始接触这个教育，然后 2001 年，我们把教授请到我们老家，当年我们在锦州，跟我们近距离的接触。然后在那里感受到，更深的感受到中国文化的这个魅力。然后从那开始，就开始，开始做这个教育，然后做教育的过程当中，我们也要在读书。嗯……包括，嗯……这些经典的原文，还有一些近代思想家的一些文……书，比如牟先生的书，我们都看。看这些书之后，自己也在不断地成长吧。” (WTS15001)

<sup>195</sup> “就是，16 年前，2000 年的时候，听到读经，听到读经教育，手里面拿到《大学》、《中庸》、《老子》、《庄子》，这样经典的读本，莫名的有一种亲切的熟悉，想要做这样的事情。莫名的不知道什么原因，我不知道套用西方的表述，或许是上帝的启示。” (Teacher M)

Teacher D is a great personality in promoting classics reading education, especially when catching people on the emotional level as has become visible during a few speeches she gave at her own study hall in 2016.<sup>196</sup> While her husband describes their turn to classics reading education as result of a meeting with Wang Caigui, Teacher D makes it appear as if a power from above sent her a message to engage in this task of great importance.

A very personal and self-reflective experience brought the headmaster of Beijing Study Hall to his new profession as a headmaster. He participated in the *Analects 100* classics reading winter camp (*Lunyu yibai donglingying* 论语一百冬令营), a classics reading camp initiated by Wang Caigui which is free of charge. People from all over China who are interested in reading the *Analects* join this reading camp and collectively read and recite the *Analects* 100 times. He participated in the camp when he was in a life phase in which he pondered on the question how to change his professional life into a direction that would allow him to engage in cultural work. Reading the *Analects* again and again influenced him a lot; according to his own accounts, it opened up his memory and he recalled a lot of things that happened in the past which he could then re-examine in a new light:

Reading classics is most suitable for the human nature. In the course of reading the classics, you think about things that happened in the past, and you think about what you did well in the past, just like it is said in the *Analects*: ‘follow the example of a virtuous person.’ And for future behavior, when there are still aspects that do not fit the principles, you ‘look at the unworthy and examine yourself internally;’ this helps me to reflect upon myself. So the classics can be the standard you refer to – not a standard in a very strict sense, but you can place it next to your past life and compare. This way, if there was only one thing that was not good in your past, if you made a little mistake, reading the classics can help you to become aware of this mistake, and then you won’t make it a second time. This is called ‘preventing the mistake happening for a second time.’ And I thought that this is very interesting, I profited a lot. So I wrote a little essay on my impressions, titled ‘Reading Classics can Change a Person’s Past.’ [...] Sometimes I would read a sentence and think, oh, precisely this sentence encompasses a principle that I realized only after I had been in work life for several years; but it had been mentioned already about 2,000 years earlier by our ancestors. I think that I agree a lot with them, I can actually still have such a compliance with ancient people – it felt like someone would understand me, as if someone would care about me, and that made me really happy.<sup>197</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Study Hall)

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<sup>196</sup> Field observations: Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 14 and 15, 2016.

<sup>197</sup> “读经是，他是，嗯，这个，读的经典是最切合于人性的，那……那你这个……恩，你读这个，你读这个经典的时候你又想起来过去很多的事情，你觉得过去做得好的地方，就像《论语》里面说的，‘见贤思齐，’那我以后还要这么做，如果做的以后还没有合乎道理的地方，‘见不贤而内自省，’会让你自己去反省你自己。那么经典就作为你参照的一个标准，他也不是严格意义上的标准，但是你可以对照你过去走过的人生，这样的话，那个过去，假如他本身，他只是个不好的，你做错的…你犯的一个小错误而已，但是因为你读过了经典，你明白你之所以错在什么地方，那么也就相当于你赋予了他一个经典的意义。就像你过去读过经典一样，你过去的那个错误就有了一个新的存在的意义，就他可以影响我们现在当下的行为，那我们过去……我以后就不要再犯这个错了。最厉害的就是颜回，他犯过一次的错误就，不再犯第二次，叫“不二过”嘛，“不二过”，诶，那我这样也很有意义啊，我这样也很有收获。所以我就写了一篇心得，叫“读经可以改变一个人的过去”[...]有的时候你突然读到一句话，觉得，哎呀，这句话简直就是我们工作很多年才悟出的一个道理，早被两千多年前祖先都已经讲了，就觉得你跟他很有共鸣，觉得，哎呀，原来我们能够跟古人还能有这种共鸣感啊，就觉得自己好像…很被人理解，很被人体贴的那种感觉，就特别喜悦。”(PK16004)

Reading the classics led to understanding of who he is and wants to be based on the principles written down within the classics. He takes those writings as suggestions or thought of the sages which provide a standard for orientation in life and for dealing with the personal past. It seems as if the discovery of China's cultural past was highly related to a self-discovery. Personal gain and an emotional connection to the own cultural past drove this young man into the field of classics reading education: after the camp, he signed up to be a volunteer for the next camp, and soon, he would change his career and open a study hall in Beijing. He appreciates the focus of classics reading education on people's benefit, not on personal profit, and since he has such positive experience with it, he wanted to share it with others.

The headmaster in Beijing opened his study hall for reasons of ideals and visions connected with classics reading education, not for educating his own children since he had none at the time. This is also true for the well-known headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A who has come the longest way through the world of classics reading education. When she was little, her mother worked (and she played) in a store for classical books, and she recalls her grandparents going to a traditional-style private school (*sishu*) when they were children. Thus, she was in contact with tradition and classical education from childhood onwards. This shaped her self-perception: she envied the people of the old times for their beautiful and cultivated lifestyle and hoped that she could be a person who lived in such times instead of the contemporary world. In high school, she read some parts of the classics:

After I read these books, I thought that the ancient people were very open, and the principles (*daoli* 道理) they talk about are eternal (*yongheng* 永恒). These doctrines (*yili* 义理) are eternal, they are the same for people of all generations, no matter if Chinese or foreigners; everybody has to follow them. For example when we talk about righteousness or about respecting one's parents, about the love for one's brothers [siblings] and the trust and faith in friends – this is an eternal value system (*yongheng de jiazhi* 永恒的价值观). You don't need to put it aside simply because it is from ancient times – that was my impression at that time.<sup>198</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A)

This ideal picture of the past did not leave her, and after graduating from university she experienced a phase of aimlessness and disorientation (*mimang* 迷茫) that lasted for about two years; she did not know which professional direction to choose. In this phase, she got in contact with traditional Chinese Han clothing (*Han minzu de chuantong fushi* 汉民族的传统服饰; in short: *Hanfu* 汉服). Within a circle of interested people, she met a *sishu* teacher and learnt about children who memorized the Chinese classics again – her idealized past became tangible in the present. Getting to know Han clothing brought her closer to tradition, and own

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<sup>198</sup> “但是我读了这些书之后，我就觉得其实古人是非常的开放，而且他们讲的这种道理是永恒的，就是每个时代的人甚至不管是中国人还是外国人，其实这个义理的方面都是永恒的，都是一样的，而且必须得遵循的。比如说讲仁义啊、讲……讲这个孝敬父母啊、要友爱兄弟啊、要对朋友讲信义啊，这些都是永恒的价值观念嘛。就是你不需要因为他是古代的我就要抛弃，我当时就是这个感觉。”(SZ15004)

research on the past made her aware of the tragedy which her own tradition went through only decades ago:

It was a time in the past when I went to Qufu to participate in an activity to worship Confucius which was organized by common people (*minjian* 民间). Before that, they did not wear the right clothes for worshipping Confucius – because of the cut [<sup>199</sup>]. We wanted to revive this starting with the Confucius ritual; we wanted to revive this clothing. A few friends and I... at that time, there were two teachers, they were... well, I was very young, ten years ago, I was a bit younger, and they were from the generation before me. Their children were reading the classics, and they were running their own *sishu*. They must have been among the earliest group of people to run a *sishu* in China. It was then that I learnt what reading the classics meant, and there were even a few children who did not go to school but exclusively studied the classics.<sup>200</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A)

A Confucius ritual organized in Qufu, Confucius' birthplace, was the occasion granting her insight into more facets of the revival of China's traditional past in the present in form of Han garments and children reading the classics she was familiar with from her own past. In her profession as a journalist, she started a tour to visit newly established *sishus* – only a few at that time – in a two-year journey. While being on this tour, she heard about Wang Caigui who was still living in Taiwan back then. They started to exchange their thoughts online and met in person during one of Wang's visits in mainland China. She followed him on his classics reading promotion tour to write about the visits and encounters, and she continued to learn about classics reading education. Classics reading activists admired her insights into the newly emerging world of classics reading education; with her visits and writings, she gained a position in their circle. Three years after encountering classics reading education in Qufu, she quit her job to open a classics reading education promotion center (*dujing jiaoyu tuiguang zhongxin* 读经教育推广中心). When she decided to settle down and start a family (*anjia* 安家), she searched for the perfect place to combine her family plans with her ambitions in classics reading education. Thus, she founded her study hall in Suzhou (Zhejiang province). She describes her story as “a process of merging fate with classics reading” (*gen dujing jieyuan de yige guocheng* 跟读经结缘的一个过程).<sup>201</sup>

The last two stories have in common that Wang's concept of reading the classics came into their lives when they were in a state of confusion or aimlessness, when personal or emotional comfort was needed, when direction and support for choices on the next step in life

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<sup>199</sup> She refers to the cut of tradition in the May Fourth Era from the 1910s to the 1930s.

<sup>200</sup> “那个时候我们去曲阜去参加祭祀孔子的一个活动，是民间的。因为以前祭祀孔子他们的服饰可能也不是太对，因为这种断层吧，我们就是想复兴这种，从祭祀孔子开始来复兴这种服饰嘛，那这个当时和几个朋友，当时有两个老师，他们都.....那个时候我很年轻啦，十年前还比较年轻。然后他们算是我的前辈啦，这样。那他们自己的孩子是在读经的，他们自己也在办私塾，应该是...他们是中国最早一批办私塾的人，我从那个时候开始知道有读经这么回事儿，然后有一些孩子是不上学专门在读经的。” (SZ15004)

<sup>201</sup> SZ15004.

were needed. Wang's reading practice of the classics offered both comfort and advice – a characteristic which Billioud and Thoraval (2015: 108f.) refer to as “settlement of mind and life” (*anshen liming* 安身立命) within their research. Teacher D describes her decision-making process less detailed but similarly personal as *intuitive* turning towards something that was familiar in way as if it was naturally part of her. All three cases contain an emotional and/or experiential part of tradition and traditional education.

What looks like nativism or cultural nationalism on small and personal scale is part of the larger project of giving China back her very own cultural face. Cultural losses endured in the past are filled with large and colorful reactivations of ritual, clothing, joint practice, reading the classics, and valuing the sages of the past. Engaged individuals also find their peace in action under the larger visionary umbrella. Especially when having experienced a time of unrest or disorientation in their own lives, turning to classics reading education helped them to settle their minds and find their direction in life. The personal grasp on Confucian idealism and its characteristic as source for personal needs shows how imaginaries constructed for a larger end are, on smaller levels, embodied by actual people in their daily lives, their self-definition and cultural identity – this is the grounding of utopian imaginaries (see also Price et al. 2016: 128f.), and this is how impulses of the utopian can be integrated into daily life to change rhythms and textures of daily lives (Gordin et al. 2010: 219). Utopias are not only imagined futures “but can also be understood as concrete practices through which historically situated actors seek to reimagine their present and transform it into a plausible future” (Gordin et al. 2010: 2).

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### 3.3. MEMORIES OF THE PAST: HISTORY AS BOTH SOURCE AND SOLUTION FOR SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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Utopian thought can be considered as consequence of upheavals and war (Winter 2006: 5) on social level and as attempt to interpret one's present grounded in the past with regard to a possible (better) future on personal level (Gordin et al. 2010: 2-4). Confucian education as part of China's past is revived within the present; cultural loss and destruction are also part of China's past, but as something people have to cope with in the present. Social and political conflict, cultural suppression, and instability in the educational sector scarred 20<sup>th</sup> century China. Results are still perceived generations later. Classics reading education in study halls and academies appears as measurement to overcome failures within the past by means of tradition. Given that the past was full of turmoil, the present is a possible time slot to process that:



Before the new China was established, there were all kinds of battles, no matter if with other countries or within our own country – anyways, everything was at war. In 1949, after the new China was established, it started again, and it lasted until the political upheavals of the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, and in 1979, there slowly began a process of reform and opening, and only after the reform and opening, the Chinese society entered a state of normality. Before this, it was some kind of un-normality. Only after entering normality there can be people who can think normally about things they want to do, and those who dare to do things which need to be done. [...] Because I am born in 1981, and basically people from the 70s to the 80s are born into a more normal time, these people can do more normal things when they are grown up.<sup>202</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A)

In this account, social and political turmoil and distress meant cultural oppression and prevented people from being normal – which resulted in an *un-normal* condition of Chinese society today. Today’s classics reading education is, in this light, an *active approach* to bring Chinese culture back into a *normal* condition and to bring Chinese society back to normal via this Chinese culture. Counterbalancing cultural destruction in form of Wang Caigui’s classics reading education means drifting to the other “culturally overloaded” extreme; or as Bregnbæk and Bunkenborg (2017: 5f.) would say, the cultural emptiness is filled with an overly full concept of culture – in this case, one that is trained via education.

Apart from the Cultural Revolution, the same headmaster talks about earlier forms of cultural decay which could be traced back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Western imperialism occupied the physical and intellectual world in China – something which could only have happened because China’s last dynasty was under Manchurian rule. She claims that Manchus as ethnic minority from the margins of the formerly glorious Han Chinese Ming dynasty empire pushed original Chinese culture to the margins already. This is an opinion she gained when she started to engage in the revival of traditional Han garments. Here, classics reading education has an overlap with Carrico’s (2017: 85-87) Han clothing movement which aims at reviving traditional Han culture by wearing the right clothes – both culture and clothes had been lost under Qing dynasty.

Han garments are a form of expression of traditional culture [...]. This contact [with Han garments] changed my view on history a lot [...]. Why did the Han clothes disappear? Actually, it happened mostly during the end of Ming and the beginning of Qing dynasty: the government of Qing dynasty had people change their haircuts and fashions; they changed the Han garments into the clothes of the Manchu people [...]. To be honest, this part of history is played down in our history books – maybe it is not completely left out, but it is not a focal point, so normally, people don’t know what it was what happened back then. Well, after I learned about the Han garments, I also learned about this part of history, and actually, this part of history is really important – not only concerning the garments, but

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<sup>202</sup> “新中国建立之前就在打，各种打仗，那个，不管是跟外面的国家还是自己内部（呵呵）反正就是各种打仗。那 49 年新中国成立之后，又开始，一直到文革都是一种政治的风波。那文革是 76 年结束嘛，那这个 79 年开始这个...慢慢的开始改革开放，改革开放之后其实中国社会才进入一种正常，在此前都是一种不正常。然后，正常了之后，才有人可以正常的想一些该做的事情，然后也比较敢做一些该做的事情，[...]。所以就 80 年代之后中国进入了一种正常。那从，因为我是 81 年的嘛，所以从，基本上就是从 70 年代到 80 年代，这一批人，他是从出生都是一个比较正常的时代。那这些人长大之后，那他可能就会做一些比较正常的事情。” (SZ15004)

many other aspects of lifestyle, the ways of the mind, of thought, and of thinking slowly began to change, and China began to walk the path downhill. [...]

No matter if literary inquisition (*wenziyu* 文字狱), isolation of the country (*biguan suoguo* 闭关锁国), or high pressure through all kinds of politics: all of this caused China's originally magnificent civilization to shrink and get insignificant, it turned into such a feeling. I know this part of history, and I know why today our whole Chinese nation has a perception of history that is all wrong: it slowly changed into such within these few hundred years, and the reason why there was May Fourth also lies here. Well, everything that was criticized by the May Fourth Movement –feudalism, conservatism, the backwardness – this is actually all Qing dynasty; this is the impression that Qing dynasty gave people, and not the impression that the China before Ming dynasty gave people. Well, actually, Chinese people before Ming dynasty gave others an open-hearted, optimistic and open impression. But once Qing dynasty was there, it changed within moments – people turned numb and the government got corrupt and immoral.

I know this part of history, and at the beginning I thought, this is very painful and sad, but, well, my second self thinks that I have the responsibility to let more people know about this, and I hope that the real Chinese culture can be brought back.<sup>203</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A)

This quotation is long, but it enlightens on intersections of history, imaginaries of history, and their relation to the individual in the present. At the end of Qing dynasty and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this headmaster detects the largest foreign influence on Chinese culture, not only from abroad, but also from within due to foreign rule by the Manchu which ruined the image people had from China. Manchu rule as barbarian sovereignty and suppression of the literary culture of Han Chinese is a label belonging to “Han-chauvinist historians” as historian Mark Elliott (2001: 25) states; the “Marxist variation on this theme is that the Manchus were evil because they were ‘feudal’ and ‘backward’” (Elliott 2001: 25). Both perspectives mix within the quotation of a Confucian activist who aims at restoring a tradition that is pure and free of exterior influence. Dealing with the past is emotionally charged; she feels personal responsibility to correct the courses of history that went wrong.

Whereas the headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A stresses the correction of the historically ruined image of China through engagement with tradition (especially Han garments), the

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<sup>203</sup> “那汉服还是传统文化的一种表现方式。[...] 那这个接触对我特别大的一个触动，就是我的历史观，对于历史的认识改变了，尤其是汉服，就是为什么汉服会消失？其实最主要的就是明末清初的这种，清朝的政府他有一个剃发易服嘛，把汉人的服饰改成满族人的服饰，有这样一段历史。其实这段历史在我们的教科书里是被淡化的，可能不是完全没有，但是不是重点，所以一般的人也不知道是怎么回事儿，那我了解了汉服之后，我就了解了这段历史，其实这段历史特别的重要。就是不光是服饰，很多方面，生活的方式、精神的方式、思想的方式、思维的方式，都是从那个时候就开始慢慢的改变了，包括中国开始走下坡路 [...]。不管是文字狱也好、闭关锁国也好、各种政治的高压也好，就是，使中国本来很灿烂的这种文明啊，然后它被压缩压缩，变成了这种感觉。那，我知道这段历史之后，我就知道为什么我们现在整个中国人对于历史的一种认知都是错误的，就是从这几百年开始慢慢的演变。那包括为什么会有五四，那五四所批判的这些所谓的封建啊、保守啊、落后啊，其实都是清朝，清朝给人的印象，而不是明朝以前的中国给人的印象，那其实明朝以前的中国给人的印象是很光明、很开朗、很开放的这样一个印象。但是到了清朝以后一下子就变了，民众也变得麻木，政府也变得腐朽。那，我知道这段历史，首先我觉得非常的悲痛，那第二我是觉得我有责任去让更多的人去了解，我希望能够复兴真正的中国文化。” (SZ15004)

headmaster of Beijing Academy B emphasizes that Confucian classics should never have been discarded as teaching material:

With the arrival of modernity, that is, starting from the People's Republic, China faced a period of the severest destruction of Chinese classics within the last 100 years. People thought that Chinese classics were useless – and not only useless but also a hindrance to the process of modernization. So they rejected them; they totally casted them aside. What did they learn instead? They learned Western theory and Western culture; people brought democracy and science to China. They believed that China's culture would be an obstacle for democracy and science, that people must adopt democracy and science, and cast aside Chinese culture. This is how the people of the May Fourth movement thought. Such a way of thought looks kind of radical today. [I think that] you can absorb things from Western culture, but you do not need to set aside everything from Chinese culture like you pour away bathing water.<sup>204</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy B)

Radical rejection of the Chinese classics while turning to Western thought and system is coined as radical; it is met with a seemingly more moderate attitude to be open to Western culture while still teaching Chinese tradition. His call to reinstall Confucian classics appears as justified claim to bring back what had been stolen by thinkers of a phase in Chinese history that was unfortunate for Chinese culture. These thinkers, however, were Chinese. Cultural oppression appears to have been *chosen* by intellectuals and leaders during May Fourth when facing Western cultural and technological superiority. He has more than enough cultural confidence today to bring back the classics into education, something that had been *lacking* in the past.

However, given that Confucian culture is also part of the historical past, there are also more favorable views on it. For example, even though the assistant of the headmaster of Beijing Academy A acknowledges that exterior forces propelled the demise of Chinese culture, she holds against this that Confucian scholars (*Rujia* 儒家) had always been withstanding deficient systems or bad influence on society; they protested and then brought change to unwelcome conditions<sup>205</sup> – something that is also attempted within the revival of Confucian education. Reaching back further in history, far behind unwanted exterior influence on China, Confucian activists find cultural resources of an untouched and pure Confucianism from which they take remedy for today's social ailments. This is highly connected with the belief that history itself is educative in the sense that dealing with history gives people a

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<sup>204</sup> “到了近代以来啊，就是，民国以来啊，他这个，这一百年对中国的经典的破坏是最大的。他是认为这个中国的经典完全没有用，不只是没有用，他还阻碍了现代化的进程。所以要把它们打倒，完全抛弃，那要学习什么呢？学习西方的理论，西方的文化，就是把民主与科学请到中国来。认为中国的文化呢是阻碍民主与科学的，要把民主与科学能够引进来，就要把中国的文化打倒。这是五四那一批人呢一个思考的方式。这种思考的方式我们现在来看呢就是，嗯，比较激进的。就是你可以吸收西方的东西，但是你不需要把中国的东西全部都抛掉，就像倒洗澡水啊。”(PK16002)

<sup>205</sup> Conversation with headmaster's assistant, Beijing Academy A, January 19, 2016.

perspective – on how others used to deal with each other and with issues of life and how previous mistakes can be prevented, similar to study experiences with the classics.<sup>206</sup>

Classics reading educators find the key for social improvement according to real Chinese values in history; “original Chineseness” could be only found in the Confucian classics.<sup>207</sup> The headmaster of Shenzhen Study Hall D states that throughout history, the “interconnecting Thread of the Way” (*daotong* 道统)<sup>208</sup> was the crucial chain of thought to hand down central values that have always been unchangeable (*yi cheng bu bian* 一成不变), and that created a stable (*wending* 稳定) and harmonious (*pinghe* 平和) social system (*shehui jieji zhidu* 社会阶级制度). A real literate or scholar (*wenren* 文人) had a stable understanding of social values (*wending de shehui jiazhi guan* 稳定的社会价值观) and could create a good social environment (*shehui huanjing* 社会环境). In the last few decades, China lacked a core value system (*hexin de jiazhi tixi* 核心的价值体系); there was no common agreement about social values. Today, Chinese society was already a bit more balanced (*pingjing* 平静) showed more understanding for Western culture which he relates to the already started revival of traditional Chinese values.<sup>209</sup> The *Daotong* and the continuation of Confucian core values is also a concern of modern new Confucian scholars (Liu 2007: 8); on the level of classics reading education, though, values are incorporated in educative activity and interaction. Traditional elementary education is believed to be the right framework for this because it was better suited for the *Chinese* society. China today still lacked a good basic education, especially in rural areas; in ancient times, the *sishu* school system covered all areas quite well.<sup>210</sup> Study hall and academy education emerges in combination with the Confucian values that are needed so much:

Chinese education is woven around the classical canon. The classics are actually a standard; they constitute a value, a faith, a basic rule. If our society does not have a common rule, a common faith, this society is very dangerous. [...] So this system of canonical writing is, of course, very important for education. You cannot talk about education in separation from it. If you do not want them at all and do education, can the people you educate have a values and world view... is this world view accurate? That can't be. So we... maybe in the end, we still need to go back to the classics.<sup>211</sup> (Teacher in Beijing Academy A)

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<sup>206</sup> TS15003; SH16001; PK16004.

<sup>207</sup> PK16001.

<sup>208</sup> English translation of “*daotong*” according to Makeham 2003b: 56.

<sup>209</sup> Conversation with headmaster, Shenzhen Study Hall D, March 17, 2016.

<sup>210</sup> Conversation with a teacher, Beijing Academy A, January 20, 2016.

<sup>211</sup>“中国的教育他是要围绕着经典的。经典他其实就是一个标准，他确立一个价值、确立一种信仰、确立一种基本的规则。如果我们社会没有一个共同的一个规则，共同的信仰，这个社会就非常的危险了。[...]所以这些经典系统，当然对教育是非常重要的，你教育不能离开这些来谈教育，如果你把这些东西都不要了你去搞教育，那么你教育出来的人他能够有一种价值观和世界.....这个人的人生观是比较的相对正确的吗？可能不行。啊所以我们.....可能最后我们还是要回到经典上来。”(PK16005)

Chinese education and the canon of the Confucian classics are seen as one entity that has to re-enter China's modern educational landscape as a unitary package. Classics reading educators expect that social improvement will be possible on such a basis:

Finally, there is a group of people – or more and more people – who start to take Confucius into their hearts from childhood onwards; they learn from him day by day and worship him every day. Every year, the academy hosts a solemn ceremony for his birthday; we worship Confucius and hold a memorial ceremony for him. But looking at the reality of Chinese society as a whole: one can see that many people's lives are very unhappy in many aspects. For example, if you look at certain companies, especially the bad ones, for example those who put a lot of stuff in milk powder and food. Considering the air and the environment in China everywhere, he [Confucius] would be very worried, yes, he would be very worried. We must change this society, people must be kinder to each other, more honest, and happier; we must make society a little slower, more relaxed, and make families happier. [...] Since the Spring and Autumn period [771-476 BCE] until today, 2,500 years have gone by, but I think that Confucius' ideal has not changed. People who study Confucius, generation for generation of Chinese people, get aware of this ideal. Even though this society might never make us feel satisfied, we will not give up making efforts. So I will engage well in driving forward education, propagate the essence of Chinese culture in large scope, and hope that everybody will get better.<sup>212</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy A)

Safety, health and well-being of Chinese society, three core aspects which are seen in danger facing current shortcomings of both society and education, can be best taken care of when returning to Confucian values. Based on such values, things that went wrong in history and that are unwelcome in current society could be erased. Embodiment of Confucian values by reading the classics in a re-activated educational approach will direct Chinese society into a better future.

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#### 3.4. JOINING FORCES: CLASSICS READING ACTIVITIES AND THEIR POTENTIAL FOR THE CLASSICS READING MOVEMENT

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Price et al. (2016: 146) point out that GUMs have a high concern for networking to promote group solidarity. Structures within the network do not necessarily have to be very hierarchical, and hierarchies can differ within the movement. Networking is also crucial to establish a steady ground for study halls and academies. Interested people are drawn to the world of classics reading via joint activities such as public lectures, free classic reading classes and study camps. Information on such events is spread mostly over social media (e.g. the chat

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<sup>212</sup> “终于有一群或者越来越多的（人），从儿童开始就把他（Confucius）放在心里，天天向他学习，天天礼拜他，每年他的生日书院是最隆重的典礼，就是祭孔，就祭奠孔子。但是 [...] 就是看到整个中国社会的现实，看到很多的领域的人们他们生活的很不幸福。比如看到那些公司，尤其是那些不好的公司，比如说，他把牛奶里面放很多东西，食品里面放很多东西，看到整个中国的空气、环境，他也会很担忧，对，会很担忧。我们要改造这个社会，我们要人与人之间变得更加良善、更加诚实、更加快乐，让这个社会是不是变得慢一点，更悠闲一点，让家庭更幸福一点。[...] 所以说从春秋时期到现在两千五百年过去了，我觉得孔子的理想一直没有变过。学孔子的这些人，一代一代的中国人都在实现这种理想，虽然这个社会可能永远不会让我们满意，但我们不会放弃努力。[...] 所以这也会更加促使他把教育办好，把中国文化的精髓传遍，传播，更广的范围，也希望大家都能变得好起来。” (PK16001)

programs WeChat and QQ) over large distances. A mother of two girls in Beijing Academy B followed the success story of the development of her friend's child in an academy. When she realized how fast the child was memorizing classical texts, she decided to send her children to an academy, too.<sup>213</sup>

Many study halls and academies use these platforms for active advertisement and student recruitment. Social media also supports word of mouth among parents and classics reading enthusiasts. Additionally, the World Wide Web hosts virtual academies and study halls which, for example, organize (real world) reading clubs; the internet serves as platform for communication, connection, and organization (Billioud / Thoraval 2008: 98; Billioud / Thoraval 2007: 13). Apart from promoting the classics and Confucian culture, activists organize rituals and worships over the internet, e.g. for Qufu – real life ritual communities would, then, carry out the rituals in Qufu's Confucius temple (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 226f.).

In the foreground of this chapter are the actual activities that result from both local encounters and virtual communication and that strengthen the movement of reading the classics by recruiting people who share the passion for tradition and want to support its revival actively. Wang Caigui appears as a central figure within the network of classics reading activists, not only as creator of classics reading education and related teaching material, but also as central force within two core networking modes: (1) the administration of a study hall system and (2) the *Analects* reading camps which have been mentioned before. Among classics reading educators, he plays the role of a Master or of a leader, especially for those who follow his pure classics reading approach. He has the power to mobilize people and inspire or motivate them to join the classics reading movement, as the examples of three headmasters from Beijing, Suzhou and Shenzhen in chapter 3.2 have shown. Among those educators who apply Wang's pedagogy rather loosely, Wang still counts as inspiration or provider of core teaching material.

The current scope of classics reading education is well visible in an online database where newly established classics reading facilities can register as study hall.<sup>214</sup> The headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall B (which was founded in 2015 not long before the interview took place) explains the registration process as quite easy: educators state their motivation for classics reading education and usually, Wang would accept their application upon that and integrate them into his system, even if they did not operate according to his

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<sup>213</sup> PK16003.

<sup>214</sup> Wang Caigui Classics Reading Education Promotion Center (Wang Caigui Dujing Jiaoyu Tuiguang Zhongxin 王财贵读经教育推广中心). Online: [www.aidujing.com](http://www.aidujing.com) (last access: December 1, 2018).

pure approach. Classes in Suzhou Study Hall B, for example, end at 4 pm and children would go home to spend time with their families.

Ties to Wang Caigui are established differently: over the name of the study hall. It consists of one character taken from a Confucian classic and the character “*qian* 谦”<sup>215</sup> taken from Wang’s courtesy name (*zi* 字) “Master Jiqian” (Jiqian Xiansheng 季谦先生). The respective first character from the classics is chosen in a specific order, starting with the first of the “Four Books”, with the *Great Learning*. The first line of the *Great Learning* reads “*Da xue zhi dao zai ming de* 大学之道在明明德,” so the first study hall would combine the character “*da* 大” with part two of Wang’s courtesy name and is called Daqian 大谦 Study Hall (*Daqian Xuetang* 大谦学堂). Further names would be Xueqian 学谦 Study Hall, Zhiqian 之谦 Study Hall and so forth.<sup>216</sup> When Suzhou Study Hall B registered in April 2015, they had already moved to *The Doctrine of the Mean* for character picking – the second of the “Four Books”.<sup>217</sup> In addition to the name, Wang’s fingerprint is also visible in the style in which the name of the study hall is visually represented. Wang has a very original style of calligraphy, and he gives every study hall under his umbrella a calligraphy with their new name (see IMG. 2, IMG. 3, annex p. 315) which is either used as interior wall decoration or as sign discreetly placed at the entrance of the study hall (which is not necessarily the outside door of the building they are located; not everybody wants to be recognized as study hall from the outside).

Wang Caigui’s Wenli Academy (Wenli Shuyuan 文礼书院) is special within the network of classics reading facilities. It has the status of a model academy and is also an interim goal within the course of classics reading education. After ten years of preparatory study or having learnt 300,000 characters of Chinese and English classics, children can proceed to his academy to study the meaning of the classics in a self-study approach with commentaries and dictionaries. “Wenli 文礼” hints to the phrase “*bo wen yue li* 博文约礼” taken from the *Analects* which refers to Confucius’ saying “the gentleman [or: superior man], engages in extensive learning and studying and keeps himself under restraint of the rules of propriety” (*bo xue yu wen, yue zhi yi li* 博学于文, 约之以礼).<sup>218</sup> Wang Caigui explains that this sentence had two important meanings for his academy; the first part meant to acquire broad knowledge

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<sup>215</sup> The character “*qian* 谦” also originates in one of the Confucian classics, in the *Book of Changes*. The *qian* hexagram (*qian gua* 谦卦) is the 15th of the 64 divinatory hexagrams and is believed to be the luckiest of all hexagrams because all six lines (*yao* 爻) that form its pictogram are supposed to be lucky (*ji* 吉); all other hexagram had both luck and evil (*xiong* 凶) in their lines. *Qian* is, therefore, an auspicious (*jixiang* 吉祥) character (SZ15004; TS15003).

<sup>216</sup> SZ15004; SZ15007.

<sup>217</sup> SZ15007.

<sup>218</sup> *Analects* 6.27, translation based on Legge 1939 [1893]: 193.

(*hen guangbo de qu xuexi xuewen* 很广博地去学习学问) and the second to bring this knowledge into a system (*ba ta shouqilai chengwei yi ge xitong* 把他收起来成为一个系统) which is what he wants to achieve with his academy – to further develop the philosophical system of Confucianism by recruiting and educating the right (talented) people. That could only be done if they trained young people in Chinese scholarship. “Wen” and “li” also embody the educational ideal for the individual:

Literacy (*wen* 文) and rites (*li* 礼) – one is broad learning, and one is high insight. A person who got broad learning as well as high insight has already accomplished integrated knowledge (*wanzheng de xuewen* 完整的学问) and a complete personality (*wanzheng de ren'ge* 完整的人格). So ‘Wenli’ means ‘complete.’<sup>219</sup> (Wang Caigui)

With his academy, he holds the educational ideals related to classics reading education high. The name and the ideals behind the academy both have their origins in the classics, and the same is true for Wang’s courtesy name; his personality and educational approach are tightly interwoven with the textual tradition of the past. Whereas his ideals are intangible assets that hold the classics reading community together, the naming system for registered study halls (i.e. registered over Wang Caigui, not officially) and the calligraphies they receive are visual characteristics that mark them as belonging to the same system, movement, or circle of people, with Wang Caigui and his academy at the highest position within the classics reading community.

One of Wang’s most famous projects is the *Analects* 100 summer camp (*Lunyu yibai xialingying* 论语一百夏令营) or winter camp (*Lunyu yibai donglingying* 论语一百冬令营). People who are interested in reading the *Analects* come together for one month to read and recite them for 100 times. Wang’s assistant teacher states that many young graduates who want to start a family participate in the camp to figure out how to educate their children. Actually, the wife of the headmaster of Beijing Study Hall went to Wang’s camp. She encountered his pedagogy when she listened to a speech he gave in Beijing. After that, in her first year at university, she started to study Confucian classics for four hours every day. In 2010, she participated in the *Analects* reading camp, and was overwhelmed by the effects. After she learned about the possibility to teach one’s baby with such an approach (prenatal and early childhood classics reading education), she decided to apply it to her own children – their first child received classics reading education from being a fetus onwards.<sup>220</sup>

Wang’s assistant herself had friends who participated in the camp; this way, she heard about Wenli Academy. After having successfully completed a teaching class (*shiziban* 师资班)

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<sup>219</sup> “文跟礼，一个是广大的学习，一个是高明的见识。一个人有广大的学习又有高明的见识，就已经完成了完整的学问和完整的人格。所以‘文礼’就是‘完整’的意思。” (TS15001)

<sup>220</sup> Field notes, Beijing Study Hall, January 23, 2016.



at the academy, she joined the staff. Such classes encompass learning the Confucian classics during the day and Wang's theory behind classics reading education in the evening. Two other staff members who work in publishing *Dujing Magazine* also joined the academy after participating in Wang's camp.<sup>221</sup> The headmaster of Beijing Study Hall even got inspired to open his own educational facility after participating in two camps. His experience with the community in the camps shows how valuable they are for networking:

What everybody was reading were the classics, and our spiritual world was so rich and colorful I thought that I could be with the sages every day, and with their disciples, too. We listened to the dialogues between them; this kind of interchange with them, including the camp workers – there is a lot of communication between everybody, this is especially beautiful. It is as if everybody would already be supernatural and would have left behind the material world for a moment. That totally suited my condition at that time. Everybody would care about the others, help each other, and one would realize that in the past, it seems, one cared very little about one's spiritual needs. Now one suddenly enters another world and starts to care about the direction of the spirit. Where does your spirit want to go? It's like that.<sup>222</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Study Hall)

He experienced the opposite of how Confucian activists describe today's society in China; camp participants interact with consideration, thoughtfulness and communication. Participants gain space to reflect about themselves, take care of their individual issues and the needs of their minds (and spiritual needs). Wang Caigui with his camps offers the platform for people to join their common interests both time-wise and place-wise; the *Analects* are the tool with which a welcoming and humane environment is created. The reading camps are well-known in the classics reading world, and they are appreciated as valuable experience for those who want to seriously engage in studying the classics.

Privately organized reading groups and study circles devoted to jointly read, recite, and memorize Confucian classics – even when not in direct relation to classics reading education – are another crucial element that links interested people, some of which would later engage in classics reading education.<sup>223</sup> The headmaster of Beijing Study Hall participated in a classics reading circle named “Beijing National University Till and Learn Society” (Beida Gengdu She 北大耕读社), a community for traditional culture (*chuantong wenhua de shetuan* 传统文化的社团).<sup>224</sup> His enthusiasm for the Confucian classics brought him to Wang

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<sup>221</sup> Conversation with a volunteer teacher of Wenli Study Hall, December 8, 2015.

<sup>222</sup> “大家读的是经典，而我们的精神世界可以如此的丰富多彩，就觉得每天，我们就像跟这些圣人啊，包括他的弟子们在一起。我们听他们之间的对话，与他们这样交流，包括我们那一届的营员，大家之间也有很多的交流，就觉得特别美好。大家好像都已经超越了，暂时啊，暂时放下了对于物质的执着，完全接受我们当时的那个条件。大家在一起互相的关心，互相的帮助，以及就感觉到，哎呀，就是，很少，好像自己过去很少关注心灵的需要，现在就，现在突然就是进入到另外一个层次的世界，就开始关注心灵的方向，你的心灵要到哪里去？这样。”(PK16004)

<sup>223</sup> XM16001; SZ15002.

<sup>224</sup> PK16004.

Caigui's *Analects* reading camps and then, as already mentioned, to his own study hall. The interviewed employee of *Dujing Baby* was part of a small university reading group in which they jointly read the "Four Books". Over four years, he read them every morning for at least 1.5 hours and eventually met his later wife in this group – who would join him as colleague in the *Dujing Baby* company and educate their unborn child with classics reading education. Another girl from that reading circle also works in the company. Experiencing classical culture in the reading group was, in his opinion, the basis for him and his classmates to decide for a job in education and classical culture.<sup>225</sup>

Many academies and study halls offer courses free of charge (*gongyi dushuhui* 公益读书会) for parents who are interested in the educational approach and the general interested public to raise awareness, to inform parents who could possibly send their child for education, and to attract potential teachers.<sup>226</sup> In case of small-scale facilities such as Suzhou Study Hall B, weekend classes are basically for students' parents' friends and their children. Chengdu Study Hall is run by a headmaster who is famous for his speeches, trainings, and courses; he organizes reading groups larger in scale and even invites external speakers (such as Wang Caigui and Teacher D) for them.<sup>227</sup> He also leads a Sunday reading class on the new Confucian philosopher Mou Zongsan and, thus, enters into the philosophical backgrounds of Confucian education in a self-study approach, similar to the grassroots scholars Billioud and Thoraval (2015: 8) mention.<sup>228</sup>

In Xiamen Study Hall B, parents and teachers likewise organize courses to gain more knowledge in their chosen educational area, but with a slightly different focus: they seek clarity on their roles in child education and how they can improve themselves in this regard. Once a week, parents and teachers join to read the *Analects* with the idea to extract suggestions and examples for child education from the book and learn how to be better parents and teachers:

Actually, it is not about education, but the *Analects* tell you how to behave and be a good person. Well, it tells you how Confucius used to do things. And then we see how, originally, the sages did things, and we also need to have such an attitude. For example, Confucius says, 'no premature conclusions, no arbitrary predeterminations, no obstinacy, and no egoism'. In the course of self-cultivation, you should be free from big opinion and too much obstinacy; you should not consider yourself as too important. Only this way, you can do things smoothly. [...] So every Thursday evening, we study the *Analects*, and once a month we have a parent-teacher-conference for which we invite other teachers to give us lectures.

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"Gengdu 耕读" points to the mode of learning for ancient China's peasant population: both learning and work in the fields were integrated into students' schedules according to seasons and field work requirements.

<sup>225</sup> WTS16003.

<sup>226</sup> CD16001; SZ15007.

<sup>227</sup> CD16001.

<sup>228</sup> Field observation, Chengdu Study Hall, April 24 and 25, 2016.

The contents of these lectures are very broad, for example, how to communicate with children [...], if your communication process is adequate, if the experience you are drawing from (the examples you give for reference) are clear.<sup>229</sup> (Leading teacher of Xiamen Study Hall B)

Being a good parent is tightly related to being a good person and knowing how to guide a child by setting a good example; child education in this respect cannot be done without proper self-cultivation. Additionally, child-parent relations are enriched by knowledge of external speakers who do not have their focus on classics reading education; they are invited regularly to provide them with more perspectives. In June 2016, an expert on Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) psychology explained how to improve communication with one's children – by establishing an environment in which active listening, supportive and positive language, and a focus on problem solving are predominant.<sup>230</sup> Xiamen Study Hall B merges classics reading education with modern educational elements.

Just as Wang's camps attract potential staff for his academy, study halls and academies use study camps as outreach program – to raise awareness for classics reading education and, at best, to win over parents and recruit more students. Summer or winter classics reading camps are normally held for one or two weeks during school breaks – which are the same as in public schools; classics reading educators did not take over the division of the imperial China school year. Classics reading children can spend their vacations studying even more classics, and children going to public schools can join to either try out classics reading education as potential substitute for state education or to simply have an additional study course during vacation.<sup>231</sup> In Xiamen, this study program aims at taking care of children during vacation periods – especially when the parents are working – and at enabling more children of the region to get a taste of the classics:

The summer and winter camps take place here [in the study hall]. Actually, classes during the summer and winter camps are nearly the same as always. We basically address children who do not have the chance to go to a traditional-style private school regularly; they can try and experience a little. Additionally, some children of the study hall have nobody who would take care of them during school breaks, they can join, too. But during the summer and winter camps, it is more relaxed; relaxed, playful things are more – for example, people are meeting, everybody goes playing, and we watch more movies. In summer and winter breaks, everyone is already tired. Children in public schools have to write all

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<sup>229</sup>“其实，它虽然不是讲教育的，但是论语它有一些做人做事的一些方法。那，他就会告诉你，孔老夫子以前是怎么去做的。然后我们看，哦，原来圣贤是这样做的，那我们应该用这样的态度。这样子去...比如说，孔子，他就说，“毋意，毋必，毋固，毋我”，他在做一个个人修养的时候，你应该是没有自己态度的那个强大的意见，没有太多的固执，没有把自己放得最重要。这样子你才能，才能说，非常通融去做一些事情。[...]那这个周四晚上学论语，那还有我们每个月都会有亲师交流会，就会请一些外面来的老师讲课。那讲课的内容也很多，比如说你要怎么跟小朋友沟通，[...]那就是说你沟通的过程合不合理？你的借鉴定得清不清楚？”(XM15005)

<sup>230</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Hall B, June 23, 2016.

<sup>231</sup> Field observation: Suzhou Study Hall, November 2015; Beijing Study Hall, January 2016; Xiamen Study Hall A, October. 2015; Fuzhou Study Hall, March 2016; Shanghai Study Hall, June 2016; Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 2016; Beijing Academy A, January 2016.

kinds of exams at the end of the school semester and that is tiring. We help them relax.<sup>232</sup> (Leading teacher of Xiamen Study Hall B)

It seems as if in Xiamen, social responsibility is in the foreground and is even more important than any ideal connected with classics reading education. Turning to classics reading education – in the roles of headmaster, teacher, and parent – is often also driven by the examination pressure of state education. In the case of Xiamen, they do not only retreat from that pressure by establishing a different pedagogy; they also try to help children in state education to deal with the stress they face in the educational system.

For others, the positive results on children's behavior count; study camps appear as a "school for good behavior."

It started in 2009 that one teacher after another started to organize winter and summer camps; children would read classics all the time. I sent my daughter to participate, and when she went, she would show big change. I found that very good, the child was so well-behaved, very comfortable and compliant. But as soon as she would go back to school, she would not listen to what she was told, again.<sup>233</sup> (Mother of two girls in Beijing Academy B)

Changing environments revealed where her child showed good behavior and where she would behave in a way not approved by her mother – a classics reading environment proved to be the better one considering the required behavior, even when the child only participated for a short period of time. Sending her to the academy for a longer time promised to be a good choice.

Classes and camps on the classics also reach out to local authorities. Even though study halls and academies still operate without a clear legal framework, educators still hope to get support by local authorities and the government to further develop their approaches. Personal connection to these authorities is important to keep up trust. Beijing Study Hall once hosted the child of an official from the local Public Security Bureau in the winter camp. They explained what they are doing in the study hall, and now the bureau checks on them regularly and advises them on matters of safety.<sup>234</sup> Beijing Academy A is more pro-active and organizes monthly gatherings for local young cadres under the age of 35 (*nianqing ganbu* 年轻干部). Around 167 people learn about National Studies (*guoxue*) and self-cultivation

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<sup>232</sup> “冬夏令营都在这边。就在这边。那冬夏令营实际上课程其实跟其他的差不多。主要是针对什么一些孩子已经上了小学了或者他平时没有机会上私塾了，那他可以来体验一下。还有一些，本来学堂的一些孩子他放假的时候没有人带他可以再集一集。但是我们冬夏令营相对松散一点，就是松散，好玩的东西比较多，假如碰人啊，还是大家去玩啊，看电影多点，因为到那边我们暑期和那个寒假的时候都比较累嘛，小朋友也是在小学上了一个学期之后他就去考试什么的很累。给他们放松一下。”(XM15005)

<sup>233</sup> “09年开始。然后陆陆续续有的老师，就是实际就办了些什么，就是冬令营、夏令营呀，孩子也一直在读经，然后我都让她去。去了有当时改变，哎哟，这个看到，看了很好，孩子很乖了，很适，很那个，很柔顺了。但是我一回到学校，又完了。又变得不听话了。”(PK16003)

<sup>234</sup> PK16004.

(*xiushen* 修身) every Friday afternoon. As a result, the local township government (*zhen zhengfu* 镇政府) commissioned the academy to organize National Studies education for families (*qinzi de guoxue jiaoyu* 亲子的国学教育) – mothers and their children would come to the academy, read the classics, engage in bow shooting (a traditional sport offered in Beijing Academy A) and eat together.<sup>235</sup> In January 2016, teachers from 15 different schools in the area of Beijing came to visit the academy and learn about its classics reading approach. Headmasters and teachers of institutions of higher education (*dazhuan yuanxiao* 大专院校) visit Qufu Academy regularly,<sup>236</sup> and Chengdu Study Hall also welcomes officials in their trainings (*peixun* 培训).<sup>237</sup>

Given that study halls and academies have quite diverse approaches to classics reading education, they have specific requirements for teachers, and many facilities therefore offer courses to train their current and future staff in teacher training classes (*shiziban* 师资班 or *laoshi de peixun* 老师的培训). In Beijing Academy B, the 2015 teacher training class lasted 21 days of classics reading during the day and getting to know the concept (or ideal) of classics reading education in the evening. Both teachers and parents were allowed to take part to give parents a chance to get to know the education their children receive in the academy – and to apply similar methods in family education at home.<sup>238</sup> It is also possible to learn in a classics reading education training center (*peixun zhongxin* 培训中心) as the headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall B did it for three months.<sup>239</sup>

Qufu Academy makes teacher training a teacher's task; the headmaster requires all teachers to study the "Five Classics" with their "canon studies teacher" (*jingxue laoshi* 经学老师) who holds the highest position among all teachers. Training takes place during regular working days when teachers have time or when students have a break.<sup>240</sup> In Xiamen Study Hall B, teacher training is also an in-house event; the headmaster teaches his teachers by himself and gives weekend classes which are open for everybody.<sup>241</sup> Training is based on self-study and discussion among professionals; self-study and studying in class with the students while regular courses are running is another possibility for further teacher education. Suzhou Study Hall A and B do not even offer specific teacher training classes but require the teachers

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<sup>235</sup> PK16001.

<sup>236</sup> QF16001.

<sup>237</sup> CD16001.

<sup>238</sup> PK16003; conversation with the headmaster, Beijing Academy B, January 21, 2016.

<sup>239</sup> SZ15007.

<sup>240</sup> QF16001.

<sup>241</sup> XM15005.

to engage in regular self-study of the classics and to read books on National Studies (*guoxue*) by themselves to gain background knowledge.<sup>242</sup> Xiamen Academy B and Fuzhou Study Hall do not have any further training courses either and also rely on self-study of their staff,<sup>243</sup> but being members in the “Fujian Traditional-style Private School Association” (Fujian Sishu Lianyihui 福建私塾联谊会), they have a platform for exchange of knowledge and experience.

Shenzhen Study Hall A has chosen a specific approach; Teacher D integrated dispositional education (*xingqing jiaoyu* 性情教育) as developed by the Buddhist Professor Huo Taohui 霍韬晦 from Hong Kong into Wang Caigui’s classics reading approach. Huo’s ideal is based on the Mencian supposition that humans are good by nature and education should enable a person to develop according to one’s own nature (*xingqing* 性情). Children’s innate intuitive understanding (*benju de lingming* 本具的灵明) should be developed so that their motivational power (*dongli* 动力) could unfold, they could escape the world of physical desire, and establish their own life – a life that they themselves owned, in which they are the spiritual and motivational center, which indicated freedom for Professor Huo. Public education could not reach such ideals; public schools prepared people for the improvement of the economy (to get good jobs) but not to develop themselves individually (Huo 2015: n.p.). Teachers in Shenzhen Study Hall A take ten days per year in the vacation period to receive further training in addition to regular self-study after work<sup>244</sup> in Professor Huo’s Dharmasthiti Buddhist Institute on *xingqing* education, the “Happy Life” (*Xiyao Shengming* 喜耀生命) class, and in the Taiwanese Fuzhi Education Group (Fuzhi Jiaoyu Tuanti 福智教育团体), a religious group that offers the so-called “teacher life camp” (*jiaoshi shengming chengzhang ying* 教师生命成长营) which supports teachers in finding their educational ideals.

There is a class in Hong Kong, called ‘Happy Life’ class, and when you take this class, you can open up, release your innermost being, open up your sentiments, learn how to appreciate others, and how to affect others. Now it’s these requirements. It is mainly about inspiring the intuitive knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知). Everybody has innate knowledge, some more, some less, and some have it blocked. It leads you to get inspiration. Open up your intuitive knowledge, and this way, your conscience emerges, and naturally, your whole life, your life is not the same, your whole condition is not the same.<sup>245</sup> (Teacher in Shenzhen Study Hall A)

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<sup>242</sup> SZ15004; SZ15007.

<sup>243</sup> XM15003; FZ16001.

<sup>244</sup> WTS16002.

<sup>245</sup> “就是有一个课程，在香港，叫做“喜耀生命”课程，要求每一个老师去学，然后通过学习这个课程，把自己打开，就是放开自己内心，把情给放出来，学会感受他人，感动他人。现在就是这个要求。[...]他主要是可以通过启发良知，就每个人都有良知嘛，只或多或少，有的，有的被蒙蔽了，他是引导你启发，把你的良知，给他打开，这样你的良知就出来，你自然整个生命，生命就不一样，个人状态就不一样。” (WTS16001)

This case shows best that teacher training in the sector of classics reading education does not only entail to acquire factual knowledge on theoretical background but is strongly combined with personal growth and change of the self. In this sense, teacher training might be regarded as a form of self-cultivation.

Joint learning and discussion on teaching and personal growth, are aspects that tie teachers closer together within educational facilities, but also establish mutual bonds and a sense of group membership and solidarity beyond the own facility between different study halls and academies. Teacher trainings, reading circles, and study camps offer platforms for exchange of like-minded people within a rather scattered and inhomogeneous movement. Wang Caigui is partly regarded as (spiritual) leader within classics reading education and can serve as connecting link between singular activists but does not have to do so necessarily. His study halls system keeps a loose network of classics reading educational facilities together, at least by name, but it does not impose a rigid framework upon singular actors. Networks are created by exchange of knowledge and experience in joint activities.

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### 3.5. CONCLUSION: READING THE CLASSICS AS PATH TO A BETTER FUTURE

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Disillusion about present conditions in Chinese society and education and dealing with the past while facing the present and hoping for the future have ignited motivations to engage in classics reading education. Hopes for a future in which failures and mistakes of the past (which still tackle the present) will be counterbalanced are directed towards Confucian classics and morality. Networks are created as platforms for exchange of knowledge and experience on the new joint undertaking and as bases for realizing new ideals in education and lifestyle; they keep the scattered classics reading activities together. Common ideals for a better society based on Confucian morals, better education based on Confucian classics, and better coping with China's past with support by Confucian thinking, push Confucian activists forward to implement a joint agenda of the classics reading movement.

Society is depicted as a dangerous space for children in China today. Materialism, a focus on money and consumption in public spaces, public education that is oriented solely towards exams, good grades, and good jobs, and interpersonal conduct in public do not qualify as proper surrounding for child upbringing in the eyes of many parents and educators. On the long run, social order needs to be re-implemented. Three perspectives of a Confucian-driven society in China – by Wang Caigui and two headmasters – draw a very clear image of how a future China should be designed in terms of the social texture and the composition of social

interaction. The interior of the classics reading world would, then, be the germ cell for future sprouts of these concepts in the outside society.

Wang Caigui is convinced that only Confucian morality could achieve an improvement of Chinese society; “Western ways” – which have been taken over in the process of modernization – are not adequate:

Confucius says that governing society has two levels: ‘direct them with rules and regulate them with morality’. One is morality, one is law. But if one uses morality to govern the people, the people will all abide by morality, and there will naturally be no punishment. If you only use the law to govern the people, nobody dares to commit any crime, but in their hearts, everybody is thinking about being criminal, they just don’t dare to do it. Actually, when everybody is unable to control themselves, it is really annoying.

It is said that in the West, there are two things that keep society stable: one is to rely on systems, the democratic system and a legal system, and the systems would be very good; the second is to rely on religion. And where do the systems come from? They stem from scientific thought, so the systems are founded on science, and [more specifically] that’s natural sciences. They use natural sciences to stabilize the people. And natural sciences contradict religion; the more developed natural sciences are, the more antiquated is religion, so in the contemporary Western world, religion already gradually declined. So only the law is left, and in the future when society derails, there is no remedy, which means that there will be no way to govern them.

So just wait and look, in Western society, there will be less and less rules, or one can say that law will be unable to control it. Why? Because there are no morals, and Western morality is based on God, on religion. Chinese morality is based on the classics and on culture. Therefore, promotion of reading the classics is necessary; Chinese people will re-erect morality, everybody will be moral, and they will learn about Western systems; they will use morality to administer the systems, they will use the systems to complement morality. Only such a moral democracy is a real democracy, and this is the ideal of New Confucianism.<sup>246</sup> (Wang Caigui)

Western society appears to have its own contradictions and does not deliver suitable resources to reestablish morality among Chinese people. Only Confucianism, being free of religious ethics but full of culturally based morality, could achieve that. It even appears as if Wang’s “moral democracy”, a fusion of the Western democratic system and Chinese morality, would be superior to other (Western) country’s system; reading the classics could prepare the Chinese nation to surpass other nations.

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<sup>246</sup> “所以孔子讲的，嗯，他说治理社会，有两个层次，一个是“道之以理齐之以德”，一个是道德；一个是法律。但是如果用道德来治理人民，人民都守道德，那自然就没有犯罪，如果只是用法律来治理，大家是不敢犯罪，但是心里面都想要犯罪，当然他不敢而已，这样。大家是其实没有，不能够自己管理自己，那个时候其实就很麻烦了。所以有人说，这个西方的世界，靠两件事情，来，来让社会安定，第一，是靠制度，民主制度，靠这个法律制度，制度非常好；第二是靠宗教。那么，这个制度从哪里来，从科学精神来，所以制度背后是科学，是自然科学，他是用自然科学的方式来定人的[...]。而自然科学是反宗教的，自然科学越发达，宗教就越没落，所以现在西方世界宗教已经渐渐没落。所以他只剩下法律，只剩下法律，将来社会就要乱，而且，治不了，等于是没有办法治理。所以，你等着瞧吧，西方世界的社会，越来越没有规矩，或者说，这个，法律管不住。为什么？没有道德，而西方的道德是靠上帝、靠宗教，中国的道德是靠读经、文化。所以只要推广读经，这个中国人能把道德复兴起来，人人有道德，又学西方的制度，用道德来管理制度，用制度来，来弥补道德。这样的话，有道德的民主才是真正的民主，这是新儒家的理想。” (Wang Caigui)



The headmaster of Qufu Academy holds the view that today's social disorder (at least partly) derives from misunderstandings and unclarity on who needs to fill in which social role with which values. Chinese society had to learn again to understand themselves as people from the perspective of their own roots and values. Social order should be based on the spirit of the rites (*li* 礼) and music (*yue* 乐) – two major pillars of social and ritual order in Confucius' time:

The spirit of music (*yue* 乐) is harmony; the spirit of the rites (*li* 礼) is differentiation. You are a guest and I am the host here; we respect the guest, this is [based on] difference, but at the same time, it is also a kind of harmony, because with too much difference, hearts will part from each other. So that's both rites and music. Under the system of rites and music, teachers preserve teachers' duties, students preserve students' duties, and this we call equality (*pingdeng* 平等). You can't say that everything a teacher does, a student could also accomplish. This is equality, or the other way around, it is not unequal. Families are the same, the father's equality means that the father is loving (*ci* 慈) and the son is filial (*xiao* 孝); a father must be loving, and a son must obey in filial piety. This we call equality. You can't say that a son can also scold the father, this is not necessarily equality. Chinese parents today – I am not sure, but I think that they have misunderstood the Western concepts of equality and freedom, so a lot of young parents think that children should be equal to us [parents], and there doesn't need to be difference, friend's relation [with the child] would be okay. That is very different to what we do. We think that parents and children are not friends, but everybody has to stick to their own [duties], parents have their responsibilities, and children have to keep the duties of the position of a child.<sup>247</sup> (Headmaster of Qufu Academy)

When the social roles in Chinese society were clear concerning the subsequent duties and if interaction was composed according to social roles and related social values, there was equality in the sense of balance; the relations between people were equal in a way that everybody could pursue the duties as relevant for their roles, and this was the basis for social harmony. Because China has been dealing with values from the West for long already, people would have misunderstood what certain new concepts meant for their own society. Confucian education would, thus, not only help to regain original Chinese values for social interaction, but also to understand foreign concepts on a Chinese basis and be able to live non-Chinese values in a Chinese way.

Marginalized and excluded groups tend to turn to alternative spaces as resource to develop what is not possible to implement in society as it is (Valentine 2001: 5). Facing the lack of ideal social models in contemporary China, classics reading educators use privately governed space to develop these ideals. In academies and study halls, they can control the

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<sup>247</sup> “音乐的精神，就是和，礼的精神就是别，区别，那你是客人我是这里的主人，我们会尊重客人，这个是一个区别，但是同时又是一种和，因为你太区别了心就分离了，这是一个礼乐。这样一个礼乐制度下呢，老师守老师本分，学生守学生本分，这个叫平等，你不能说老师所做的事，学生我全部都可以做，这个叫平等，这个反而不平等。那家庭也一样，父子的平等呢，就是父慈子孝，父亲要慈爱，孩子要孝顺，这个叫平等，不能说儿子也可以骂父亲，那个就不见得是平等。[...] 我们现在中国的家长，我不知道，我觉得他们对西方的平等自由的理念体会有差误，所以现在我们很多年轻的家长嘛，觉得孩子跟我是平等的，所以也不用有区别，这个朋友关系就好了。这个跟我们是差异的，我们觉得孩子跟父母他不是朋友，各有各的守的东西，父母要守他的责任，孩子要守他自己孩子位上的本分。” (QF16001)

educational input, social interaction between different actors, and they can create the surroundings and their influence on one's children.

The academy is not like the exterior, for example like those [schools] that focus especially on individuals' grades and so forth. This academy does not value this, because we still hope that students and teachers can be in a relatively relaxed and free environment, yes. And grow up in such an environment. In addition to that, the academy actually rather hopes to be able to... be able to make everybody experience what the internal essence of being a person is. What does that mean? It means that the academy respects people to the utmost, and respects the experience of every single person, respects everybody's choices, wishes, yes, and, of course, everybody's interests. I think that this might also be different from the schools outside, so the academy does not have so many requirements towards students and teachers on how to be, for example which aspirations to have, how you should do things. This cannot be enforced, but it must be negotiated with you. If you don't agree, I also respect you. Well, I think that this originated in China's traditional educational thinking, yes.<sup>248</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy A)

Study halls and academies appear as spaces in which social roles and values are renegotiated to be able to implement them into society later. In quality, (social) space in study halls and academies appears to be very open, free of pressure and force. Yet the social ideal to be constructed is filled with social rules and hierarchies. The following two chapters will shed light on both physical and social features of the space in the new educational facilities and how they influence the people who live and learn there. Considering the ideals drawn when facing the perceived dystopia of Chinese society today, chapters 4 and 5 also deliver specific examples of how these ideal images are drawn into and lived in the real world.

#### 4. GOOD ENVIRONMENTS MAKE GOOD PEOPLE: IDEALS OF PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS AND SOCIAL SETTINGS IN CONTEMPORARY STUDY HALLS AND ACADEMIES

In Chinese education, considerations on the educational environment developed into a core topic, but this has not always been the case. For Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), there are no records on the importance of the educational environment for successful learning (Lee 2000: 55). During the Southern and Northern Dynasties (220-581 CE), this changed when Buddhism spread in Chinese territories. Buddhist monks started to search for a quiet and peaceful environment for their learning, so they gathered disciples in mountainous areas to

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<sup>248</sup> “书院他不像在外面的，比如说那种比较特别注重个人的成绩啊，分数啊等等，这个书院他不太重视这些，因为他还是希望所有的学生、老师都在一个相对宽松自由的环境里，对。这样的环境里来长大。再来呢，就是书院，他更多，实际上，是希望能够...把人...之所以为人的这些内涵，能够在这里让大家感受到。什么意思呢？就是书院比较尊重，尽可能尊重一个人，尊重每一个人的感受、尊重每一个人的选择、尊重每一个人的意愿。对。当然也尊重每一个人的兴趣。我觉得，这个可能跟外面的学校也不一样，所以书院对老师、对学生没有太多.....有要求你一定要怎么样，比如我有个什么愿望，我希望你能做，但也要给你商量，绝不能勉强你。如果你不同意，那我一样也要尊重你。那我想这些就是基于中国的教育思想，嗯，对。”(PK16001)

teach them. These peaceful grounds stood in clear differentiation to (metropolitan) areas of court influence; natural quiet grounds promised isolation from official reach. A retreat from areas of state influence into silent mountain areas proved to be effective for “intellectual growth and rectitude” over time (Lee 2000: 32, 216-217). A philosophy on the relation between environment and learning was not established by Confucian scholars, but by Buddhist monks who related discipline and cultivation to the location of their community where enlightenment should be achieved (Lee 2000: 69).

By the eighth and ninth centuries, building private studies in scenic but isolated places had become a deep-rooted Chinese idea, informing all that intellectual growth was part of moral uplift, and could only be completed in an authentic separation from the world, in charming rural and mountainous places. (Lee 2000: 217)

The institution of the academy as introduced by the Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi in Song dynasty (see chapter 1.1), an important facility for (private) higher education and scholarly exchange, adopted many elements from these Buddhist monasteries which were places of education prior to the academies:

In the years preceding the rise of Neo-Confucianism, lay people had long used Buddhist monasteries and even Taoist temples for private studies. In a quiet and peaceful environment, students freely pursued their studies without hindrance from the religious orders. Many were impressed with the rigorous discipline, quiet and ease of the clergymen in their personal search for inner peace. Commonly referred to as *shan-lin Chiang-hsiieh* [山林讲学] (lecturing and learning in the mountains and tree grove), this tradition has had enormous appeal to the Chinese imagination about the joy of learning. (Lee 2000: 7)

Zhu Xi, then, started to stress the concept of location, of a good environment, for education, and the idea that children had to start early with their learning (Lee 2000: 282). A person’s moral upbringing was considered to be highly influenced by both the physical and the social environment in which a person would grow up and live (Lee 2000: 11). Consequently, features relating to both physical and social space became crucial for concepts of ideal education.

Discontent with the social environment in today’s public schools is a major driver for designing better environments alluding to a tradition of undisturbed learning which is now related to study halls and academies. Location and design of the educational facility are the two main categories discussed in the context of an ideal physical environment. Even though study halls and academies are very different in size and settings, there are a few similar features which can be encountered in all facilities in differing scopes and/or intensities, such as isolation, quietness and pureness of nature. Facilities in urban areas try to embody characteristics which are related to nature, such as isolation and appreciation of natural aesthetics, with their choice of location and interior design. Certain locations allow for an

embodiment of the cultural roots of the region within the ideal design of the educational facility which does not seem to be related to nature at first sight. However, the grounds on which the facilities are built are also associated with memories of the past and with historical cultural roots. Establishing a personal relation to the past of the region where one makes oneself at home is also perceived as “natural” in an abstract meaning. Finally, the placement of study halls and academies in rural areas and the countryside are the most visible embracement of nature in the classics reading movement.

Physical and social environments for learning cannot really be separated from each other. With classics reading education, matters of child upbringing are laid in private hands, in the hands of parents and private educators. Many facilities started as initiative in people’s private homes and/or initiative dedicated to one’s own child. Both starting points are closely related to home (as physical space) and family (as social space), and classics reading education is, indeed, an education which also affects shifting concepts of family and family life. Classics reading educators are eager to mold an environment with both ideal physical and social facets that would produce morally upright gentlemen who could transform Chinese society in the future:

I think that Chinese people have a special focus on the environment’s role for a student. So there is a saying in China: ‘those who are close to cinnabar will get red, and those who are close to black pigment [for making ink] will get black.’ Chinese people are convinced that all people are the outcome of their environments. And because education is a gradual nurturing... For example, when you are in a place full of light, your attitude is, for sure, more cheerful and optimistic; your health is also better. If you are in a damp and dark place, won’t you also feel bad then? Putting you in a cell will make you feel bad; putting you in a teaching hall or a temple will make you feel good. Now imagine that we will put you in such a place every day, won’t you for sure be influenced by that?

Chinese people have linked education with environment earlier already. No matter how bad a child is, if you put it in a good environment, it will turn well after three, or one or two years. So when we do education, we definitely have to mold (*suzao* 塑造) a good environment. And what belongs to this environment? Actually, an environment does not only consist in putting a few things [somewhere] and hanging a few pieces of calligraphy [on the wall], right? It’s the people, issues and objects that you see, hear, and encounter daily; that’s all environments. For example, our environment is not bad, it’s clean, organized, elegant, right, it has a cultural taste and atmosphere.<sup>249</sup> (Teacher in Beijing Academy A)

It seems as if a good environment could guide a person in its personal development just by its existence and inner effect mechanisms. A good environment is organized deliberately

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<sup>249</sup> “我认为中国人，他特别重视环境对学生的作用。所以中国人有句话叫做“近朱者赤，近墨者黑” [...] 就是中国人认为，你所有人就是环境的产物。因为教育他就是一种熏陶。就，比如把你放在一个充满阳光的地方，那你肯定就，心态也比较阳光，你的身体也比较健康。如果把你放在一个潮湿的、黑暗的地方，你是不是心情也不好？ [...] 如果把你放在一个监狱里面，你心情也不好。如果把你放在一个教堂里面或者寺庙里面，你心情也很好。那你想想，天天把你放在一个地方，你是不是肯定受他的影响？所以中国人早就看到了环境也是教育的关键。一个孩子再不好，你要把他放在好环境里面，他三年、一年两年下来，他就变好了。所以我们教育一定要给孩子塑造一个好的环境。那么这个环境，哪些是环境？其实，环境不仅仅是说这个环境是不是摆着一些、挂着一些书法作品啊，是吧？他的每天看到的、听到的、接触的人、事、物，都是他的环境。你比如[...]这个环境，是吧，他就是不错嘛，他比较的干净、整齐、典雅，是吧，有文化的一些...这种.....品味啊、气氛、氛围。”(PK16005)

according to patterns and structures that are aimed to influence the people who interact in the designed space – a Chinese concept that is similar to the idea of behavioral environments.<sup>250</sup> In the context of classics reading education, the learning environment is seen as a good basis to compile a new social texture, new modes of interaction which can be translated back into a standard of good and moral behavior. Study halls and academies are designed as places where a new tradition can be created and trained (see also Hobsbawm 1983: 1-4). Newly established standards could later be used for other environments, too – for example for Chinese society and its restructuration.

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#### 4.1. IDEALS OF NATURALITY EMBODIED IN PHYSICAL EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Even though the common urban lifestyle of Chinese society is largely criticized among classics reading educators, most of the visited academies and study halls are (still) located in urban and suburban areas. Transportation between students' homes and educational facilities is more convenient; more families who can afford to pay the high study fees live in the catchment area. Six out of the 21 study halls and academies are situated within the city center: Xiamen Study Hall A and B, Suzhou Study Hall B, Suzhou Academy, Shenzhen Study Hall B, and Qufu Academy. Being located in apartment flats and city houses, they are rather small and educate between five and 18 children. Qufu Academy, located in the city center of Confucius' birth town, is an exception; the academy expands over a large campus of many buildings and a dormitory area. They educate 120 students.

Seven facilities are located in residential areas in the outer city belt and townships (*zhen* 镇): Xiamen Academy, Chengdu Study Hall, Shanghai Study Hall, Guangzhou Study Hall, Beijing Study Hall, Beijing Academy A and B. They are still reachable by local public transportation, but the areas are quieter because the areas are mainly used for living, not for business. Numbers of students vary between eight and 250 – eight in Xiamen Academy which follows the headmaster's individual classics reading education approach, and Guangzhou Study Hall with 250 students in a pure classics reading approach according to Wang Caigui. Most of the facilities are located in large houses or villas. Guangzhou Study Hall is divided into two campuses; one shares a building with a privately-run elementary school and one is in another city, in Zhuhai 珠海, a city Southern of Guangzhou. Beijing Academy A consists in a

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<sup>250</sup> Geographer Chris Philo's (1989: 213) states that the behavioral environment was conceptualized by people for people; its localized structures and patterns could be directly linked to location-related (deliberate) actions which means that the environment directly influenced people's behavior. In difference to this, the phenomenal environment was the kind of environment *containing* things created by nature and humans.

few large buildings distributed over a residential area in separate and walled courtyards, and Beijing Academy B is founded on the premises of a former farm.

Five facilities are located outside of the city in suburban areas and villages: Suzhou Study Hall A, and Shenzhen Study Halls A, C, D, and E. Only three facilities are located in quite remote natural surroundings unreachable by public transportation: Wenli Academy, Wenli Study Hall, and Fuzhou Study Hall. The locations of these facilities in nature are in closest relation with the ideal natural learning environment that developed with academies in Song dynasty. They incorporate ideals of nature in a way different from urban study halls, and they also have other possibilities to show the outside world who they are and what they do. Scarceness of people in nature create a certain privacy (in the sense of not being seen by others) in which it is easier to act according to self-set ideals. Nature appears as spatial resource for a group of people to develop their ideas and implement their projects in the margins (Valentine 2001: 5). Even though not all study halls and academies are placed in rural areas or within nature, they still attempt to approximate singular characteristics of the ideal location and design of the classics reading facilities as a compromise between ideal and real world. The “corruption” of the imagination of peaceful learning in green nature in specific spatial implementation, however, reveals a lot of thoughtful consideration, creativity, and research on tradition and education.

#### 4.1.1 – URBAN ENVIRONMENTS: ISOLATION FROM CITY LIFE AND HARMONISATION WITH CULTURAL ROOTS

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City centers are central spots for everyday life and daily business: work, school, and daily errands fill the cities with life. In the eyes of many classics reading educators, this is a life focused on materialism, consumerism, shallow lives, public education pressure, and pursuit of money in professional life which they reject. Yet many activists open their (first) study hall or academy in the city center. Normally, the study halls in the city are not boarding but day schools; parents bring their children in the morning and take them home in the evening.<sup>251</sup> Thus, they are not really cut off from city life in a community with their own rhythm of life. Parents who are part of a normal work life and who live in an urban environment send their children to study the classics while they work; after class and after work, they spend time together as a family.

Still, study halls and academies even in the city center manage to create an environment that is, to a certain extent, physically isolated from unwanted exterior influence and

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<sup>251</sup> Exception: Shenzhen Study Hall B allows children to stay overnight if the parents cannot take care of them at home, e.g. when they are on business trips. This is only possible because the headmaster lives in the study hall.

anonymous. Shenzhen Study Hall B, for example, is located in an apartment house in a small residential district in the city center of Shenzhen. Neither on the street nor at the outside of the building are any hints nor signs that point to the educational facility. Xiamen Study Hall A (IMG. 4, annex p. 315) is located in a high-rise apartment building, Xiamen Study Hall B and Chengdu Study Hall are each placed in an urban villa in a closed residential district accessible through a gate guarded by a watchman. No sign points to the study halls, but the watchmen of the districts are informed. For passers-by, the educational facilities are not discernible as academies or study halls, and nobody would enter the residential district if they had no business in the neighborhood. This way, the study halls can remain invisible and be cut off from city life to a certain extent. Residential areas offer a possibility for retreat; one has to cross a gate to enter the area, and one has to an effort finding the (right flat in the) right building; one also needs initial information on the exact placement. Similar to the retreat into Buddhist temples in imperial China, study halls also seek isolation to escape the reach of the state. In the case of the study halls, that is related to a core issue which is still unresolved: their legal status. Even if some study halls and academies seek contact to *selected* local authorities to find support for their educational project (or at least tolerance for their existence), most educators are still cautious with external appearance to secure their undisturbed operation.

Classics reading facilities that have moved further away from the city center into areas of low population dare a little more external representation. Beijing Study Hall is situated at the end of a blind alley behind a large courtyard gate guarding driveway and access to the property. Red lanterns mark the entrance; a small sign under one of the lanterns reveals the name of the study hall – at the outside of the courtyard gate. The study hall is discernible as such from the outside, but the hiddenness in the blind alley is another privacy screen. However, the headmaster has connections to local authorities (Public Security Bureau) which makes the existence his study hall officially known anyways. Beijing Academy B is established on the grounds of an old farm. The entrance is decorated with colorful woodwork and a sign with the name of the study hall, written in Wang Caigui's calligraphy style – the academy is completely devoted to his approach. The sign is visible from the street, but there are not many people passing by since the grounds are outside of the city center close to the Western mountains near Beijing. Stone fences mark the borders of the property. The premises are easily accessible without needing to cross closed gates. However, there is video surveillance all over campus and the headmaster himself looks on the video screens in his office and keeps has an eye on the property and who enters it. Both Beijing Study Hall and Beijing Academy B are boarding schools; their properties include student dorms, classrooms,

kitchen and canteen, the headmaster's office, and teachers' dorms. Beijing Academy B has even been building an apartment house in 2016 to make academy life more appealing to teachers, especially for couples. Teachers, staff and children either live on the premises or close-by; the daily schedule structures the whole course of the day according to a traditional lifestyle. Thus, both facilities create their own rhythm of life.

The only two academies which are included in a streets' guidance system and marked with very visible school signs are Qufu Academy and Beijing Academy A. Having excellent contacts to local authorities, the headmaster of Beijing Academy A does not make a secret of their existence. The academy consists in five large courtyards (*yuanzi* 院子) with several buildings inside of the walled courtyards; access to the courtyards is possible through heavy black iron gates that open with security codes which only employees and some of the older students know. Children cannot leave the premises without supervision and nobody gets into the premises without being accompanied and guided by academy staff. Qufu Academy is the only registered traditional school and a large campus area in the city center of Qufu that is easily accessible from outside.

Beijing is a good example of a locational compromise between convenience for business and following Confucian ideals. All three classics reading facilities are located in the same city district not far from the city center but also close to the Western mountains. The headmasters of Beijing Academy A and Beijing Study Hall relate their choices of placement with the Confucian academies from history:

Chinese traditional academies all chose places with mountains and water, and close to us, there are mountains everywhere. Once spring will have arrived, there will be fresh flowers and fruit trees, and many of them. All this is very beautiful and very suitable for running [an academy]. Air, light and water here are much better than in the city, because I think that when you run an academy, it needs a calm environment. In addition to that, it should have a concern for heaven and earth [i.e. nature]. So it cannot be in the city center, it is very packed, hasty, you have to hurry and be careful. I think that they [cities] do not suit the growth of our heart-minds. So I came to this place, it – well, because it has mountains, water, and also fruit trees.<sup>252</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy A)

We chose this place because of one aspect; it is close to the mountains, and it is not far from the city. The first reason why we chose this place is because the environment is elegant, a bit calmer and more peaceful. The second one is that the transportation is not too inconvenient; it is not too far from the city, [there is] no disturbance, and [we are] not disturbing the people. There are not many people living in the houses close by.<sup>253</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Study Hall)

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<sup>252</sup> “中国传统的书院都是选择在有山有水的地方，因为这附近都是山，一到春天就是，哦，鲜花呀、果树啊，很多，都很漂亮，也很适合办。这边的空气、阳光和水都比城里面要好，因为我觉得办书院，他需要一个很安静的环境，另外他要有一个天地的情怀。所以他不能在一个都市里面，他很紧迫，很紧张，要快速，很小心；我觉得他不适合我们的心的成长。所以到这个地方，他就，因为有山嘛，也有水啊，也有果树啊。” (PK16001)

<sup>253</sup> “我们选这个地方有一点，因为他靠近山，离市区不太远。我们选地方第一个，环境优雅，清静一些。第二个，交通也不要太不方便，不要离市区太远，不受干扰，然后不扰民。这附近的房子里面住的人不多。” (PK16004)



A certain kind of isolation is created through remoteness and scarcity of people who share the area with them. Thus, they can carry out their education without being disturbed or disturbing others. Retreating into the mountains for isolation, quietness, and engagement in personal growth (developing one's heart-mind) is a dynamic of suburban study halls and academies which is very similar to that of imperial Buddhist monasteries that were used as learning places.

Considerations on space when choosing a location for a classics reading facility are not only concerned with the places' present physical structures; the structures are embodied into and related to its specific educational ideal. Headmasters in Shanghai and Suzhou point out that the historicity of the city grounds as broader framework of their facilities' environments also play a role for their locational choices. The headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall B explains that Suzhou's cultural and economic wealth had been created by a few big families (*jiazu* 家族) over time and therefore, the broad region of Jiangnan 江南 province gained a good reputation for culture and education. Parents who had their children educated in this region were convinced that they would learn something proper and useful. She relates this to historical antecedents: in imperial history, over 500 scholars from the region gained the highest scholar title (*Zhuangyuan* 状元) in the imperial examinations. Great scholars in Suzhou's history were, according to the headmaster, educated in a day schooling approach (*zou du* 走读; lit. "walk and study"); schools were for learning but not for living. For today's classics reading education, concepts should remain in line with this heritage – children should live with their own families. This was why she chose a day school approach for her classics reading facility. This was healthier (*jianquan* 健全) and more normal (*zhengchang* 正常) than boarding school education – in a boarding school, one would have to change one's whole lifestyle and get accustomed to place, time, teaching approach and material. Therefore, she prefers to keep the study hall small and open to local children.

The headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall B considers locality and regional customs as crucial for child education. Parents trusted her with the upbringing of their children because she conducted *regionally adequate* education. People in each region of China were different in character, and in each region, gender roles and characteristics were different. Girls and boys from different regions therefore required different education. She explains that in general, girls were gentler (*wenrou* 温柔); they liked to plant flowers and do filigree things. Boys were rather wild and liked to build things. However, boys in Suzhou were more like the girls and gentler compared to boy in the North of China whom she calls "tough fellows" (*dahanzi* 大汉子). Therefore, parents from Suzhou would not send their child to be educated by someone from the North. If they would do that, the child would acquire another character through

upbringing in another regional area and would develop too far away from their parents.<sup>254</sup> Confucian activists consider Confucian education as the most suitable for Chinese people as it had shaped Chineseness for centuries. China, though, is large, and every region has a different historical development, too, which is attempted to be considered: people from a certain region would best receive traditional education in line with the historically grown customs of that region; traditionalization should go together with localization.

The headmaster of Shanghai Study Hall is even more specific and does not only relate to the history of Shanghai, but emphasizes the historicity of their city district (Songjiang 松江) as decisive factor for the placement of the study hall:

This place is called ‘Chunshen 春申 Village’, [relating to] Lord Chunshen of the Four Lords during the Warring States Period; Lord Chunshen of the State Chu in this place. Its history is quite long. [...]

Why do we call our Huangpu River – or: *Huang Xie Pu* – Huangpu River? This has to do with the name of our Lord Chunshen. Lord Chunshen’s [personal] name is Huang Xiepu. Why we call Huangpu River this name is also why we call Shanghai ‘Shen City’ (Shencheng 申城). This “Shen 申” comes from Lord Chunshen; there is a relation. So the people, the villagers, built a Chunshen Ancestor Hall (*citang* 祠堂) here.

Songjiang is the port city from where Shanghai developed; it is its development starting point. People say that the construction of Songjiang’s city port also has a history of approximately 1,500 years; Songjiang prefecture, if I am not remembering wrongly, has a history of ca. 1,500 years. When Shanghai was not yet there [as a city], Songjiang was already there.

So you see, our Chunshen Village is in Songjiang, and this place [i.e. the study hall] is nearly at the center of it [Chunshen Village]. You can say that there is something about this place. It’s like asking why Jesus was born in Jerusalem at that time. There is an explanation for it all. Why is Tathāgata [chin. *Rulai* 如来, refers to the enlightened Buddha] in the Himalaya in Nepal? Why was Confucius born in Qufu? All this is the necessity of history. Why is Mohammed in this... this... this... capital of Islam... Mohammed... Well there is a saying for everything. Why are we in Chunshen Village? I do not understand that either, but [the forces of] the unseen mystical world [arranged it this way]. [...]

Why is Chinese culture reborn on these grounds? There are so many foreign Chinese abroad; why has the overseas [Chinese] culture not been revived in the countries abroad? Because it cannot be separated from these grounds and these people, because there are uncountable historic sceneries and historical relicts that were combined in a predestined relationship; they stick together in unstable situations, the people, the generation of this society, this place, this region, well, it is all here.<sup>255</sup> (Headmaster of Shanghai Study Hall)

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<sup>254</sup> Field observations, Suzhou Study Hall B, November 17, 2015.

<sup>255</sup> “因为这个地方是春申村，战国四公子春申君，楚国的春申君，就是这个地方。历史很久啊[...]。我们说这个黄浦江，黄歇浦，为什么叫黄浦江，就跟我们的春申君的名字有关系。春申君叫黄歇浦。为什么浦江，浦江，为什么上海叫申城，叫申城，春申君这个‘申’就是这个‘申’，是有关系的，所以这边的民众，村民给这边建了一个春申祠堂。松江又是上海的发埠，就是一个发起点，松江也是有建埠大概据说是有一千五百年的历史，松江府，我没有记错的话，可能有一千五百年了。那么这个地方如果说松江是一个上海还没有的时候松江就有了。所以你看我们在春申村，而且我们这个地方是大概在春申村的中心的位置，好，又是在松江，你说这个有一种无形的东西在这儿。这个就像当年这个耶稣为什么在耶路撒冷？这个都有说法。为什么如来在喜马拉雅地区在尼泊尔那边？为什么孔子出生在曲阜？好。都有历史的必然。为什么穆罕默德，是在这个叫叫叫.....作为伊斯兰教的首领，穆罕默德，那么都有说法。那为什么在春申村，我们也不懂，但是冥冥之中他就在这里。[...]中国文化为什么在本土复兴呢？海外那么多华人，为什么海外文化没有从海外复兴起来呢？离不开这个土地，离不开这一群的人民，就是因为有无数的历史的风物，历史的文化遗迹，所以，因缘聚合，风云聚会，人，这个社会的时代，这个地，这个这个区域，就在这样的地方。”(SH16001)

Chinese culture can only be revived on Chinese grounds; culture and region are inseparable for this headmaster, just as region and educational are tightly interwoven for the headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall. History appears to be a feature of the physical grounds on which study halls and academies are established. Classics reading educators picture themselves in their present places and actions in relation to a history which they need to continue in revived original Chinese culture and education. In this imaginary, the intertwining of timelines of the past and present in the context of specific physical groundedness is obvious. The mission of cultural revival is drawn from lessons of the past; it is incorporated in a specific educational approach and brought onto solid grounds which are also soaked with meaningful history. Alternative realities that are approached via classics reading education are grounded in physical space and “informed by past lifeways” (Price et al. 2016: 128f.).

Just as the headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall B considers Suzhou as a perfect place for her education, the headmaster from Shanghai finds that Shanghai had the best quality of the “natural conditions and social customs” (*fengtu* 风土).<sup>256</sup> He pays special attention to regionality in terms of customs and local rhythms (of life) which used to be different in each region in China’s past. People used to be oriented towards nature’s tunes; each place that was inhabited by a certain group of people would react to their direct surroundings and create their own rhythms of life, i.e. regionally specific rhythms.<sup>257</sup> People of each region would be affected by the surroundings of their particular region which, then, resulted in regionally different characteristics of people. That is where the headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall B starts with her concept of regionally inspired education for regional people. This is an important facet of the overarching assumption that the environment in which a person lives has an impact on that person’s character. It starts with the macro environment and is extended into the micro environment which can be actively designed by classics reading educators.

#### 4.1.2 – NATURALITY AND PURENESS IN AUDIO-VISUAL INTERIOR DESIGN

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Urban academies and study halls are rather anonymous and isolated; these are abstract features related to nature which are embodied by the facilities’ location which are actually not located in nature. Singular features of naturalness (also as abstract features) are also drawn into the design of the interiors of study halls and academies. Suzhou Study Hall B (IMG. 5, annex p. 316) is located in a multi-purpose building complex with both flats and commercial premises. The building itself is very simple with a grey concrete façade. While the exterior

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<sup>256</sup> Conversation with the headmaster, Shanghai Study Hall, June 17, 2016.

<sup>257</sup> Conversation with the headmaster, Shanghai Study Hall, June 17, 2016.

design has an industrial touch, the headmaster tries to bring features of a natural environment into the flat:

From the perspective of the child, an environment for studying has to be relatively peaceful, quiet, and simple; and a natural environment is better. Therefore, our study hall is very simple, there are no costly things. We also think that one should not give the children too much for development, I mean, one should not... in one moment, the child is supposed to move its hands, in the next moment the eyes shall look, in the next moment: jump, in the next moment: eat... in Western pedagogy, there are aspects like this to develop the child's every facet.<sup>[258]</sup> However, we classics reading schools maybe have one thing that is not quite similar: maybe the surrounding environment that we give the children is one plain white background, empty, and the classics gain primary importance within it; they are the only color within it. Yes. And at this time, when the children absorb this, they get deep into the subject. Yes. The effect at this time is much better.<sup>259</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall B)

Simplicity in the design of the study hall mirrors the simplicity of quiet nature, and it also means to stay away from luxurious goods related with capitalism and mass consumption in Chinese society. An undisturbed, simple and single-colored environment is, in the eyes of this headmaster, the best ground for classics reading education. Her study hall is painted in white; natural colors in accessories like bamboo shades, wood floors, stools and desks, and green plants on the windowsills complement the subtle design (IMG. 6, IMG. 7, annex p. 316). Keeping things simple also means to keep children from being diverted; they would be able to concentrate on the classics better in a plain environment. Educational ideal and design of the educational environment carry similar characteristics.

Nature does not only enter classrooms in form of actual plants. It is quite common in study halls and academies to decorate the walls with traditional Chinese paintings of birds, flowers, and landscapes. They are not only part of the valued traditional culture which is taught in the study halls and academies, but educators believe that they have a positive effect on children. Classics reading educators widely acknowledge Wang Caigui's proposition that children are very receptive for external input and should therefore get as much positive input as possible. Visual input should be *fine* arts, starting with Chinese traditional or national paintings (*guohua* 国画) and calligraphy. Accordingly, Wenli Study Hall has a complete wooden interior lining and the walls are decorated with landscape paintings ("mountains-and-water paintings", *shanhuihua* 山水画) and birds-and-flowers paintings (*huaniaohua* 花鸟画;

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<sup>258</sup> She believes that often children are stimulated with many external impulses to make them develop certain skills and characteristics; she thinks parents and teachers should not do that.

<sup>259</sup> “学习环境的话，就是那当然对孩子来说，应该就是，相对来说比较清静，对，简单，对，这个，自然的这种环境比较好。所以我们的学堂里都是特别简单，就是没有什么很多花哨的东西的，对，就是而且我们觉得就是给孩子的这种这个开发不要太多，就是不要就是一会儿幼儿他手要有动，一会儿眼睛没有要看，一会儿没有要跳，一会儿没有要吃.....就是西方教学里有这样子开发孩子的这种各方面的这个因素的方面。但是我们读经的学校可能有一点不太同，就是可能我们给孩子周围的环境是一片白地，就是很空白的，然后这个经典呢，就是是里面的重中之重，是里面的唯一的颜色。对。然后这个时候孩子，他吸收这一块，他就是一门深入的。”(SZ15007)

IMG. 8, IMG. 9, IMG. 10 annex p. 317). Landscape paintings display outdoor scenery and have themes like mountains, trees, waterfalls, and rivers (Chou 2009: 1701); birds and flowers paintings focus on plants and animals which are usually symbols for self-expression of the artist, and not seldom emotional expression (Jiang 2009: 1693). Both types of painting flourished in Song dynasty but evolved much earlier (Chou 2009: 1701; Jiang 2009: 1693). Within such paintings, nature is represented artistically as it was perceived and aesthetically expressed by ancient masters. In study halls and academies, they are part of education: appreciation of paintings and calligraphy would shape the learner's aesthetic sensations and emotions.<sup>260</sup> On the basis of understanding arts, children could develop an understanding for good and bad;<sup>261</sup> distinctions of good and bad were the basis for the development of morality: "Moral virtue is the experience of beauty; it is the aesthetic ability and things like fine arts."<sup>262</sup>

Wang Caigui conceptualizes "fine arts classics reading" (*meishu dujing* 美术读经) as part of his classics reading education; it focuses on the appreciation of world-famous paintings and pieces of art (Wang 2009: 73, 76). Among these are not only Chinese paintings but also famous Western classical paintings (*Xifang jingdian minghua* 西方经典名画), such as works by Van Gogh (*Sunflowers*), Claude Monet (*The Poppy Field near Argenteuil*), Leonardo da Vinci (*Mona Lisa*), Albrecht Dürer (*Self-Portrait* from 1498 in Madrid), and Paul Gauguin (*Arearea*). Wang labels them as "representative works" (*daibiao zuopin* 代表作品) which children appreciate "consciously or unconsciously" (*youyi wuyi* 有意无意); they would be imperceptibly influenced by what they see and hear (*erru muran* 耳濡目染) which would then subtly influence their character (*qianyi mohua* 潜移默化).<sup>263</sup> When "reading" classical paintings in class, the teacher holds up a painting and the students in class have to say the title of the painting in choir (IMG. 12, annex p. 318). If the title comes out wrongly or not enough children have joined the choir, the teacher holds it up again.<sup>264</sup> In practice, picture appreciation turns out to be memorization and recitation of their titles.

In addition to visual input of fine arts and nature paintings, the sense of hearing is constantly penetrated with readings and music that are considered as valuable and

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<sup>260</sup> Field observations: Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016; Beijing Study Hall, January 23, 2016; Taishun Study Hall, December 8 and 10, 2015.

WTS15001, WTS16003, TS15003.

<sup>261</sup> TS15003; conversation with the headmaster's wife, Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016.

<sup>262</sup> "德是体美，就是审美能力，美术什么的。"(TS15003)

<sup>263</sup> Aidujing 爱读经 [Wang Caigui Classics Reading Education Promotion Center]: "Wang Caigui jiaoshouqiuyu 'Aidujing' jiating zaojiao taozhuang 王财贵教授寄语‘爱读经’家庭胎早教套装". Online: <http://www.aidujing.com/a/4382.html> (last access: September 6, 2018).

<sup>264</sup> Field observation, Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016.

constructive for the shaping of an aesthetical perception a good and educated person should have. Most of the visited academies and study halls are equipped with CD players or *dujing* player (*dujingqi* 读经器, (IMG. 13, annex p. 318; lit. “classics reading machine”).<sup>265</sup> Its sound design is in accordance with the ideal to not “pollute” babies, infants and children with inadequate sound waves. Pregnant women already use the music and readings to create a nurturing sound environment for their offspring which they continue when the babies are born. The employee of *Dujing Baby* explains the elaborate design:

This *dujing* player has been developed by Teacher D together with our design group. She takes the perspective of a mother and of education, and it is developed together, so ours is the model which is best sold worldwide. It is a music player especially designed for babies in terms of micro power and high fidelity. That means that it has only 2.5 Watt of micro power which is very low, so one doesn't need to worry about radiation. We have put a radiation measurement into our model. Normally, it is about 0.001 or 0.003, so basically, there is no radiation. When mothers are pregnant, they worry a lot about radiation that could influence the child. So Teacher D has thought about it. And why is the internal sound frequency high fidelity? Because when children hear sounds, they have high requirements. It's like when we listen to a piece of music on a Hi-Fi music player or on a regular mobile phone; there will be lots of differences. First of all, it resolves the information of this sound much better than a cellphone, and the sound it emits is different. So Teacher D combined these high technologies, and there were a lot of follow-up considerations.<sup>266</sup> (Employee of *Dujing Baby*)

The *dujing* player's music selection is programmed into the music player and listed in detail in the accompanying “Item List of Classical Music Pieces and Readings (*Jingdian Songdu Qumu Bianma* 经典诵读曲目编码)”; it contains music and readings of selected classics from China and the West (the full list is described in the annex pp. 332f.). Musical pieces are selected according to tonal quality and value for child development:

For example, we haven't chosen Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony [for the CD]. And why didn't we choose it? Because its interpretation is that life is unstable with ups and downs, so we say that it is not suitable for children to listen to such music. Having reached the age of eight or nine, the child can start to listen to such music, and then it'll be OK to play it for the child. So the music we chose from Beethoven is, for

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<sup>265</sup> Classics reading facilities in Fujian province do not provide *permanent* audio input. Music is rather used to accompany children's games in between small classics reading sessions or breaks (field observations, Xiamen Study Hall A, Xiamen Study Hall B, October 26 and 27, 2015). Study halls and academies that are more dedicated to Wang Caigui's theory pay more attention to *constant* input of classics reading voices and classical music during the day.

<sup>266</sup> “这个读经宝宝的这个机器，是孟老师她跟我们的设计团队一起共同开发的。因为她是基于母亲的这个角度，基于教育的角度，来共同开发的，所以我们读经宝宝的话，他是全球首款，就是专门为宝宝设计的微功率、高保真的这个音箱嘛。就是，微功率就是他只有 2.5 瓦，就是比这个功率还要低，所以说不需要考虑辐射的问题。我们拿一个辐射测量仪放到我们读经宝宝里面，他基本上是 0.001, 0.002，所以说基本不会有辐射。是因为母亲在怀孕的时候，她非常担心孩子有没有辐射的这个问题嘛。所以说这一块孟老师他是有考虑到的。然后里面的音频的内容为什么是高保真？因为孩子听的声音的话他要求就是很高的。就像你一首音乐，如果我们用比较，用 HIFI 的音箱听，跟你用普通的手机听，他会有很多的一些不一样。首先他解析出来这个音的信息，就比手机要完整很多；然后他出来的这个声音，也会很不一样，所以孟老师他是把这些非常高的技术融合到一起的，后面还有很多很多背后的这些考虑的。” (WTS16003)

example, the 6<sup>th</sup> Symphony and the Piano Sonata No. 14 – these are very smooth and describe the beauty within life.<sup>267</sup> (Employee of *Dujing Baby*)

An aesthetical musical composition that is easy on the ears needs to be combined with positive contents to be suitable for the creation of an ideal learning environment. Positive audio input is believed to have two effects: (1) it could help to raise a child's intelligence, and (2) it could take space in the audio environment and ousts negative audio input:

Our children are originally able to hear many sounds, because the sounds of nature are many. When you play [the sounds] at the same time – if a child is intelligent or not actually depends on the richness of stimulation with information. So, three [sounds] at the same time make the information stimulation richer; it's like building a high way network for it.

But richer information is only one side; on the other side, the content is crucial. Because the same... look, the sound of cars, the sound of street cleaning outside, this is also a lot. But these sounds, even though they stimulate children to a certain extent, they are of no value for children. If these sounds only rarely stimulate [the child], it can still be okay; but if it happens for a longer period of time, it is not okay. So you have to choose these contents; you have to provide them with Chinese and Western classical music, these valuable things that are labelled as classical art with high artistic value.<sup>268</sup> (Employee of *Dujing Baby*)

Children are *naturally* able to perceive lots of different sounds at the same time because nature is filled with many sounds – educational input is chosen in relation with the person's disposition which is related to nature (in the meaning of human nature). Additionally, sounds for audio education are taken from a richness and pureness of sound – how one would encounter sounds in nature.

The wife of the headmaster of Chengdu Study Hall – who is also a mother – believes in the positive effects of music. Children at the age of three or four years had a good memory and could absorb a lot of input via their sense of hearing, even different audio inputs played simultaneously. She illustrates her argument with a description of brain development when the child learnt languages: with every new language, the brain would develop a new string of nerves connected to this particular language. The more languages the child learnt, the more strings it developed. It would not be crucial that the child comprehended everything or was able to use these languages, but to establish a foundation [in form of language input into the

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<sup>267</sup> “例如贝多芬的这个《命运交响曲》，这首歌我们就没有选，为什么没有选呢？因为这个诠释的是他这个命运非常跌宕起伏的这个过程，所以说，孩子他现在还不适合去听这样的音乐，尤其是他到了八九岁的时候他可以开始听了，那到时候再给他听就可以。所以我们就选的贝多芬的这个音乐都是他的，那种《田园交响曲》啊，什么《月光曲》啊，都是一些非常柔和的，有非常描述的都是人生非常美好的这个过程。” (WTS16003)

<sup>268</sup> “我们孩子他能听的声音，本来有很多种嘛，因为大自然的声音就有很多种。那你同时播放的话，他孩子，一个孩子聪不聪明的话其实来自于信息的刺激够不够丰富嘛。所以说，你同时三个的话，对他的信息的刺激会越丰富，就像给他架构一个高速公路网一样。但是信息越丰富这只是一方面，另外里面的内容这个也是越关键的。因为同样的，你看汽车的声音啊，外面扫垃圾的声音啊，这个也是很多。但是这些声音对孩子来说的话，他虽然在一定程度上能刺激孩子，但是对于孩子来说的话，没有太多的这个价值的，偶尔刺激一下，可能还可以，但是你要长期刺激的话，是不行的。所以你要选择的这些内容，一定是东西方的经典音乐，这些被称为经典的艺术...艺术性的有很高的价值的东西给他听。” (WTS16003)

brain]. Until the age of three, a child would develop about 60% of the nerve connections which would be there in adulthood in its brain; between the ages three and six, 80% of the overall connections would be reached. The rest would be developed until the age of thirteen – meaning that at the age of thirteen, the brain development in its basic structure would be completed.<sup>269</sup> Proof for this was to be found in Wang Caigui’s concept of classics reading education. His theory was based on Western research and therefore very scientific. However, no specification is made on this aspect, neither by the interviewee nor by Wang Caigui himself.<sup>270</sup> “Western science” as a general term seems to be trustworthy enough to prove the mechanism described above as true and adequate.

Classics reading educators believe that a positive sound environment has a positive influence on the child’s brain development, intelligence, and aesthetics; aesthetics were part of shaping a distinctive understanding of “good” and “bad” and therefore morality. The structure of the child’s personality seems to be immensely effectible by a sound environment which does not only contain classical music, but also readings of the classics in Chinese and foreign languages. Wang’s ideal foreign classics reading education is conducted in seven foreign languages (*qi men de zhe ge waiyu* 七门的这个外语): English, German, French, Latin, Hebrew, Greek, and Sanskrit. Classics reading graduates, at best morally upright gentlemen who are capable to change China, should simultaneously be a “citizen of the world”:

Concerning the seven foreign languages, it is like this: even before a child turns one year, it is already a citizen of the world (*shijie gongmin* 世界公民). When your child is born in China, it speaks Chinese, when it is born in Germany, it speaks German. Before age one, it is already able to distinguish between all languages in this world. When you let it listen to seven foreign languages at young age, it will get used to these languages; even though it won’t be able to speak these languages. But because at a young age, the memory is very firm, it later has a chance to ... when it has grown up in China, but goes to Germany and listens to German, it will be very familiar, and it will learn to speak this language quite fast.

But we haven’t chosen these seven languages randomly. For example, we have chosen English because it is a language used all around the world. And German, for example – there is a saying that Western philosophy was concentrated in Kant. Later philosophy is set in motion through Kant’s thoughts. So if you want to get to know the wisdom of mankind’s philosophy, you have to grasp Kant with German language skills. So we chose German. The second language is French because the Industrial Revolution started in France and it had great value for science. So, one must select French. And Greek, Greek is the starting point for all Western philosophy, so one must pick it. Hebrew is the starting point for the field of all Western religion. Then there is Latin, and Latin is the foundation for all alphabetic languages. So these six languages must be chosen. At the same time, we chose Sanskrit, an Indian language; that concerns the Indian Buddhist classic written in Sanskrit. So all of these languages are chosen considering the highest perspective on the culture of humankind.<sup>271</sup> (Employee of *Dujing Baby*)

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<sup>269</sup> Conversation with the headmaster’s wife, Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016.

<sup>270</sup> Wang 2009: 16.

<sup>271</sup> “七门的外语的话是这样子，就小孩子他在一岁之前的话，他都是世界公民，就是你孩子出生在中国他就会讲中文，出生在德国他就会讲德文。所以他在一岁之前的话，他是能去分辨世界上的任何一国语言的。那他在他小的时候呢，你给他听七门外语的话，他对这门语音就会比较熟悉。他即使说不能讲，但是说，他以后因为这个小的记忆他是很牢固的，他以后有机会...他在中国成长，但到了德国，他听到



According to Wang's ideal of learning languages, audio input in different languages sets the foundation for (passive) language skills which are the basis for understanding philosophy, religion, science and other languages from the roots onwards and on global level. Input in different languages could also be started from pregnancy onwards – to prepare the baby for being a global citizen already.<sup>272</sup>

Quality and importance of audio input are the reasons why Chengdu Study Hall has created a sound environment within the classroom that encompasses three sound tracks running simultaneously: readings of the classics (1) in Chinese, (2) in English, and (3) Chinese and Western classical music. This audio environment is extended from the classroom over the hallways into other rooms such as the assembly or dining hall. The main board of the classics reading is removable; in Chengdu Study Hall, it is hung at the balustrade at the staircase (IMG. 11, annex p. 318) and fills the hallway with good vibes until entering a room where the next *dujing* player is positioned. There are no “audio breaks” when changing rooms; positive audio influence is steadily kept up. Even if nature cannot be enjoyed in its original sounds, children can gain positivity through the classics. As the headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A emphasizes, both sound sets are equally good:

Wang Caigui says that children should listen to the most beautiful sounds. Well, of course the readings of Chinese classics are the most beautiful sound, but there is another type: the sound of heaven and earth, of nature – the sound of rain falling, the sound of frogs croaking, of birds twittering, this is the most beautiful. Well, in the city, you cannot hear this.<sup>273</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A)

In the context of creating a positive learning environment within non-natural educational surroundings, nature often becomes an abstract topic. Nature's relative remoteness (to hasty city life) and isolation are reflected in anonymity and hiddenness of the study hall's location; nature's simplicity is achieved by non-pompous interior design with natural plain colors and natural materials in decoration. Nature's cultural embodiment Chinese art as well as the quality of classical music and readings from Chinese and non-Chinese classics are the most

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这门语言，他就会很熟悉，然后他就能很快进到这门语言里面去。但是我们同时选择七门语言不是说随便选择七门的外语。像英文的话，因为他是一个全球通用的一个语言嘛。那德文的话是，因为现在有一句话叫做，西方的哲学汇总到康德，那后面的哲学是从康德开发出来的。所以如果你了解人类哲学的智慧的话，你必须透过德文这一个才能去了解康德。对，所以我们选择了德文。然后第二个的话法文，因为法国他是工业革命的开端，他在这一块的话，科学领域这一块也是有很高的价值，所以说法文也是必须选的。那希腊文呢，希腊文是西方所有哲学的这个开端，所以我们必须选。那希伯来文，希伯来文是西方所有宗教的这一块儿的开端。那还有一个拉丁文，拉丁文的话他是所有拼音文字的一个基础。所以说这六门语言是必须选的。然后同时我们选择梵文是印度语，是印度梵文佛经这一块，所以，他都是站在人类文化的这个非常高度的这个角度，去选择这七门语言。” (WTS16003)

<sup>272</sup> WTS16003.

<sup>273</sup> “王教授说这个孩子要听最美的声音嘛。那，当然经典诵读是最美的声音，但是还有一种就是天地自然的声音，这个下雨的声音，这个蛙叫的声音、鸟叫的声音，这也是最美的，那城市里面是听不到的。” (SZ15004)

outstanding characteristics in the creation of a good learning environment. In its relation to nature, originality and pureness of Chinese culture are underlined. Chinese culture deriving from Chinese soil being in harmony with Chinese nature is provided for Chinese people – classics reading education facilities in such a design seem like a closed artificial ecological system.

#### 4.1.3 – PROJECTING UTOPIA INTO NATURE: THE VALUE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

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Nature as tangible physical space not only used to be the environment for peaceful and isolated learning around China’s academies in the past, but also played a teaching role itself:

According to the alignment of education in Chinese traditional culture, the oldest teacher is nature itself. In the old times, for example, when Confucius was teaching his students, he would go outside into natural surroundings and teach them. There was nothing, no books, no classis, no magazines, no teaching method. Everything depended on the knowledge-generating interaction between teacher and student. When they saw something that had been grasped or understood before, this knowledge could provide guidance in the further process.<sup>274</sup> (Teacher in Beijing Academy A)

Natural surroundings deliver both input and platform for knowledge generation. The utmost ideal of classics reading education as Confucian traditional education is, therefore, placed in nature. Nature seems to be the most original starting point for traditional education where one could start to “reboot” the system.

Nature and the rural imagined with the idea of untouched wilderness can be constructed as a “sacred space” (Valentine 2001: 283) for a lifestyle oriented towards Confucian education ideals and harmonic images of peace and quietness of the ancient sages. Rural landscape can be understood as cultural construction “by people living both in the country and elsewhere, through discourses and language deployed, emphasizing the production and contestation meanings” (Valentine 2001: 249f.). Just as classics reading educators construct isolated ideal environments within urban environments that resemble features abstracted from nature, the rural itself can be packed with ideals that cannot be implemented in the surroundings one usually lives in; it is a perfect refuge from urban life. The countryside is often imagined in utopian perfection; nature offers possibilities to unfold spirituality and to implement an alternative lifestyle in terms of alternative models of social and economic living. The rural can be a space for the individual encounter of new resources for personal growth and individual healing from sorrows and botheration (Valentine 2001: 250, 270). Nature can

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<sup>274</sup> “按照中国传统文化的这个教育序列来说啊，最古老的老师就是大自然。那个时候比如说孔夫子教学生，就直接把他带到大自然中去教，没有什么，哪有书，没有典，也没有籍，没有教法，完全靠一种师生之间的互动式的体悟。看见一片上一个什么体悟，在过程中去点拨他。”(PK16006)

serve as the ‘ideal place’ that is collectively sought-after by followers and supporters of a grounded utopian movement (Price et al.: 134).

Eight facilities among the 21 visited study halls and academies are situated in surroundings of an ideal natural environment. Five facilities are outside of the cities in suburban areas and villages: Suzhou Study Hall A, and Shenzhen Study Hall A, C, D, and E. Numbers of students vary a lot: there are between 18 and 70 students in the facilities. Places are still reachable by public transportation: Suzhou Study Hall A at the shores of Lake Tai is a three hours bus ride from the city center; the Shenzhen study halls are all located in Wutongshan, a village that is about one hour away from Shenzhen city center. Three of the 21 visited study halls and academies are situated in natural surroundings that cannot be reached with public transport: Wenli Study Hall, Wenli Academy, and Fuzhou Study Hall are surrounded by green mountains and blue rivers; the sites resemble structural features of the Neo-Confucian ideals of perfect academy environments. Only between 20 and 30 students learnt in each of these three facilities in 2015 and 2016.

As mentioned before, there is a tendency of study halls and academies to move out of the cities and into nature – especially urbanites appreciated the idea of their children being educated in nature. Wenli Academy started in Beijing, but Wang Caigui wanted to move into nature because Confucian academies of the imperial past used to be in nature, too. After having inspected over 80 places, he decided to move to the mountains of Taishun. Fuzhou Study Hall started as a small city facility but moved to the countryside after the headmaster gathered enough money. They built a house according to their own ideal image of a modern study hall. Suzhou Study Hall A started in the city center of Suzhou; when the students’ number increased, the female headmaster decided to move to the shores of Lake Tai into a former holiday resort (*dujiacun* 度假村) which had been constructed in a traditional-style architecture (IMG. 14, annex p. 319). She considered an area further away from the city center with water, mountains, remoteness and sounds of nature as more appropriate for studying and for establishing her own family.<sup>275</sup>

The property of Suzhou Study Hall A is walled, and the main entrance closed at any time. Walls are white, and roofs are dark brown – according to the headmaster of the study hall, this was typical architecture for the area of Suzhou. The entrance is decorated with a curved hip roof and a few ornaments that resemble a traditional style, e.g. the roof sits on a concrete base with fake brackets (*dougong* 斗拱) which were used in traditional architecture to support the roof with overhanging eaves of traditional Chinese timber-frame buildings (Liang 1985: 11). Even though the property is walled and closed towards outsiders, there is a sign over the

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<sup>275</sup> SZ15004.

entrance indicating that there is a study hall. It is not registered as school, but local authorities tolerate them if they can occasionally check on safety precautions to make sure that the children are well. At the center of the walled building complex, there is a little pond with rocks as decoration and for crossing the water (IMG. 15, annex p. 319). A wooden pavilion with a richly decorated curved roof invites to sit at the pond. In the back, one can see the Western Hills (*Xishan* 西山) and the typical regional white houses with dark roofs. The broad environment of the study hall entails water (Lake Tai) and mountains (Western Hills); the interior encapsulates the small version of these features: a pond and rocks. Around the pond, buildings like the headmaster's and teachers' office, dormitory rooms, classrooms, guest rooms, kitchen, and the dining hall are allocated. Just as the properties in the outer city area of Beijing close to the mountains, this study hall is a boarding school.

Wang Caigui's academy is situated in the village Zhuli 竹里 in the mountains of Zhejiang 浙江 province (IMG. 16, IMG. 17, annex p. 320). No public transport is running from the closest city (Wenzhou 温州) to this place. The village itself consists of only a few houses that were built by the government for the regional ethnic minority of the She 畲 who used to live (and partly still do) in self-built houses scattered over the mountains in the region. The headmaster of Wenli Study Hall explained that the houses were built for safety reasons: people who live in the mountains were cut off from basic health service which was not secure, especially for the elderly who stayed in the houses alone (because their children left for work in the city). With new buildings to live in free of charge, life was much better.<sup>276</sup> The governmental buildings are large white concrete buildings with dark roofs, like the buildings in Suzhou, but with round and curvy roofs. A small stream crosses right through the village which is surrounded by large mountains. It takes only five minutes to walk through the whole village; apart from people's homes, there are a post office, a police station, a restaurant and a hotel complex run by a local bamboo artist, and a cultural center (Zhuli Wenhua Litang 竹里文化礼堂) that hosts a public library.

Wang Caigui's academy is integrated in the cultural center (IMG. 19, annex p. 320) on second and third floor (according to the Chinese way of counting floors; the ground floor counts as first floor). The building combines white concrete with a dark roof and wooden details. Wang's office and a music room are situated in core part of the building (right side). All other rooms of the second and third floor are classrooms which are connected with balconies decorated with wooden details. Two classrooms on third floor are for the long-term students. Regular classes are held together in one room; during self-learning sessions, students can also retreat for more silence into the second classroom. They start and end classes

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<sup>276</sup> Conversation during field observation, Wenli Study Hall, December 10, 2015.

together in the same room. Wang's office is on third floor; this facilitates communication with the students who can consult him in his office when they have questions. Classrooms on the second floor are for short-term students – that means adults who do further training in classics reading education, e.g. in form of teacher training class based on Wang's educational theory, or a one-year classics reading course for adults. Participants are often students or university graduates who want to add classical education as a further training on top of their education. The academy's main entrance is secured with a number code; externals and guest cannot enter without help by staff or students. Dormitories and offices for Wang's staff are situated in two buildings very close to his academy.<sup>277</sup>

On the one hand, Wang and his staff moved to this remote and scarcely inhabited region because it is silent and isolated; students would not be disturbed by hasty city rhythms or traffic noises. The headmaster of Wenli Study Hall appreciates the possibility of a natural lifestyle. She thinks that the remoteness of the environment is good for children who are easily influenced in young age and learn everything very quickly, be it good or bad. A calm environment with studying at its base was very good for children to grow up in. They could even read their classics outside in the sun, play outside, pick flowers and play with water.<sup>278</sup> On the other hand, the government is very present; being in nature in this case does not mean to avoid officials' reach. The government built and owns houses for the She people; they have also placed signs at lamp posts in the village with slogans like “do well in family health and sanitation, enjoy a healthy life; build a harmonious society, create a civilized village” (IMG. 18, annex p. 320) – the government is present visually and ideologically. However, Wang does not wish to be unseen; he wishes to be noticed in his activity. He and his assistant think that they can support local businesses with their presence, and when others also saw that their presence was beneficial, there might be more tolerance. The academy is not registered as an official school where a child can get an official school registration (*xueji*) and a valid diploma, but as training school (*peixun xuexiao* 培训学校) which falls into the category of a private non-enterprise unit (*minban fei qiye danwei* 民办非企业单位).<sup>279</sup> Although studying at Wenli Academy costs 30,000 RMB per year, Wang states that it is basically sustained by donations.

Education in his current academy is not Wang's highest goal – his dream academy has yet to be built. He has chosen a plateau in the mountains that faces a valley with a small lake in its center to establish a complex that encompasses an academy, a library, a research center,

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<sup>277</sup> Field observations, Wenli Academy, December 7, 9 and 10, 2015.

<sup>278</sup> TS15003.

<sup>279</sup> A legal status for private enterprises such as non-profit NGOs and certain types of private schools; the Lujiang Cultural Education Center in Anhui province founded by Jing Kong has the same status (Dutournier / Ji 2009: 68).

and a medical center for traditional Chinese medicine. According to Wang's assistant, students would partly be working and partly studying (*gengdu* 耕读) as it used to be in the old times. They will plant their own crops to sustain themselves and grow herbs for health. In addition to that, in 2015, plans to open an international school were already very far. Six languages (English, Japanese, Latin, Greek, Sanskrit and Chinese) should be taught there.<sup>280</sup> In late 2016, the school opened and is now led by an overseas Chinese who returned home after having lived and studied (MA and PhD) in Germany for several years. She had her own weekend study hall in Hamburg;<sup>281</sup> now she lives in the mountains of Taishun. According to Wang Caigui, going global with his approach meant to strive for the good of mankind:

[Our aim is to] train contemporary international talents. And that's not only for China, but for the whole mankind. Mankind must have wisdom, and this wisdom comes from ancient times. Many nations have had a few sages and virtuous men; they all have their outstanding great personalities, they are very wise, and the written records of their wisdom are called 'canonical writings.' So if you let children learn these classics, you let them learn the special knowledge of all mankind. And it enables mankind to face the current age being based on its preserved wisdom. Wisdom is eternal while time is in constant change. But one can use eternal wisdom to deal with the issues of the present time. If that's possible enough, mankind can turn to a brighter direction. So the students I train are not only Chinese, but when foreign students want to come and seek instruction, that is also possible. But they have to have this ambition to strive for the entirety of mankind, to fight for the truth and for mankind. We train this kind of people; it is not [only] for the Chinese nation. So it's not like Hitler who said that the German nation was an elite nation, and Jewish people were an inferior nation and they had to be killed, we are not like that.<sup>282</sup> (Wang Caigui)

Wang explicitly distinguishes himself from large (and single nation focused) visions like those of Hitler which, in Winter's (2006: 4f., 208f.) terms, could be categorized as "major utopian" project in which lives were sacrificed to implement large scale ideologies, and which were centered on one elite nation. Wang claims to aim at pooling knowledge and wisdom that, embodied in people from all over the world with the motivation to make the world a better place, could actually change the future into a better one. Wisdom is, in his eyes, the element that is independent from timely changes and can, having its origin in the past, inform the present to change the future – wisdom appears as perfect carrier for utopian aims. This wisdom will be specifically embodied in a new cultural turf for the whole world

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<sup>280</sup> Conversation with a staff member, Wenli Academy, December 7, 2015.

<sup>281</sup> The talk is of Zhiqian Study Hall, mentioned again in the context of overseas classics reading education in chapter 7.

<sup>282</sup> “培养时代的国际人才。就是不是为中国而已，是为全人类，就是人类应该有智慧，而这个智慧从古以来，很多的民族都有一些圣贤，都有一些伟大人物，他们很有智慧，那那些智慧的记录叫做经典。所以让孩子学这些经典就是让孩子学全人类的学问。而让人类保持他的智慧去面对现在的时代，就是智慧是永久的，时代的变化，但是用永久的智慧去处理变化的时代问题。那如果能够这样，人类就能往更光明的方向走，所以我培养的学生不只是中国人，但是有外国学生想要来学，都可以，但是要有这种志气，就是为人类整体而奋斗。就还是为真理奋斗，为人类奋斗，培养这种人，不是为中华民族，所以不是像希特勒一样说这个德意志民族是上等民族，犹太人是下等民族就要杀掉，我们不会这样。” (TS15001)

based on devoted international (elite) thinkers. In his image film clip “A Millennium Promise” (*Qian nian zhi yue* 千年之约)<sup>283</sup> – a title that clearly indicates intentions for long-lasting effects of his project – the future academy is advertised as center for the revival of traditional culture and for global communication; it is supposed to be a sacred place of world culture (*wenba shengdi* 文化圣地).

Spatial structures chosen for this exclusive place of learning are also well thought through according to concepts of geomancy (*fengshui* 风水). Structures which could condense energy (*ju qi* 聚气) while being open (*kaikuo* 开阔) with a wide view towards the horizon are considered to be suitable for an education that aims at opening the learner’s intellectual horizon (*kaikuo xinxiang* 开阔心胸). Wang’s chosen mountain plateau offers an open view into the valley and is backed by high mountains (IMG. 20, annex p. 321). Wang compares the environment with a chair in which one could comfortably sit, having the back stabilized, while being able to look into distance – this had a comforting effect on the mind, too, it would calm people down (*jingxialai* 静下来). Furthermore, the view from a mountain plateau would change daily, depending on the weather; so every day, one could enjoy a different view and a different perspective. One’s eyes were confronted with a new beautiful environment; with a daily changing and non-monotonous view, one’s horizon could grow into different directions. These structural features of the environment resemble his educational goals: based on a foundation supported with classical culture, people had an open perspective with which they could face a bright future with a calm attitude.<sup>284</sup>

Spatial ideals are underlined by images of geomancy which Wang used in the explanation of his choice of site: the mountain plateau had a good location because its sides were supported by matching constellations within the celestial sphere. In ancient times, the sky had been divided into four sections; each section had seven constellations; in total, there were 28 constellations in the sky. Each section was represented by a mystical creature: The North by the black turtle (*xuanwu* 玄武), the South by the rose finch (*zhuque* 朱雀), the East by the azure dragon (*qinglong* 青龙) and the West by the white tiger (*baihu* 白虎). Wang Caigui’s plateau has the azure dragon to the right and the white tiger to the left, symbolizing protected flanks (TS15001; see also Field 2009: 811). The main building of the future academy is planned to be built on the highest point facing the South, offering a view that was ten kilometers wide. Ancient wisdom, cultural heritage, and classical languages will be protected

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<sup>283</sup> Available online on the website of Wenli Academy: <http://www.wenli.ac.cn/> (last access: December 3, 2018).

<sup>284</sup> TS15001; conversation with Wang Caigui while visiting the mountain plateau, December 8, 2015.

in a structural and spiritual safeguarded area; an “otherworldly scenery” (*shiwai taoyuan de fengguan* 世外桃源的风光).<sup>285</sup>

This scenery has been translated into a computer model to underline Wang’s vision with a clear image. To the right side, the mountains pile up in the academy’s back; to the left side, the view into the valley opens (IMG. 1, see below). It is planned that by 2019, around 200 students should be taught on the new grounds. In 2023, Wang plans to be done with the building process and wants to educate up to 3,000 scholars to attract worldwide attention. By 2030, there are supposed to be a few hundred Wenli graduates who can share their moral knowledge (*daode xuewen* 道德学问) on discussion platforms in conferences and summits worldwide; and by 2040, these graduates would have approximately ten years of experience within society, i.e. ten years of having had the chance to let their talent shine for the people already.<sup>286</sup>



IMG. 1: Computer model of Wang Caigui’s ideal academy (screen shot from the website of Wenli Academy [www.wenli.ac.cn](http://www.wenli.ac.cn))

The headmasters of Fuzhou Study Hall, well-known in the network of Fujian classics reading facilities, have already successfully transferred their educational ideals into the building of an ideal study hall. Having started as a small city study hall in Fuzhou, they had a study hall building designed and built far outside of the city in a natural environment. It is located in the middle of a green plain next to a small river with mountains in the back (IMG. 22, IMG. 21, annex p. 321). The three-story building of the study hall is in square shape and encloses a

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<sup>285</sup> Wenli Academy: Wenli Academy Short Introduction (*Wenli Shuyuan Jianjie* 文礼书院简介). Online: <http://www.wenli.ac.cn/h-col-175.html> (last access: October 9, 2018).

<sup>286</sup> Wenli Academy: Wenli Academy Short Introduction (*Wenli Shuyuan Jianjie* 文礼书院简介). Online: <http://www.wenli.ac.cn/h-col-175.html> (last access: October 9, 2018).



courtyard in its center. Its basic layout reminds of China's traditional courtyard houses (*siheyuan* 四合院), except for the fact that the courtyard is not the center of many one-story buildings which are connected with each other (Knapp 2009: 508) but is in the center of a single building complex. Open space inside of the building is necessary because the main door is locked at any time and the children cannot leave the premises without supervision. The third story of the house is not fully covered with a roof; the highest floor is half open makes it lighter and allows for simple things like drying laundry. Teachers and students live together in the building; female students, male students, and teachers each in their separated sleeping areas. Eight people find space in a dorm room; each dorm area on the second floor has a shared space with sinks for basic daily hygiene openly placed at the entrance to the dorm area. A toilet and a shower can be used in the small bathrooms located in the back of each dorm. Kitchen and dining hall are on first floor (Chinese ground floor); in a small outside space next to the dining hall, everybody can clean their own bowls and chopsticks with their hands and natural soap. Assembly halls and larger teaching halls are on first floor; classrooms are on second and third floor, and the teacher's office – the only place with internet connection in the whole building – is on third floor. Everything that is needed for daily life is encapsulated within the building.<sup>287</sup>

Similar to Suzhou Study Hall and Wang's academy, the building is white concrete in combination with wooden details. From the ground floor, one can enter the assembly and teaching halls through dark brown wooden doors with ankle high thresholds; windows are underlined with wooden patterns; the light brown ceiling lights are in lampion shape. Different in style is the third story on one side of the building (which one faces when entering the study hall); it is richly decorated with light brown wood and, in distinction to the dark wood, an immediate eye catcher. Red lampions in front of the light brown wooden decoration are bigger and with golden details. However, the fine façade does not cover a special room; it is an assembly hall similar to those on the ground floor. The design was just supposed to add a little variation to the white and dark brown; the light brown wood adds a bit of warmth to the atmosphere. The overall design of the building resembles a traditional flavor; yet, it does not try to duplicate the architecture of ancient Chinese buildings.<sup>288</sup>

Fuzhou Study Hall cannot be reached with public transportation. Life for the children and the teachers is mostly happening behind the walls of the study hall and outside in nature. Interaction with the locals in the rural area happens occasionally on field trips in the nearby villages; interaction with family members is limited to free days (every second weekend two

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<sup>287</sup> Field observations, Fuzhou Study Hall, March 2016.

<sup>288</sup> Field observations, Fuzhou Study Hall, March 19 and 20, 2016.

days, and the national holidays for Chinese New Year and the National Day holidays). People's focus in life is, therefore, very much centered on the study hall. This fits the headmasters' intention to create a lifestyle that is in harmony with nature, relating to the Daoist concept of "unity of heaven and men" (*tianren heyi* 天人合一). The female headmaster characterizes their daily rhythm as in harmony with that of nature. Even though teachers were sometimes so caught up in their work, they would still keep the nature-given rhythm of life and keep their periods of rest to preserve good health (*yangsheng* 养生). A healthy rhythm in accordance with patterns prescribed by nature (such as sleeping hours) could be found in the knowledge pool of both traditional Chinese medicine and Daoism.<sup>289</sup> From there, she extends the idea of human and environmental unity into the duty to also protect the environment one lives in, especially considering current environmental issues. The citation containing her explanation on this is quite long, but very necessary to show the connection between environment, tradition, and motivation for change:

Traditionally and historically, Chinese people are very environmentally friendly. Everybody knew how to protect the environment, because they knew that you have to respect nature. The result of respecting nature naturally is that you protect nature; you are not going to do such things [that destroy nature]. For example, large-scale exploitation of resources, overly excessive exploitation and waste – this is, in Chinese tradition, very very taboo, is even strongly criticized, it is strongly condemned, it's not allowed. Really! Because with these things – when you break the balance, we Chinese think that along with the punishment of the rules of nature, you will have to face the wrath of Heaven for that. Why are there hurricanes, earthquakes, and global warming?

This world faces such a crisis, because there is no such concept [as in Chinese tradition]. People think that they are very scientific and awesome, as if mankind could put itself above nature, 'I can rule nature;' as if nature should have to listen to me, and mankind would be the biggest. But originally, that is not the case; mankind is only a small part of nature. [...] We all have to follow the rules of nature. It is like that. In the environment of the whole world, results of this [inadequate attitude of men] emerged, this is already beyond argumentation; this does not need to be discussed at all. The environmental issues of the whole world are already very severe, right? Because we think that we are number one, we think that we can do this, we don't care – anyways, I think that I am awesome, I've got a lot of money, and I can build many factories, there is a lot of exhaust gas, emitted just like that, and the results of this emission is already seen.

But according to our Chinese traditional thinking, our cultural thinking, this is not allowed. You must serve nature; you must know that in the face of nature, the power of men is very tiny. This is not to say that you should feel inferior, but I think that this is a revelation of wisdom. Because a person [like that] understands the secrets [within nature], that's really subtle, but the ancient Chinese people really understood it. Today many Westerners also understand it; in their hearts, they are hasty and desperately call out, call out [to the others]. But many people, the biggest part of the people, have not yet grasped it, so they are still very alert.<sup>290</sup> (Headmaster of Fuzhou Study Hall)

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<sup>289</sup> FZ16001.

<sup>290</sup> “中国人从传统上面，从历史上，它就是非常环保的，每个人都知道怎么去环保，因为他知道说，你要尊重自然，尊重自然的结果很自然的你就环保了，你就不会做那样的事情。比如说能源大量的开采，和过度的开采以及浪费，这在我们中国传统里面是非常非常忌讳的，甚至是受到谴责的 *strongly condemn, it's not allowed*。真的，因为这种东西，你破坏了这种平衡的话，我们中国人就是，这是必须遭天谴的，就是所谓的遭天谴，随着这种自然规律的惩罚。为什么现在这个什么 *hurricanes、earthquakes*，还有这个全球变暖？”

Today's environmental pollution and destruction are set in clear relation with wrong choices made by people who are not in touch with their own tradition and do not have the same high insights as the wise people of the past had. A traditional lifestyle is an attempt to find back to the original harmony between the Chinese person and the environment. On the long run, traditionalization also means to care more about the environment.

For the way back to traditional culture, locality and local customs as preserved in rural areas is seen as crucial. Two cases of Suzhou and Shanghai have already shown how historicity, locality and culture relate to each other. Rural areas exceed these cases in the sense that these locations are believed to have preserved traditional Chinese culture all along and even through times of destruction such as May Fourth and the Cultural Revolution. Remoteness and isolation made nature the perfect cultural protection zone. A female teacher of the state-run Xiamen Academy takes the whole province of Fujian (where Fuzhou is also located) in the South of China as an example for cultural preservation in the countryside: during the Cultural Revolution, it had been possible for Fujian locals to keep some of their daily customs, such as their popular belief (*minjian xinyang* 民间信仰) and their ancestor shrines (*citang* 祠堂) where they could go to pray and worship the spirits of their ancestors. The South was in a secure distance to the North where destruction due to the revolution took place – no temple, no shrine, no tradition was left untouched, as the teacher stated.<sup>291</sup> Exploring local rural culture in the case of Fuzhou is also rediscovering tradition. According to one of the teachers in Fuzhou Study Hall, it was important for children to get in contact with local culture (*bentu wenhua* 本土文化); communication with the locals in their rural area enabled them to have an experience of their cultural awareness of life (*wenhua de shengminggan* 文化的生命感). He therefore stays in contact with peasant people in the

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这个世界面临这样的危机，就是因为他没有这个概念。他认为说，我科技很厉害，就是人类可以凌驾于自然之上，‘我可以统治这个自然’，好像这个大自然就要听我的，人类就是最大的。本来去这个 it's not, 我们人类只是自然其中的一个部分。[...] We all, we have to follow the rules of nature, 就是这样子。

因为现在整个世界的环境呈现出来的就是这样，这已经是 beyond argumentation, 这根本不需要辩驳什么。这现在整个世界环境的问题已经非常非常严重了呀，对吗？就是因为我们觉得我们太老了，我们觉得我可以这样，我们不管，反正我觉得我就是很厉害，我又有很多钱，然后我就可以制造很多的工厂，很多的这个废气，然后就这样排，排的时候现在结果都已经呈现了呀。但是我们，按照我们中国传统的这种思想，文化思想，这是不允许的，人有的时候，你就必须要臣服于自然，就是，你要知道在自然的面前人的力量是很渺小的。这个不是说，不是自卑，而是一种，这是一种智慧的呈现，我认为。因为他看得懂，understand the secrets in there, that's really subtle, 但是中国古人真的看到了，所以现在很多西方人也是，他看懂了，他内心很着急啊，他就拼命的呼吁啊，呼吁啊，但是很多人，大部分的人还没有明白嘛，他还是比较着急。”(FZ16001)

The interviewee is an English teacher. Being interviewed by a foreigner, she threw in a few English terms now and then.

<sup>291</sup> Conversation with a teacher, state-run Xiamen Academy, October 24, 2015.

surrounding villages, especially with seniors who have experienced a lot of the customs people thought lost.<sup>292</sup>

The rural played an instrumental part in Confucian revival before – at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the “last Confucian” Liang Shuming aimed at a re-culturalization of China starting from elucidating peasants through their own experience (Billioud / Thoraval 2007: 15). Between 1931 and 1937, he planned to set in motion a social and cultural renovation of China, starting from the renovation of the countryside. “Liang Shuming’s action was aiming at ‘the emergence of gentlemen (*junzi*) within the masses,’ and the ‘spiritual progress’ of villagers was an essential part of his project.” (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 28) Among today’s classics reading educators, common people are at the center of Confucian revival, too, and the rural is a starting point for this revival, too, but the implications are slightly different. People today are the driving forces of retraditionalization; they do not need external enhancement by philosophers or politicians to engage in a top-down program. The rural is chosen as crucial starting point not because people there needed to be enlightened, but because the people who live there are seen as bearers of valuable knowledge and customs of tradition. Peasants appear as barely educated people; yet they embodied the *wisdom* of nature, gained through personal experience and the interaction with nature – they appear to be in a spiritual and harmonious relation with nature. Therefore, “[f]or some Confucians nowadays, the soil and the world of the peasant are invested with a strong ‘mystique’ or imaginary dimension.” (Billioud / Thoraval 2007: 15) A physical and spiritual experience of the countryside today within the context of a Confucian revival was an experience of a dream-like Chinese civilization for learners with urban background (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 104).

Nature is also chosen as setting to for temporary classics reading activities. Billioud and Thoraval (2015: 49) tell the story of a young woman who works for a local government in the section for cultural affairs and who convinced the authorities to support classics reading education for children aged three to six before they enter the regular school system. Upon her initiation, three reading sessions per day take place in a in a park. Similarly, the core activity of Yidan Study Hall (Yidan Xuetang 一耽学堂) in Beijing, a facility that focuses on adult classics reading, are morning recitation sessions of Confucian classics in a park (Billioud 2010: 219). Confucian movements are likely to be found somewhere in connection with the countryside; field trips into nature in relation with Confucian activity are not rare (Billioud / Thoraval 2007: 15). The value of the countryside might not only relate to preservation of Confucian tradition and distance to the dystopia of city life, but also to the inherent ecological consciousness within Confucian thought as pointed out by historian Arif Dirlik (1995: 256).

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<sup>292</sup> Conversation with a teacher, Fuzhou Study Hall, March 20, 2016.

Whereas the individual appears at the center of Confucian learning and self-cultivation, the intention of shaping a good individual stands within the paramount collective goal to achieve harmony in social and environmental relations. Caring about cultivating a good relationship with the surrounding environment correlates with caring about the environment. The setting itself is a reminder of the goals of self-cultivation.

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#### 4.2. PARENTAL IDEALS IN CLASSICS READING FACILITIES AND THE IMPACT OF SHIFTING FAMILY VALUES AND STRUCTURES

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Classics reading education is basically an initiative started by parents for their children or by private educators for parents and their children. Starting from this organizational form, it is highly related to family issues. Most of the headmasters and teachers in today's study halls and academies are also parents and occasionally even teach their children at the facility where they work (or which they run). The roles of teachers and headmasters therefore have often intersections with their parental roles. In turn, parents who do not teach in a classics reading facility and send their children to one of the boarding schools are not in their parents' roles on a daily basis; child education in all facets would mainly be done in the study hall or academy. In the discourse on shortcomings of China's society today, inadequate child education or a lack of attentiveness towards parental duties are also topics. Within study halls and academies, family education concepts and parental roles are renegotiated along Confucian values and traditional social family constellations;<sup>293</sup> this is related to the concept of family-tied education in these facilities in the past:

Academies are more... they focus much more on the joint life of traditional Chinese families, for example, piety towards parents and respect towards teachers, companionship of the older brother and respect of the younger brother. The academy is like a large family, everybody eats together, studies together, organizes activities together, right. So it is like domestication, this is very important.<sup>294</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy A)

Family life in ancient China used to be regulated by Confucian values which were often manifested in so-called family precepts (*jiaxun* 家训<sup>295</sup>), a family code of good behavior and ideal personhood. The emerge of study halls and academies that take traditional family precepts as reorientation for family life reveals the lack of something to ground the modern

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<sup>293</sup> SH16001; SZ15004.

<sup>294</sup> “书院也比较，把传统的中国家庭里面，比如说对老师、对家人的孝亲尊师啊、兄友弟恭啊，就他比较注重是一种共同的生活。书院就像一个大家庭，大家一起吃饭、一起读书、办活动啊，对。所以他就像一个家庭化的，这个也很重要。” (PK16001)

<sup>295</sup> Alternative terms for *jiaxun* are *tingxun* 庭训, *jiajie* 家诫 or *jiafan* 家范 (Liu 2014: 66). They all refer to a set of rules and standards for family education, traditionally established by big clans in imperial China.

Chinese family on. Ethnographic studies on families in China show the effects of changing lives and environments on values and social structures (chapter 4.2.1). The different roles within the social environment of study halls and academies try to counterbalance this lack by establishing a tradition-inspired structure among classics reading educators and learners which also influences family life and structure beyond study hall life (chapters 4.2.2, 4.2.3 and 4.2.4). Ideal images of the physical environment of learning and growing up in nature with mountains and water (streams, rivers, ponds) in their abstraction also stretch into the social environment, similar to the abstraction of nature in the interior design. The headmaster of Shanghai Study Hall matches ideal fatherly and motherly positions with ideal landscape images: “Seeing the parents from the child’s perspective, the father needs to be solid like a mountain and the mother needs to be kind and loving like water, this is not easy.”<sup>296</sup>

#### 4.2.1 – CHINESE FAMILY EDUCATION IN TRANSITION

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China had a tradition of family precepts of over 3,000 years (Guo 2003: 77). They dominated China’s family education landscape from pre-Qin (before 221 BCE) to Republican times (Kong 2003: 56). Family precepts basically delivered the moral framework for family education to keep the individual and the family in order – which would gradually influence the next larger social category, the state, and then the world, as indicated in the *Great Learning* (compare Legge 1939 [1893]: 358f.). Confucian virtues of loyalty (*zhong* 忠), filial piety (*xiao* 孝), benevolence (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 义) and trust(worthiness) (*xin* 信) form this moral framework; family education in ancient China meant to strive for (personal) moral perfection (Kong 2003: 56; Liu 2014: 66). The most important part on the parents’ side was to serve as a good example (*shenjiao* 身教; lit. “education by the self or the body”) which meant to actually and actively embody these values (“making oneself into a rule,” *yi shen zuo ze* 以身作则, Guo 2003: 78; see also Liu 2014: 66).

Written records on family precepts can be traced back to Han dynasty, and Confucius’ reprimands of his son Kong Li 孔鯉 in the *Analects*’ chapter *Jishi* 季氏 (Legge 1939 [1893]: 306 ff.) serve as an example of *jiacun*. Sui and Tang dynasties saw the institutionalization of the imperial civil service examination but stressed military power and the central government even more. State institutions were more in the central focus than family education and childhood issues. These only gained attention again in a time of turmoil, in the Period of Disunity (220-589 CE). Childhood as development stage in the formation of the human character was broadly studied; moral education within families (as prescribed in family

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<sup>296</sup> “要成为父母，从孩子心中的，说父重如山，好，母慈如水啊，不容易。” (SH16001)

precepts) became the core concept for family education (Lee 2000: 489-491). In Song, Ming and Qing dynasties, family precepts from well-known clans and families were written into books, circulated in society, and became part of a wholesome family education (Kong 2003: 55f.). It had always been sages and gentlemen who served as models for an ideal character; their actions are considered as embodiments (*huashen* 化身) of wisdom, to reveal truth (*zhen* 真), goodness (*shan* 善) and beauty (*mei* 美; Guo 2003: 77). They therefore served as character examples (*ren'ge fanshi* 人格范式) for moral instruction in family precepts. Given that the value of a person in ancient China was measured along his or her moral integrity and goodness, moral family instruction was highly treasured and encouraged; deviations from ideal behavior was punished, and punishments were also integrated into family precepts (Guo 2003: 78).

After the fall of the last dynasty, the tradition of family precepts slowly disappeared. Moral education, though, has become a national topic. Within the “Citizen’s ethic construction program” (*Gongmin daode jianshe shishi gangyao* 公民道德建设实施纲要), China’s government states the in the family, moral education takes place at its earliest stage. Family education should focus on implementing the “common ideal of socialism with Chinese characteristics” (*Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi de gongtong lixiang* 中国特色社会主义的共同理想, Kong 2003: 57), which, for example, consists in patriotism and keeping the law, being well-behaved, harmonious and friendly, working hard, and benefitting the nation by being dedicated to studying.<sup>297</sup> Influences of traditional values of the Confucian past, ideals of today’s socialism, and the discovery of values of other cultures have created a field of value tension in Chinese society.

Anthropologist Vanessa Fong (2011: 38-40; 70) argues that since the 2000s, along fertility decline and economic growth within the process of globalization, young Chinese started to be able to go abroad, get in contact with foreign cultures, and shift their focus from the traditional Chinese family setting, seeking for more liberal input and a lifestyle suitable for them as individuals. The softening of Confucian values started in the Reform and Opening Era (after 1978) when young people sought professional success not only to survive but to earn a *good* living. Grandparents would take over the task of taking care of the children while parents would work. Due to the one-child policy China (after 1979), most of these children grew up as singletons in which parents projected all their aims and ambitions. Size and structure of families enhanced a shift in parental duties and expectations.

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<sup>297</sup> The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China: “Dangzhongyang yinfa ‘gongmin daode jianshe shishi gangyao’ wunian zongshu 党中央印发《公民道德建设实施纲要》五年综述.” Online: [http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2006-09/19/content\\_392861.htm](http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2006-09/19/content_392861.htm) (last access: September 13, 2018).

Vice versa, in pursuing their filial obligations towards parents, especially when they are old, all duties are left to a single child:

Unlike children of the large families common in China in previous generations, who had many siblings to share the costs of supporting parents and grandparents, singletons need jobs with developed-world-level incomes to cover the rapidly inflating costs of providing education, medical care, and respectable lifestyles for themselves and their children as well as the medical and nursing care and comfortable retirement some of them will be expected to provide to their parents, grandparents, and parents-in-law. (Fong 2011: 71)

In her anthropological study on the impact of Confucian values on young people's life paths, especially on their decision making, Désirée Remmert (2016: 30-32) takes this as a starting point to show the changed meanings and impacts of the core pillar of the traditional Chinese family: filial piety (*xiao* 孝). She argues that traditionally, filial piety was the core family value which meant for parents to take emotional and material care of children; children, in turn, had to live up to parents' expectations and take care of them when they are old. Given that after 1978, people's development in terms of profession and professionalism was highly emphasized to meet with the needs of an uprising economy, living up to family expectations had been extended to making high achievements in academic and professional sectors. Following Fong's argument, this would also secure the older generation's materialistic well-being in retirement. Anthropologist Lisa Hoffman (2010: 51) argues that people's professional success, especially among urban middle class families, started to be related with being a good Chinese citizen. The urge to develop oneself regarding possible positive effects for the whole country culminated into tensions for the individual, being torn between personal and social(ist national) goals. Striving for personal development and fulfillment, a young person in contemporary China also faces new family obligations based on traditional values and expectations related to the role as a Chinese citizen.

Both family structure and value system in China are in transition. Competition and stress in public education which are criticized by classics reading educators seem to be matched with performance pressure to be able to fulfill today's filial duties. Parents who turn to classics reading education want their children to be happy, to develop themselves according to who they are, and to be able to live a decent and good life but doing that on the basis of the Confucian classics as solid foundation for personal and family values. Classics reading educators hold a classical Confucian-oriented moral upbringing against the politically favored model of moral upbringing; they decide about the moral values which should be propagated, lived, and taught in their privately-run academies and study halls, in their privately governed spaces. Family concepts are touched by own childhood experiences; some participants recall that their parents did not know much about children's upbringing and how to best educate them given that they themselves grew up in a time when education was not emphasized



(hinting to the time span around the Cultural Revolution). Others hold the view that the overall knowledge of family education is generally scarce in today's China.<sup>298</sup> Instability in family structures and values is, thus, not only related to shifted meanings of tradition-based values and related obligations and expectations, but to a caesura within family education and values in which a whole generation grew up; filling the gap is, again, task of classics reading education.

#### 4.2.2 – STUDY HALLS AND ACADEMIES AS PARENTAL INITIATIVES

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16 out of 21 headmasters of the visited classics reading facilities are also parents. Their children were their motivation to start this educational approach; this motivation is strongly intertwined with their understanding of parental rights and responsibilities – a huge topic among classics reading educators.<sup>299</sup> Parents are considered to be the first teachers of a child; they are responsible for the basic (moral) education, leading (*yindao* 引导) their children in behavior and choices, and accompany (*peiban* 陪伴) them in the course upbringing.<sup>300</sup> However, the father's role gains relatively little attention among classics reading educators; fatherly duties appeared only twice in the interviews: the headmaster of Guangzhou Study Hall cites the *Three Character Classic* (*Sanzijing* 三字经) stating “when a child is raised but not educated, it is the father's fault” (*yang bu jiao, fu zhi guo* 养不教，父之过).<sup>301</sup> The headmaster of Qufu Academy refers to the Chinese traditional relations of “fatherly love and filial piety of the son” (*fu ci zi xiao* 父慈子孝).<sup>302</sup> In all other cases, the mother appears at the forefront of family and school education.<sup>303</sup> In Chinese tradition, female virtue (*nü de* 女德) entailed that mothers had to be concerned with children's education;<sup>304</sup> Chinese tradition valued “mother's teaching” (*mujiao* 母教);<sup>305</sup> especially at home, the mother's educative influence was huge.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> SZ15007; PK16001; PK1600; PK16005; CD16001; GZ16001.

<sup>299</sup> PK16001; SZ15004; SH16001; WTS15001; WTS16003; XM15005; GZ16001; XM16001; WTS16001; CD16001; FZ16001; GZ16001.

<sup>300</sup> WTS15001; WTS16003; XM15005; GZ16001; XM16001; WTS16001; PK16004; conversation with two parents, Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 14, 2016.

<sup>301</sup> GZ16001.

<sup>302</sup> QF16001.

<sup>303</sup> PK16003; TS15003; SZ15002; SZ15004; SZ15007; TS15002.

<sup>304</sup> TS15002.

<sup>305</sup> PK16005.

<sup>306</sup> XM15005; PK15005.

The sense of parental responsibility combined with criticism of public education in China drove many parents to start their educative project for their own children.<sup>307</sup> The headmaster of Qufu academy opened her first study hall in Guangzhou in 2000 when her child was about three or four years old and went to kindergarten. She wished for her child to receive a good basic education in early years. Being dissatisfied with her family business, she used her free time to study Chinese tradition. In the context of her university studies of philosophy, she studied Chinese and Buddhist classics as “external knowledge” (*waizai de zhishi* 外在的知识). However, when she discovered that classics could also be spiritually appreciated, she developed interest in Chinese classics and hoped that she could transform that into a proper education for her child:

I mainly hoped that he can study history, study Chinese history, because the history of us Chinese people is very profound. Studying history, studying traditional culture, studying philosophy – this easily helps people to get profound and deep, not like the young people nowadays who do not consider any issues apart from eating, drinking and enjoying themselves. I hoped that my child could study in this way, and I searched for the way for my child’s education.<sup>308</sup> (Headmaster of Qufu Academy)

At first, she taught her son by herself. But according to Chinese tradition, a mother’s position differed from the teacher’s position, and she figured that homeschooling in the sense that she as a mother is the teacher was not suitable:

The concept of Chinese ancient people was to ‘exchange sons and teach the son of others,’ which means that you have to give your child to another person to have it educated. Chinese people say that the father needs to show fatherly kindness and the son needs to show filial piety – the parents show love towards their children; they transport family emotions to the child. When you use strict rules to rebuke or scold the child, your family emotions are easily disregarded; the child easily misunderstands and easily turns away from you. But if you don’t educate it with rules, the child is easily spoiled, anarchistic, so you have to be able to squeeze in somewhere in the middle; that is not easy to do. According to the Chinese solution, you exchange the children and teach the respective other. Being a parent, I provide my child with parental love and send it to a teacher; the teacher teaches the child rules. According to the education of our ancient people, the teacher has to beat and scold, [...] but as a parent, you have to love it. It gets love and rules, this is the best.<sup>309</sup> (Headmaster of Qufu Academy)

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<sup>307</sup> GZ16001; PK16004; QF16001; XM16001; FZ16001; SZ15004; TS15003; CD16001.

<sup>308</sup> “最主要的我希望他能学历史，学中国的历史，因为我们中国人的历史很深厚，然后学历史，学传统文化，学哲学，他容易让人变的深厚、深刻，不至于像现在年轻人一样的，就是除了吃喝玩乐不思考别的问题。我是希望孩子能够这样子学，那我是寻找孩子教育的理路。”(QF16001)

<sup>309</sup> “因为我们古人中国的理念叫易子而教，就孩子你要交给别人教，因为中国人讲父慈子孝，父母对孩子就是一个爱，然后就是，你传递给孩子的是一个亲情，如果你用很严厉的那个规矩去规范他的时候，你的亲情就很容易被漠视掉，嗯，孩子也容易误解，容易逆反。但是你如果不用规矩去教呢，他又容易溺爱，无法无天，所以你会夹在那个中间，就不好教。所以按照中国人的理路，易子而教，就是我做父母的，我就给孩子一个亲情，我把孩子交给老师教，老师教孩子规矩。按照我们古人的教育老师要打要骂， [...]; 但是我做父母的疼爱他。他又得到亲情，又学会规矩，这个是最好的。”(QF16001)

Teaching one's own child at home or in a study hall is seen as critical among other headmasters and teachers, too, considering the ideal of educational exchange of the past.<sup>310</sup> However, this dilemma inspired the headmaster of Qufu Academy to find a solution in which she could decide on her child's education and avoid leaving her motherly position. She met friends with similar ideas and they slowly developed a class for classical teaching:

At that time, I met a few like-minded friends who liked traditional culture; we met together, they brought along other children, and we slowly began to form a class. This class was led by a few former friends of mine and I also took part in it. At that time, we had a calligraphy teacher from Shishi 石狮; he was leading the children and taught them classical culture and calligraphy at the same time. This was in the earliest stage when we started to lead children; at the beginning, we only had six children and started to lead [educate] them.<sup>311</sup> (Headmaster of Qufu Academy)

She did not intend to develop this study group into an academy, but in the end, this class was the cell for her later academy in Qufu – she says that she was “following fate” (*suizhe yuanfen* 随着缘分).<sup>312</sup>

The headmaster of Wenli Study Hall formerly ran her own study hall in Shijiazhuang 石家庄 where she also started to educate her own child in Chinese classics. When she met a few mothers who got interested in the matter and spread word to more parents, home education slowly developed into a study hall.<sup>313</sup> She describes herself as a (former) career woman who reflected and reconsidered her position as a mother which drove her into more engagement in child education:

Formerly, the grandparents took care of our children. I thought by myself that I had to focus on work, so with this awareness, I was fully dedicated to my work, and did not pay so much attention to my children, especially regarding their education. And then I saw this [education], and I thought as a mother – because in Chinese traditional culture, there is a lot about ‘female virtue’ (*nü de* 女德), that means women's proper moral conduct. It is very particular about women; they necessarily have to return to the family. It talks about Mother Earth; she needs to take charge of the world, take charge of the world with great virtue. Furthermore, in the *Book of Changes* it is said that she necessarily has to return to the inner sphere, and should not be directed to the outer, she should be directed to the inner [matters, i.e. family matters]. So this is... before, I always thought, ah, men and women must be equal, one has to be financially independent, go to work, and like this, this concept is... not at once, but slowly, after listening to others and reading more, I really started to think like this: I think that a child's education is more important to mothers.<sup>314</sup> (Headmaster of Wenli Study Hall)

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<sup>310</sup> PK16002; XM16001; TS15001; SH16001; conversation with a teacher, Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 9, 2016.

<sup>311</sup> “那个时候也碰到了一些喜欢传统文化的一些志同道合的朋友嘛，开始聚到一块，聚在一块呢，朋友们也把别的孩子也带来，我们慢慢就形成了一个班。这个班由我自己以前的一些朋友们来带，我也参与。那时候就是我们有一个书法老师，石狮镇的，他那个时候带我们孩子，一边学传统文化，一边教书法。这是最早开始带，最早我们才六个孩子，开始带的。” (QF16001)

<sup>312</sup> Conversation with the headmaster, Qufu Academy, July 8, 2016.

<sup>313</sup> TS15003.

<sup>314</sup> “以前的时候，你看我们家孩子，全部都是爷爷奶奶给带大的。就是自己觉得，自己也好像应该以工作为重，所以这个意识呢，就是，全在工作这块，对孩子关注就比较少，尤其是对孩子教育的关注就更少。然后也是因为看了这个，觉得这个母亲啊，因为中国传统文化有很多女德方面的，就是女子的德行，

Being convinced of her traditionally grounded motherly responsibilities towards her children was her motivation to establish a study hall. Mothers with a similar mind joined her with their children. Traditional values that prescribed a balance between (working) men and (family-oriented) women rather than what she calls “equality” gave her a firm grasp of knowing what to do as a mother. The headmaster of Fuzhou Study Hall engaged in her classics reading educational project when her daughter was two to three years old with the goal to help her grow up (*bangzhu haizi chengzhang* 帮助孩子成长). She did not have any intentions to run a study hall; it had emerged from her compassion to cater to the educational needs of children around her.<sup>315</sup>

Teacher D runs a quite famous study hall and has further developed to concept of prenatal and early childhood education in reading the classics. She did not talk about her own role as a mother but is a crucial figure for the representation of a motherly ideal and for promoting traditional family values. Teacher D is mostly concerned with the propaganda of classics reading education, and not so much with teaching at her own study hall. In March 2016, she visited her study hall for a short period of time and held two speeches for teachers and students. Her first speech was preceded by showing a film clip on a famous classics reading student who started to read classics at a very early age by support of his mother. When talking about his mother and Chinese civilization, he started to cry – emotional ties to parents and the Chinese culture were a major topic in the movie clip, and that is where Teacher D picked up with her speech. She criticized the inattentive attitude many students in the room had when they watched the man talking about important topics, expressed her regrets for such neglectful behavior, started to cry, and pointed out that everyone would hopefully get better by studying the classics, developing their wisdom, and learning how to value their ancestors’ heritage. In a second speech, she intended to raise awareness for a problem among the students which she wanted them to solve. Facing their non-ideal responses to each other, she pointed out that every child in this room was like her own child, and when someone hurt one of her children, she got hurt, too; her eyes got wet again.<sup>316</sup> She presented herself as an overall loving mother figure who tries to teach her student-children proper conduct on the basis of respect and love for the mother and passion for Chinese tradition.

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她非常讲究就是这个...就是这个女人啊，一定是要回归家庭。就是它讲这个就是大地嘛，要载物，厚德载物，然后那个...还有，就是.....《易经》里面也讲嘛，这个一定要回归，不是向外的，应该是向内的。所以这个是.....就是以前的时候，以前的时候总是觉得，就是，哎哟男女一定要平等啊，要经济都要独立啊，经济要独立啊，要打拼呀，是这样子，就观念也就是.....但是这个不是一看就是，是慢慢的，听别人说的多了、自己看这方面书多了，慢慢儿的真的是，就，这样子认为了，就觉得还是孩子的教育对妈妈来说更重要。” (TS15003)

<sup>315</sup> FZ16001.

<sup>316</sup> Field observation, Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 15, 2016.

Even though the mother's role in education is strongly underlined by classics reading educators, there are only six headmasters among the interviewees who are also mothers, but ten headmasters who are also fathers. One of the most prevalent motivations for interviewed fathers to open a study hall or academy is their former occupation – being a teacher in the public education system. Beijing Academy B is led by a father who used to be a teacher at a public school; being dissatisfied with the overall quality of public education, he turned to classics reading education. He considers teaching the classics as freedom; he can teach his own children and further students according to his own ideals. Just as the other headmasters, he values the principle of exchanging children for education which is why he hopes that he could educate children of other headmasters and they would take in his children.<sup>317</sup> Xiamen Academy is also led by a father who left behind a teacher's career in the public education system. He opened his academy seven years after he founded Xiamen Study Hall B. Originally, he aimed at providing an alternative to public education for children in general, not his own, which were too young for formal schooling at that time anyways. After having experienced public education from the teacher's perspective, he wishes for his children to gain their knowledge in the study hall system.<sup>318</sup> Chengdu Study Hall headmaster used to be a language teacher at a public school but turned to classics reading education due to dissatisfaction with the job. Additionally, he rather wanted to teach his children with the classics reading approach. His wife joined in later; he is mostly occupied with representation and propaganda.<sup>319</sup> Teaching in a public school did, in these cases, not fulfill the teachers' ideal of education. They share the general criticism of public education and having had a deeper insight into the public system due to their (former) occupation, they rather spared their own children a similar experience.

Some fathers are also motivated to open their own educational facility because they wish to educate their own children completely according to their own ideals without putting too much emphasis on criticizing of the public education sector. Teacher D's husband was more concerned with his own children when he decided to join in the study hall undertaking with his wife. When his daughter was four years old, they opened the study hall specially to offer a better place for her to be educated. The later-born son started with prenatal classics reading education and was the first child in China to be born as a “classics reading baby” (*dujing baobao* 读经宝宝). His daughter was enrolled in Wang Caigui's academy when the interview took place in December 2015. Similarly, the headmaster of Shanghai Study Hall started with

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<sup>317</sup> PK16002.

<sup>318</sup> Conversation with the headmaster, Xiamen Academy, February 29, 2016.

<sup>319</sup> CD16001.

classics reading weekend classes and changed to a full-time educational facility because he wanted to have his daughter educated with their approach. The headmaster of Shenzhen Study Hall C also values the principle of “exchanging sons to educate them”<sup>320</sup> but still educates one of his children in his own study hall because of financial shortcomings. Beijing Academy A was opened by the headmaster because he did not see his ideals of education implemented anywhere when he engaged in the promotion of reading the classics; his choice was not connected with the children. Actually, his wife is leading the academy and he claims to just be a representative.<sup>321</sup> The same is true for Guangzhou Study Hall; the headmaster’s wife is concerned with the actual education and he is in charge of representation and relations. They opened the study hall for their own son.<sup>322</sup> The headmaster of Beijing Study Hall opened his facility prior to having a child because he considers classics reading education as ideal approach. However, he also had experience in teaching (adult language education) before.<sup>323</sup>

Mothers who engage in classics reading education as headmasters do not necessarily have previous experience in teaching; they had their own businesses before, and then turned to the educational sector. But being a mother is, regarding the traditional role of a mother, reason enough to do so. Most fathers who became headmasters engaged in the profession of teaching before; and quite a few would turn to tasks concerned with the “exterior”, with the outside world, while their wives would be concerned with the inner workings of the study hall or academy. Social constellation among males and females in classics reading facilities, even in leadership, reflect the taste of a traditional social order with a traditional role model in which the women take care of the child’s education and upbringing, as it is prescribed by traditional Chinese female virtue. Notwithstanding the social constellation, the mere action of opening an own educational facility to realize one’s own educational ideals, keep one’s own children’s whole (family and formal) education into one’s own hands is quite a progressive project, especially when considering that there is no support by governmental authorities. Parents who are also headmasters merge traditional values with new considerations on parental responsibility and rights in education.

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<sup>320</sup> “易子以教,” conversation with the headmaster, Shenzhen Study Hall C, March 13, 2016.

<sup>321</sup> PK16001.

<sup>322</sup> GZ16001.

<sup>323</sup> Conversation with the headmaster of Beijing Study Hall, January 23, 2016.

#### 4.2.3 – TEACHER-PARENTS IN STUDY HALLS AND ACADEMIES: FAMILY AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE UNDER ONE ROOF

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Many study halls and academies are boarding schools. For parents and children this means to live separate lives for most of the year, except for the national holidays (Chinese New Year in spring and the National Day holiday week in October) and free weekends every other week (normally every second weekend for two days).<sup>324</sup> If parents live close by, they can visit their children occasionally (only Guangzhou Study Hall does not allow parents to visit their children) or children can spend the free weekend days at their parent's home. However, this constellation only counts for parents who are not involved in teaching or working (e.g. cooking) in the same study hall or academy in which their children are living and learning. 17 out of the 21 visited privately run study halls and academies employ mothers as teachers. In Guangzhou Study Hall, for example, most of the teachers are young mothers in their 20s and 30s; only one male teacher works there (age: over 30).<sup>325</sup> Chengdu Study Hall also mainly employs female teachers. The headmaster's wife relates this to the low income that study hall teachers can expect: given that men had to provide for the family, a teacher's salary from a study hall would not be enough. About one third of their teachers were mothers who first took lessons or training in classics reading education – because their children did or should also learn it – and then remained in the study hall; one third used to be teachers in public education who left the system, and the last third were teacher's college graduates.<sup>326</sup> Billioud and Thoraval (2007: 17) visited small traditional-style private schools (*sishu*) in the Pearl River Delta within their research and found – quite similarly – that teachers are women in their 20s who are rather uneducated but devoted to Confucian tradition. They usually only started to get to know Confucian writings shortly before they had entered the field of classics reading education. Their qualification as classics reading teachers would not lie in their academic qualification but in their “moral credibility” (Billioud / Thoraval 2007: 17) deriving from their passion for tradition.

Passion is a crucial motive to become a classics reading teacher. Beijing Academy A has approx. 200 students and 100 teachers. The teachers joined either out of interest in classical education or because they were parents interested in the educational approach. Some parents would decide to stay and turn their learning into teaching.<sup>327</sup> The female leading teacher in Xiamen Study Hall B started as an assistant to the headmaster of the study hall. She was

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<sup>324</sup> FZ16001; TS15002; WTS16004a/b.

<sup>325</sup> Conversation with the head teacher in Guangzhou Study Hall, May 4, 2016.

<sup>326</sup> Conversation with the headmaster's wife, Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016.

<sup>327</sup> Conversation with the headmaster's assistant, Beijing Academy A, January 16, 2016.

searching for a place where she could bring job and family together. Before teaching at the study hall, she used to be a teacher at a public high school.<sup>328</sup> A female teacher in Suzhou Study Hall A joined the study hall at the shores of Lake Tai with her four years old son while her husband stayed at home to work. As a family, they see each other every two weeks when teachers and students have two days off. Devotion to her child and her child's education is her prioritized motherly responsibility which is why she sacrificed living together with her husband for a life in a study hall with her son. Before she came to the study hall, she used to be a kindergarten teacher. In her friends' circle, she learned about classics reading education. She chose the study hall partly because she had a chance to work while being together with her child. In her teacher's duties towards the other children, she tries to integrate some motherly characteristics: in her dorm, she lives with six children, and when at night somebody would cry because they missed home or their parents, she would take the child into her bed to comfort and cuddle it, although it was not her own child. She is aware that this does not quite suit the study hall's ideal of a strict teacher, but for her, it is necessary to also take care of the children's emotional sides.<sup>329</sup>

The leading teacher in Shenzhen Study Hall A did not only stay as a teacher for the sake of her own child. Her understanding of Wang's educational ideal and her awareness of the chance to create a better society made her quit her old job and settle within the classics education world:

Later I realized that if only the child studies [the classics] it doesn't work; the parents have to study, too. So I went to accompany my child in reading, and later on, I quit my job and came here with him to be able to study the classics in depth. But if you only do it for being with the child, your intentions are not enough. Actually, your values are then only resting upon your own perspective. So slowly, I got to know this education, and after I had come to a deep understanding, I also grasped the cultural responsibility behind it all. Step by step I was drawn towards [this education], and I started to hope that I could do a little bit for it, not only for my child, but for all children in the world, for society, and for mankind. With every small step in the process of getting familiar with and understanding this matter, my own value system got its shape. And the ideal of this education is, in my own personal cognition, also my own ideal. And I hope that I can use of my efforts to reach it step by step.<sup>330</sup> (Leading teacher of Shenzhen Study Hall A)

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<sup>328</sup> The nominal headmaster of Xiamen Study Hall B opened Xiamen Academy and focuses on his teaching there now (XM15003; XM16001).

<sup>329</sup> Conversation with a teacher in Suzhou Study Hall A, November 13, 2015.

<sup>330</sup> “后来呢，就发现只是孩子读是不可以的，父母也要读经。然后就会陪着孩子一起读，到后来就是放弃了工作，然后陪着他一起在这里，能够更深入的去读经。但是，嗯，你只是为了陪孩子，那你的初心就不够嘛，那你.....实际上你的这种价值观还是停留在你只为你自己的角度上。所以慢慢的了解了这个教育，深入的了解了之后，然后对于背后的这种文化的承担，也有了了解。所以，嗯.....慢慢就会向往，向往之后呢，就希望能为这个做点事情，做不只是为了自己的孩子，可以为天下的孩子，可以为这个社会，为这个人类，为这个事逐步的一点一点的认识和了解，然后形成自己的价值观的。而且这个教育的理想是，在我本身的认知当中，是，嗯.....它就是我的理想，然后我希望用我的努力可以逐步地把它达成。” (WTS16002)



Concern for the own child's upbringing was her initial motivation, but the ideal of classics reading education with a vision of improvement of society and benefits for the whole mankind carried her concern further along these visions beyond her own family. Reading the classics broadened her perspective and extended her devotion to the education from her own child to the young generation in general. Classics reading education drove her to taking over a larger responsibility than just for her own child.

Three classics reading facilities actively create conditions to make the work more appealing for parents. If any of the female teachers in Shenzhen Study Hall A gets pregnant, the headmaster Teacher D allows them to take care of their children up to three years; after three years, the teachers would have to return to their full responsibilities. Within the three years, they could do a little teaching; part-time models are possible and subject of individual negotiations – something which would not be possible in regular employment. Small children can also be brought to class. The classes are not led by a single teacher; normally, one teacher does the main lead in reciting and the others support the class, e.g. help individual students to keep pace. This way, mothers can also bring their children to class and look after them when they are not in main duty but only in the role of subsidiary help.<sup>331</sup> In Beijing Academy B, over 50% of the teachers are the students' parents; most of them are a bit over 20 years old, some are in their 40s. All teachers live in the school's teacher dorm (*jituan sushe* 集团宿舍). To make living at the academy more appealing to couples and avoid the spatial separation of parents, the academy started to extend the living space into small apartments. Children would be educated in the academy and live in one of the student dorms while the parents could take over teaching duties and live in the apartment house.<sup>332</sup> Wenli Academy has opened Wenli Study Hall especially for the purpose to educate the academy staff's children. Small children (under age nine) usually live at home with their parents; the other children (age nine or ten and older) live in the study hall's student dorm, but they can see their parents every day during breaks and during their time off on weekends.<sup>333</sup>

One Chinese mother in Wenli Academy made quite a long journey to have her children educated in the adjacent study hall for two years while she works as a volunteer English teacher in Wenli Study Hall and volunteer for *Dujing Magazine*. She moved from Northern Germany where she lived for 14 years into the mountains of Zhuli. Her German husband stays in Germany to work; they see each other during the holidays outside of the premises of the academy. He supported her ambitions in classics reading education, but they never really

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<sup>331</sup> Conversations with two female teachers, Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 9 and 15, 2016.

<sup>332</sup> Field observation, Beijing Academy B, January 21, 2016.

<sup>333</sup> Field observation, Wenli Academy, December 8, 2015; TS15002.

communicated about the topic in-depth; she is afraid that he might not understand or approve of the teaching approach. That is one reason why holiday visits do not take part on the academy grounds. Her children are enrolled in a high school (German “Gymnasium”) in Germany. It is common to complete half a school year or even a whole year abroad, e.g. in the UK or the US. She negotiated to take her children from the school for two years to learn Chinese classics and about their Chinese roots. But the major reason for her to go to Wenli Academy was her disappointment with the German education system.<sup>334</sup>

Well, as a father and as a mother – we say that a mother should love her children, send them to school, and the teachers should discipline the children. If a school can take over this responsibility, it is nice for the families. But if school education doesn't really meet with our expectations, the educational burden of us parents is very heavy. So, in Germany, I was... not quite satisfied with the education, because my son is already in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 12 years old, but he is still only going to school for half of the day. I think that's a waste of the child's time, and a waste of his life. Additionally, when my son was in high school 6<sup>th</sup> grade, he never did his homework when he came home; he said that he already did his homework at school. He was very quick and did his homework in the breaks in between lessons. So he never did any homework at home. And he is very clever, without much hard work, he normally gets a B or C; that is after he got in secondary school. In elementary school, he normally got straight As. But after he got in secondary school, he didn't develop good learning habits. For example, if next Tuesday there would be a test, he wouldn't revise his lessons; he is a boy, he is not very hard-working. He's not like my little daughter who would revise her lessons ahead of time when there's something scheduled. But he doesn't. So he goes to the exam, and normally if he studied okay [in class], he could get a B, and if he didn't do so well, he would get a C. Like in Latin – he wouldn't learn the vocabulary, so he wouldn't perform well. But the teachers don't reprimand him.<sup>335</sup> (Volunteer teacher and mother, Wenli Study Hall)

Being dissatisfied with the lack of the school's performance in education, she struggles with her son's behavior and learning attitude. In addition to the lack of responsibility she perceives among the teachers, she disapproves of the poor organization of the school. Teachers would be sick very often, or mothers would go into maternity leave, and there would be no substitute teacher for class; many lessons would just be skipped. That had an overall negative effect on her son's education and she does not want to let this happen.<sup>336</sup> She chose classics reading

<sup>334</sup> Conversation during field observation, Wenli Academy, December 8, 2015; TS15002.

<sup>335</sup> “就是当父亲、当母亲，我们说当妈妈其实就是爱孩子，送到学校去，老师就要管孩子。如果说学校能够完全承担这个责任的话，那对家庭是很轻松的。但是如果学校的教育不令，不那么令我们满意的话，那我们家长的教育责任就很重了。所以呢，在德国我不是太...满意的，我对教育的，因为我儿子7年在德国已经12岁了，但是只是半天上学，我觉得这个就是太浪费这个孩子的时间、浪费他的生命了。而且我儿子，他那个时候是6年级，Gymnasium [secondary school]，他从来回家，从来不做作业，他说这个作业就在学校就写完了，他，就是他很快的，他课间的时候就把这个作业写完了。所以他在家从来没有做作业。然后他，他是挺聪明的，他不敌无功，一般得个二分，这样的，2分儿、3分儿，然后，而且他上了Gymnasium [secondary school]以后，他上Grundschule [elementary school]一直是一份儿，然后上了Gymnasium [secondary school]以后他也没有养成一个很好的学习习惯，比如说下个星期二要有一个Arbeit [exam, test]，他之前，他不会复习的，就像他男孩儿，他也是很，很，那种，不是很努力的。他不是像小女孩儿，她是有一个计划，事前会复习一下。他不复习。然后去那儿考试，然后他平时看了，学得不错，可以得一个2分儿，如果学得不好呢，他得一个3分儿。像有一些Latein [Latin]，他就不背那个单词，那当然考不好了。但老师也不说他。” (TS15002)

She is also fluent in German and she threw in a few words in German when it concerned school-related specifications of the German educational system.

<sup>336</sup> TS15002.

education to compensate what public education in Germany could not develop in her son: a passion for learning and self-study abilities.

All parents who become teachers in classics reading facilities share passion for traditional culture and interest in Confucian learning. Independent of being a parent or not, this is the most important requirement for teachers in study halls and academies. Given that headmasters seek to push forward an educational approach that does not meet with much approval outside of the study hall or academy, they have to make sure that the inner workings of their educational facility are, at least, balanced – which can be achieved by agreement to the facility’s educational ideals. Mothers gain special recognition in their importance for keeping the family harmonious and the children well-educated; in classics reading education, this can coincide with becoming a teacher. Concern for one’s own child can extend to children all over the world. Parents are not only willing to move from one province to another to participate in classics reading education, but even from another country to China, and/or accept to part from their loved ones for a while.

#### 4.2.4 – PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES: GOOD PARENTING IN CLASSICS READING EDUCATION

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Whereas teachers’ and parents’ roles often merge in headmasters and teachers who engage in classics reading education for their child’s sake, academies and study halls can also be valuable resources for parents to work on their roles within their children’s education. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, some interviewees recall that their parents did not know much about education when they were little:

The process of growing up was hard because even though my parents loved me very much, they didn’t know how to guide me. That means [when I had] worries of life and [when I was] growing up, they did not know how to advise me. This actually left me with great disorder in my heart.<sup>337</sup> (Leading teacher of Xiamen Study Hall B)

Lack of knowledge in child-raising can be inherited by the parents’ generation; yet it is also attributed to an overall deficient education in China today: “Chinese parents today normally do not have not very high educational levels, so parents are, in general, not very qualified, so problems are relatively big.”<sup>338</sup> In Chinese ideal education, the social environment is seen as crucial for a person’s character formation – but parents could often not serve as role models

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<sup>337</sup> “成长的过程非常痛苦，因为我父母虽然很爱我，但是不知道要怎么指导，就生活成长方面一些苦恼，也不知道怎么去指导我。那我的内心，实际上，有很多的挣扎。”(XM15005)

<sup>338</sup> “中国今天的这个家长他普遍而言她就是一种没有受过太高的一个教育，所以中国今天的家长总体上是不太合格的，问题比较严重。”(PK16005)

for their children.<sup>339</sup> Lacks in these respects are seen as relicts from times in which education in China did not and could not play a big role, i.e. the Cultural Revolution.<sup>340</sup> The results were still perceivable today. In contrast, Taiwan was not cut off from tradition and did not suffer under the Cultural Revolution, as a teacher in Beijing Academy A mentions; on the contrary, Taiwan contributed to the preservation of Chinese traditional heritage; this must be the reason why their social conduct was so much better than that of Chinese people in mainland China.<sup>341</sup>

One-child policy and its social impacts align in the queue of problems in child upbringing today. Chinese single children (*dusheng zini* 独生子女) were spoiled; parents treasured them in a way that prevented them from doing anything by themselves, such as helping in the house. Such children were egoistic, lacked social skills, and, given that their parents expected much of them, were pressured into educational achievements which led to knowing how to pass exams but no development of personal skills.<sup>342</sup>

In the last few years, there are single children in China everywhere. When adding the cultural lacks to this, many families, as far as educating their children is concerned, cannot help it; they do not know how to educate them. They teach them randomly and chaotically. So these children develop bad habits, and their upbringing is poor; they don't have the ability to study, this is already very bad.<sup>343</sup> (Headmaster of Chengdu Study Hall)

Family is the core for moral education.<sup>344</sup> The basic responsibility for education and upbringing is located with the parents; parents therefore had the responsibility to get informed in educative matters and seek advice in areas where they are out of ideas.<sup>345</sup> It was the parent's responsibility to know their children and to figure out what kind of education was good for them:

But only the parents can know what kind of education a child should receive. For example, many children in our study hall have very bad grades in public schools, almost not sufficient, and it could be that these children cannot pass the university entrance examination. It might be that they do not know what to do about the future. But such children are not necessarily bad at reading the classics. Even though some are bad at public schools, they might have a special feeling for reading the classics. The government is not able to take over responsibility for such cases, because they cannot examine what is

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<sup>339</sup> XM15005; WTS16001; PK16005; PK16004; WTS16003; WTS16002; SH16001; SZ15001.

<sup>340</sup> Conversation with a teacher, Beijing Academy A, January 18, 2016; conversation with the headmaster's wife, Chengdu, April 24, 2016; PK16006; XM16001; WTS16006; SZ15004; PK16001; XM15003.

<sup>341</sup> Conversation with a teacher, Beijing Academy A, January 18, 2016.

<sup>342</sup> TS15002; conversation with a teacher, Shenzhen Study Hall A, December 29, 2015; XM15005; PK16001.

<sup>343</sup> “中国这些年都是独生子女，然后加上文化的一种缺乏以后，这种，很多家庭在教育孩子上是没有办法的，也不知道该怎么教，然后就随便乱教。所以这些孩子就养成一个很坏的习惯，然后，不会，教养也很差，然后又不会，又没有能力读书，所以这个就已经很糟糕了。” (CD16001)

<sup>344</sup> SZ15001; SZ15003; PK16005.

<sup>345</sup> XM16001; PK16006.

actually suitable for each single child. Such children need their families, need their parents to take responsibility.<sup>346</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A)

It is up to the parents to choose a form of education suitable for their individual child. Parents needed to offer the child guidance based on reason (*lixing* 理性), morality (*dexing* 德性) and goodness (*shan* 善).<sup>347</sup> Study halls and academies formulate a clear responsibility for education on the parents' side. At the same time, classics reading educators notice that many parents today were overwhelmed with their parental responsibilities. If their children had problems (in general or at school), they would rather blame the schools than reflect their own role in the situation.<sup>348</sup> Classics reading educators rather see the parents' lack in being a role model and being a good example as root of children's problems:

Why do China's children today have so many problems? I think that in China, our educational problems are very severe. Oh, parents don't know any principles; they do not understand any principles. So first of all, the behavior of the parents is problematic, and the parents' thought is problematic, and now imagine that the parents interact with the children on a daily basis – over the time, the problems of the children will get more and more.<sup>349</sup> (Teacher of Beijing Academy A)

In this context, parents also turn to study halls and academies with hopes to get advice or inspiration in educative matters – at best, they would find out what the best education for their children was.<sup>350</sup>

This education... I haven't said that yet... ever since my older daughter was enrolled in kindergarten and elementary school, I have fostered her diligently, and I think she is very intelligent. But rashly, after she was five years old, she had a change of thought, and was not controllable anymore. She would not listen to me. Why was it like that? No method really worked for her. She was too smart, and her oppositional thought was really severe. She might have read a few books, but without putting much energy into it. At that time, I also had no method for that [to solve this issue]. Later, I heard about classics reading education. [...] I reflected upon that, and... I regularly read our biographies, I read about the successful people of our past, and I turned back some pages and saw that when they were children, traditional-style private schools were responsible for their education. Around the ages four or five, they received elementary education (*qimeng* 启蒙) via the classics. And I realized that I had neglected this part in my children's education.<sup>351</sup> (Mother of two girls in Beijing Academy B)

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<sup>346</sup> “但是一个孩子到底应该接受什么的教育，这是父母才能了解的，比如说像我们学堂就收过很多这样的孩子，他在体制内学习成绩其实是非常的差的，几乎考试就是不及格，然后那像这样的孩子高考都可能通过不了，他可能未来就是也不知道会怎么样。但是这样的孩子，他读经未必是不好，有些孩子虽然体制内成绩很差，但是他一读经就特别有感觉，那像这种事情，国家就没办法负责了，因为他不可能真的去研究每个孩子到底适合什么，那这样的孩子就必须要有家庭、父母去为他负责。” (SZ15004)

<sup>347</sup> PK16004.

<sup>348</sup> PK16004; WTS16002; TS15002; conversation with leading teacher of Guangzhou Study Hall, May 4, 2016.

<sup>349</sup> “中国的今天的孩子为什么出了这么多问题？我们在中国，是认为中国的教育问题是很严重的，那这个就是因为中国孩子的家长首先就是有问题的。[...] 诶，家长就不明白一些道理，家长就不懂，不懂一些道理。所以家长的言行举止首先就有问题，家长的思想都有问题，你想家长他天天和孩子在处，这个孩子时间长了他就有问题了。” (PK16005)

<sup>350</sup> PK16004; SZ15007; QF16001; FZ16001; PK16002; SZ15004; WTS16002; PK16003.

<sup>351</sup> “就是这个教育...我没讲...就是我的大女儿从小学，从幼儿园，因为她从生源了我很用心在培养她 [...] 而且我培养了觉得她很聪明。真是超过一般孩子聪明，但是冒昧到五岁之后发现思想变化，就控制不住。”

In times of disorientation and helplessness concerning child education, the structured plan of classics reading education with promised high ideals seemed to be the right solution for this mother. Among parents who are not simultaneously professionally involved in classics reading education, it is also the mothers who spent more time, energy and research on seeking a better kind of education for their children; that is tightly related with the already mentioned female virtue which is even a topic of a study group in Xiamen Study Hall B.

We also have classes on female studies, for example, how a girl needs to behave at home – a traditional girl. For example, how a young unmarried girl needs to do things, how she needs to do things after being married, how she needs to interact with her mother-in-law and her husband's siblings, how she needs to educate the children. And when you are old, when you are a grandpa or a grandma, how do you need to be. Well, we say that a woman is very very important at home, even more important than the man. Even though she does not go out to work, and the things she says at home do not necessarily count, she reins the family's destiny. So we have to say that after coming here, slowly, they learn how to teach children and how to make the family more prosperous and peaceful. Only this way, your family can be peaceful and happy for a long time. And we have such classes here.<sup>352</sup> (Leading teacher of Xiamen Study Hall B)

As core element in the mechanism of family matters and in child education, a woman needs to have clarity on her different role and she needs to function according traditional beliefs to ensure a happy family. Study halls and academies in this sense serve as places for further parental training, especially for mothers. Xiamen Study Hall B offers a course each Thursday evening for teachers and parents who are interested in reading the *Analects* together. Parent-teacher-meetings in Xiamen Study Hall A often include external knowledge input. After reading an abstract from a chosen classic together, educational matters are discussed and knowledge on child upbringing is shared. In October 2015, an expert for Chinese medicine was invited to advise on how to prevent children from catching a cold in the cool and windy season, to show child massage techniques for curing ailments, and to confirm that physical punishment would, from the perspective of Chinese medicine, not harm the child's physical development.<sup>353</sup> Chengdu Study Hall only accepts to enroll children if the parents agree to

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不听话。然后这些为什么这样？就什么方法都不太好。就太聪明了，反而她那个反向思想特别严重。可能她看一些书，看地不是太有劲儿。那时候也没找到方法。后来我就听着说读经。[...] 然后我就反思，我就.....我经常看我们的传记，我就看我们古代好多那些那个特别有成就的人，啊，我回到一翻，他小时候都是私塾教育承担起来的，四、五岁都是用经典来启蒙。就我发现，就我对孩子漏掉了这一块儿。” (PK16003)

<sup>352</sup> “我们也有一些，比如说，女学的课程。女学的课程是说，你比如说一个女孩子在家里她应该怎么样，一个传统的女孩子。比如说，在少女的时候，还没有结婚的时候，她应该要怎么做，你接了婚以后你要怎么做，怎么对待公婆，怎么去处理丈夫的兄弟姐妹，你要怎么教孩子。然后你要当老人家，就是当人家的，你当爷爷奶奶的时候你要怎样做，你要怎么样.....就是，一个女人，我们说一个女人，在一个家里是非常非常重要的，甚至比男人还重要。她虽然不出去工作，她在家里面说的话不一定算，但是在主宰这个家庭很多带的命运。所以我们需要说，阿，慢慢地来到这边她知道怎么教育孩子的。怎么让这个家庭更兴旺，更和睦。这样你的家才能常常久久安乐乐地这样下去。阿，我们都有一些这样的课程。” (XM15005)

<sup>353</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Halls A and B, October 2015.

study with the headmaster. Every Sunday from 2 to 6 pm there is a reading group; in April 2016, they read works written by new Confucian thinker Mou Zongsan. The headmaster furthermore keeps track of the parents' efforts of reading the classics. They have put up a table on the outside window of a small classroom at the garden side of the study hall with the names of each parent and the classics which they are supposed to learn. Parents who come to study can afterwards go to the table and write their *status quo* of learning into it (IMG. 23, annex p. 322). Parental participation in the child's education is, in this case, even manifested visibly in physical space.

The case of Chengdu Study Hall is not a singular one. Many study halls and academies require of the parents to study some classics (or to put it in less rigid words, offer them the possibility to engage in learning the classics)<sup>354</sup> to make sure that the principles of classics reading education could be carried on at home during holidays (school breaks) as well. Parents secure the continuation of a classics reading environment from the study halls and academies into the private homes:

Because Chinese people focus on 'teaching by precept and example,' teaching by giving a good example (*shenjiao* 身教) is very important. Except from the teachers, the parents, too – and even more importantly, the family – can set a good example. So parents are very, very important. Parents who love to study will, for sure, have a child that loves to study.<sup>355</sup> (Leading teacher of Shenzhen Study Hall A)

Classics reading education is a wholesome concept; involvement of all relevant actors in the child's (or learner's) life enhances the consistency of the environment and adds solid social ground for the classics reading world: "The more they read the classics, the more they experience and trust and their children will be better in studying."<sup>356</sup> For parents, reading the classics also means to stay intellectually close with their classics reading children.

From my perspective, my deficiency is that I need to keep pace with my child. He learns the classics here, and I study them at home. Only this way, we can perform good education and educate better children.<sup>357</sup> (Mother, Suzhou Study Hall A)

Now that we are parents, we parents have to read the classics. We really have to study. If you study, you have a common language with them [the children], and you understand what they read. Only when you

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<sup>354</sup> CD16001; WTS15001; SZ15003; PK16003; WTS16002; WTS16004a/b; GZ16001; PK16002; field observation: Chengdu Study Hall, April 24 and 25, 2016; Beijing Academy A and B, January 2016; Xiamen Study Hall A and B, October 2015.

<sup>355</sup> "因为这个中国人讲要言传身教，那身教是很重要的。那身教除了有老师给予的嘛，还有父母，更重要的是家庭给予的，所以父母是非常非常重要的，一个好学的父母，一定会有一个好学的孩子。"(WTS16002)

<sup>356</sup> "他越读经典对经典越有体会他越有信心，嗯，他的孩子读经呢就会更好。"(PK16002)

<sup>357</sup> "对于我来说啊，我不足的地方是，我要跟进孩子的进度，他在这边学经典，我们在家里也要读经典，那样的话我们才能教育好，更好的孩子。"(SZ15003)

read these things, you yourself will understand and be able to teach the child to a certain level. So we parents indeed need to participate in reading the classics.<sup>358</sup> (Mother of two girls in Beijing Academy B)

When she [my daughter] read the *Book of Changes*, when she was memorizing the book, I accompanied her, and as if from the bottom of her heart, she said, ‘Mum, I am sure that you cannot keep up with me’ – because I hadn’t yet read these classics. And in the end, I could really keep pace with her, because I would know when she misread the text. [...] It must be the last half of the year that I read more classics at home; only if you read more, you can talk together with the child.<sup>359</sup> (Mother, Shenzhen Study Hall A)

Parents have to know what their children learn, be on the same level with them, and have a common language with them – to offer better education, be better parents, and keep the family in harmony. For gaining the same knowledge, parents occasionally go to study in their children’s study hall or academy, too: a mother in Beijing Academy B joined in her daughter’s class for a while to read with her; a mother in Beijing Academy A joined her only son for half a year to study the classics; she wanted to know more about the education of her son. Staying in the Academy’s guest house, she enjoys taking time off her housewife duties and study.<sup>360</sup>

The overlap of formal and family education in physical educational space and in educational ideals enhances a (re-)negotiation of parents’ and teachers’ roles. The headmaster of Beijing Academy A values the teacher as complement to the parents:

When it comes to school teachers, of course, Chinese put a lot emphasis on the ‘way of the teacher’ (*shidao* 师道). The teachers are also called ‘parents of the spiritual body’ (*fashen fumu* 法身父母). What does this mean? It means that the teacher is able to provide you with life, to enlighten your wisdom, to show you the way; he is also equivalent to the embodiment of the parents. [...] So you can say that teachers bear the duties of parents and teachers at the same time, he is a guide, a leader, a companion.<sup>361</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy A)

The headmaster of Shenzhen Study Hall B similarly values the complementary character of the roles of teachers and parents in a child’s upbringing:

Our parents and teachers play the role of directors – I direct you to do this, I direct you to do that – right? But they never reflect if [the child] is willing to play this role, if this role suits the child, [...], they do not think about if this is natural. They just think ‘I am a director, I need you to be like this and that’. Now, our classics reading education parents and teachers are like ... we don’t do anything, we provide you with air and patient waiting, we provide help you, and this help are the classics. We watch over your growing, sharing the same fate and breathing the same air. Yes. We only do this. And in such a situation, I realized that everyone just returns to their positions, students return to the position of

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<sup>358</sup> “就是现在我们作为家长，就是我们家长来读经。一定要跟着读。如果你读了，你跟她有共同的语言，他读到什么你就会理解，觉得啊，这个东西你读到，对你，你就要，你自己有感悟才能教孩子可能谈得到什么程度。所以我们家长一定要参与读经。” (PK16003)

<sup>359</sup> “她是读《易经》的时候，她在包本的时候，我在陪她，好像打心眼的看着说妈妈你肯定跟不上我的，因为我没读这些经典。后来我确实能够跟得上她，因为她哪个地方读错，我知道。[...] 应该是下半年吧，我会在家先多读点经典，读得多的话你才能跟孩子聊在一起吧。” (WTS16004a)

<sup>360</sup> Conversation with a mother, Beijing Academy A, January 22, 2016.

<sup>361</sup> PK16001.



students, teachers to the position of teachers and parents to the positions of parents, this is very natural and harmonious, the whole situation is wonderful [...].<sup>362</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall B)

The relation between teachers and parents reflect the classics reading educators' concern for the *right* position of everyone; interpersonal relations have to be put into the right constellation; a well-fitted social constellation is yet another secure source for harmony – which is even labelled to be *natural*.

Only one study hall emphasizes the teacher's position in child education in a way that reduces the importance of the parents' role: in Guangzhou Study Hall, parents have to obey the teachers and are not allowed to get involved in their children's education in the study hall. The leading teacher states that his main task was to control the implementation of the educational ideals of the headmaster as inspired by Wang Caigui's pure classics reading approach. He had to make sure that teachers were obedient to ensure a smooth running of this approach, and when there were problems or questions, the parents had to communicate with him, not with the teachers (who had to concentrate on teaching). The parents could give the leading teacher their opinions, but they were not allowed to mingle in the educational approach; they are not expected to integrate their own wishes and ideas into education. If they were not satisfied with the school, they could search for another study hall. There are no gatherings with the parents; a parents' group on WeChat was the only space to discuss educational matters. Everyday study hall life and matters of the children's private life were not to be communicated in social media platforms such as WeChat, and parents were not welcome in class because it would distract the children. They have to trust the headmaster and the teachers in all matters of their children's (study hall) life and education.<sup>363</sup> Trust in the leader of a facility is often established via word of mouth, introduction to a study hall or academy by a friend, and success stories of friends.<sup>364</sup>

Similar to those who want to teach in a study hall or academy, those who wish to have their child(ren) educated there are also required to approve the respective educational facility's educational ideal. This is especially true for pure classics reading facilities:

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<sup>362</sup> “我们的家长和老师都是扮演着一种导演的角色，我导演你这样我导演你那样，对吧。但是从来不考虑这个角色他愿不愿意演，他这个角色他适不适合这个孩子演，[...] 这种没有考虑到这种自然的，只考虑到我是导演，我需要你这样，我需要你那样，对。现在我们这个读经的家庭和读经的老师就是我们什么都不做，我们只是这个，给你提供空气和等待，还有我们给你提供一个帮助，这个帮助就是经典，我们看着你共呼吸同命运的生长，对。我们只做这个事情，然后在这样一个状态里我发现，就是各归其位，学生归回了学生该在的位置，老师归在老师该在的位置，家长归在在的位置，非常自然和谐，整个状态很美好，对，是这样子的。” (SZ15007)

<sup>363</sup> Conversation with the leading teacher of Guangzhou Study Hall, May 4, 2016.

<sup>364</sup> PK16003; PK16004; QF16001; SH16001; SZ15002; SZ15003; SZ15004; SZ15007; TS15003; WTS16003; WTS16004a/b.

Well, parents have to agree to our ideal. As I have said, there are two aspects: first of all, they have to agree to ‘pure classics reading’ (*laoshi daliang dujing* 老实大量读经); secondly, they have to agree that we strictly demand to honor the teacher and respect his teaching (*zun shi zhong dao* 尊师重道). Additionally, the parents have to study continuously. So, in our times, there is still a large number of people who do not agree to classics reading, especially to pure classics reading. If a parent does not study regularly, and does not keep up with his thought, we will have a gap between us, and the child will be influenced [disturbed] in studying the classics. So the parents first have to agree to our concept, have to agree to our strict demands, and mother and father both have to agree, and then we hope that the parents can also study the classics. Their children study the classics with us, and they better read the classics at home or after work. The more they read the classics, the more they will experience them and have trust, and their children will study much better. [...] Not everybody can understand, some people do not understand [classics reading education], and think that it is very monotonous, and are not willing [to join in]. If parents and teachers are not at ease, it will influence the educational effect.<sup>365</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy B)

Guangzhou Study Hall with its restriction on parents’ influence follows this logic and rejects parents who do not commit to the headmaster’s ideal:

If they do not agree, they don’t have to come to me. [...] If they seek knowledge from me, they have to listen to me, and not the other way around. Modern education has a twisted character, there is no Way of the Teacher (*shidao* 师道), it became a trade, a sell-off, and that is not good.<sup>366</sup> (Headmaster of Guangzhou Study Hall)

Not all places have such high requirements; others simply wish to make sure that parents do not send their child for only a few weeks and then try another facility and then another and so forth. Agreement also secures stability in the child’s learning environment and course of studies.<sup>367</sup> However, parents who are not directly involved in classics reading education as teachers have a more complicated standing in their parental role, especially when it comes to boarding school facilities. Xiamen Study Hall B, Chengdu Study Hall and Suzhou Study Hall B – all study halls that are conveniently placed in the city center – welcome parents into their premises to engage in joint activities concerned with education focused both on the self and on the child. Study halls and academies can be places that actively support parents in being better parents. Depending on the role which the teacher is supposed to have, this is, however, not always the case.

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<sup>365</sup> “嗯，那么对于家长来讲呢，他要能够认同我们的理念，就是，我好像讲过，就是，有两个方面，第一个要认同老实大量读经，第二个要认同严格要求尊师重道。而且呢，这个家长要不断的去学习。所以在我们这个时代啊，多数的人还是不认同读经的，更不认同我们这种老实大量读经。那这个家长呢，他如果不经常去学习的话，他的思想就跟不上，他与我们就有差距，那么孩子的读书读经就会受影响。所以我希望家长呢，首先认同我们的理念，认同严格要求，父母双方都一致认同，然后希望家长能够多读经典。他的孩子在我们这里读经典，他在家啊、在工作之余，最好也多读经典。他越读经典对经典越有体会他越有信心，嗯，他的孩子读经呢就会更好[...] 不是每一个人都能理解的，有人他理解不了，他以为这个太单调了，他就不愿意。这样的家长和老师如果说不能安心，那这个就会影响到教育的效果。” (PK16002)

<sup>366</sup> “那不同意就不用找我啊！[...] 所以求学嘛，求学你是求我，还要我来听你的，那不是反过来了。现在教育就是变质嘛，就没有师道，就成了一种交易、买卖，那就不好了。” (GZ16001)

<sup>367</sup> CD16001; GZ16001; PK16003; PK16004; PK16005; QF16001; SH16001; SZ15004; TS15002; WTS15001; WTS16002.

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### 4.3. CONCLUSION: SEEDS FOR SOCIAL HARMONY IN IDEAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Physical surroundings and social relations are the two core columns of the ideal environments of contemporary study halls and academies. People's behavior is both influenced by structures and features of the physical environment as well as by the people who interact with them in a common social environment. The high involvement in networking in different formats with like-minded people and merging into the classics reading circle (*jinru dujing quan* 进入读经圈)<sup>368</sup> changes the individual's social environment. Former friends and social acquaintances appear in a different light and topics of interest drifted apart:

When I got in contact with classical culture, I realized that this was even harder, I really didn't want anything to do with that [business as usual]. And I realized that I was not interested in meeting [with them] anymore, or that in our meetings, my classmates would realize from my words that I had changed. We wouldn't have much to talk about. You have your value system, I have my value system. But when I got in contact with a Buddhist Charity Association (Cishanhui 慈善会), I also learnt how to accept other people's viewpoints. You cannot put yourself on a higher shelf than others because you are in contact with classical culture.<sup>369</sup> (Headmaster of Xiamen Academy)

It's my personal feeling, my personal impression, that I am different from my classmates at university. I realized that when I want to talk with them now, it is actually very difficult. I would find the topics they would talk about very boring, I wouldn't really like it, or let's say: there were no real topics between us, because at our age, you have... they had their own thoughts, I had my own thoughts; communication was quite hard. There was a big change.<sup>370</sup> (Headmaster of Chengdu Study Hall)

When a family chooses classics reading education, it originally has a different overall situation, it actually is like entering into an area or a circle. Because the parents of this student will slowly gain a new awareness, for example, when the parent is a business person, their former friends might also have been business people. Or – anyways, in the past, there was a certain friends' circle, a specific type of friends' circle, but once entering... after the child starts to read the classics, the whole family's friends' circle will change. They will get to know more people who like to study, and once this circle changes, the whole person changes and the family, too. So normally, families who choose classics reading, especially those who follow this path for a long time, will be more and more harmonious and happy.<sup>371</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A)

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<sup>368</sup> SZ15007.

<sup>369</sup> “等接触了传统文化，发现了那些就更难，就更不想，更不想去接触了，而这个时候呢，就很多聚会我就变得不想参加，或者说，我在聚会上讲的一些话，同学们就发现，诶，我好像变得跟他们不一样，哈哈。就是会讲不到一起，就是说什么，你有你的价值观啦，我有我的价值观啦。但是呢，也还好有接触那个叫做慈善会，或者叫佛法这一块，就是说你也要学会来接纳别人的不同的观点，不能因为你接触的传统文​​化，觉得你好像会活的高一点，比别人高一点。”(XM16001)

<sup>370</sup> “这个我有跟我们这种大学那个时候的同学跟他们都有一些对比，这些对比当然是个人的感觉，个人的体会。就我会发现，现在就跟他们交流的话题其实都很难了，就是，他们所谈论的话题我都觉得很无聊了（.....），不太喜欢了。或者是说，我们同学之间见面的时候已经没有什么（话题），因为这个年龄有一些自己的，他们有自己的想法，我也有自己的想法，可能这个时候也很难做这种沟通。”(CD16001)

<sup>371</sup> “就是如果一个家庭选择了读经，那本身他的家庭整体的状态就会不一样了，其实他就是进了一个领域或者新的圈子一样了。因为这个学生的家长也会都会慢慢重新认识嘛。那，比如他以前是经商或者怎么样，他身边的朋友可能都是经商的，或者是他，反正他以前的那个朋友圈，就是某一类型的朋友圈。但是他进入.....一个孩子读经了之后，整个家庭的朋友圈都会改变。那，他会认识更多的想要读书的人，这个圈子一变，好像人就会变了，他的家庭就会改变了，那所以这个一般来说呢，选择读经的家庭尤其是一直长长久久走下去的家庭，他是越来越和谐，越来越美满。”(SZ15004)

Change of thought can be a reason for classics reading activists to stay in new networks and neglect former social relations. At best, a whole family would choose the classics reading path and merge into the new social network together. Change of thought among classics reading educators who are wholly devoted to their educational projects is profound. Topics of interest change and they value the presence of like-minded people – teachers and parents similarly devoted to the classics are these people, and together, they design a social texture in classics reading facilities that grants mothers their traditional responsibility as provider for education and child care. Many headmasters are fathers; they have their share in educational matters, too. Depending on the teacher's position, parents can have an important role in the child's life which is complemented by the teacher's role. However, the more prominent the role of the teacher in a study hall or academy, the less important appears the parents' required contribution to their children's upbringing. Both solutions appear as approvable by means of tradition – either focusing more on respect towards the teacher or parental responsibility towards the child. Both solutions try to provide a solid ground for family life and education in times when family concepts, roles and related values within the families are uncertain. The right position within social texture promises social harmony.

Harmony is also related with physical space. A natural landscape with mountains and water, a very balanced image, is imagined as ideal surrounding for good education – this resembles notions of Confucian academies in the past. Visions of nature in classics reading education seem furthest away in city study halls; yet isolation and anonymity, tranquility and a focus on simplicity can be viewed as attempts to achieve an environment that reveals features similar to a placement in remote mountains. The farther study halls and academies move out of city areas and the closer they get to rural areas; the more tangible are the natural assets of the ideal Neo-Confucian study environment. Finally, the rural does not only serve as platform to create a better education in an ideal environment, but also as space for romanticized projections of original untouched culture concentrated in a local place. The rural as a protected zone to project one's ideals of a better life can serve as fertile soil to re-plant one's cultural roots.

In the interior design of academies and study halls, nature paintings, plants, and natural materials such as wood bring natural features into the educational facilities visually. Art in form of calligraphy and bird and nature painting is even considered as superseding the natural. The cultural is imagined as emerging from the natural; the natural is already ideal, but it seems as if culture was still its perfection. Cultural and historical connotations of places are also embodied within spatial ideals, as the case of Shanghai Study Hall shows. The location of

that study hall gained depth because the headmaster rooted the place in history and saw its present state as underlined with all cultural achievements that had been grown since then.

Study halls and academies in their physical setting and their ideally oriented and historically rooted spiritual dimension appear as a safe space, shielded from unwanted exterior influences, equipped with objects and people carefully chosen by the people who govern these spaces, and animated with a spirit that is provided by the Master Confucius. Within such safe spaces, the entity of the family experiences reconsideration, reflection, and a new perspective. Family is, on the one hand, a very personal topic and precious for people's lives. Parents hope for the best possible upbringing of their children, and they want to make the decisions. Looking back on their own childhood and on the forgotten tradition of family precepts in China, they want to create something for their own children that is better than what they experienced. On the other hand, family is also abstractly viewed as a germ cell for a potential better society in future China. Personal needs in the present informed by experiences of the past are intertwined with ideals of a better future, achieved by living and learning in study halls and academies – which will be subject of the next chapter.

The emerge of study halls and academies has been set in relation with historical discontinuities; at the forefront, of course, one finds movements and attitudes that opposed Chinese tradition, such as in the May Fourth and the Cultural Revolution eras. As Winter (2006: 3) states, “utopia is a discourse of two contradictory parts.” On the one hand, discontinuity of family traditions sets the individual free and opens the horizon of possibilities that can be taken instead of the past ways. However, the individual would find itself inhibited by the presence, by the present way of life. This is, again, where China's social problems (chapters 3.1 and 3.2) hook in. A third option for improvement in the future is needed. Having taken back educational responsibilities into their own hands, parents open a study hall for their own child (4.2.2), teach their own child in a study hall (4.2.3) or seek parental advice there (4.2.4). Study halls and academies serve as platform for a better upbringing of today's children; hopes for a better future are drawn into classrooms of present newly established privately governed and historically inspired educational facilities. In practice, some hopes and ideals look less colorful than in theory.

## 5. SELF-CULTIVATION AND A REGULATED LIFESTYLE IN CONTEMPORARY STUDY HALLS AND ACADEMIES

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Study halls and academies have been presented as places cut off from the influence of public education as well as negatively perceived influence by society infused with ideas of

consumerism, capitalism, quick cash and low morality (see chapter 3).<sup>372</sup> In a study hall, children do not need to get in contact with the “complicated environment in society.”<sup>373</sup> Digital communication and information channels via computers and cellphones are inhibited; electronic devices are not allowed in the educational facilities (at least for students). Leisure time activities such as playing games on smartphones and computers as well as watching TV are not a choice for classics reading students.<sup>374</sup> It is suggested to “isolate the child a little from the outside world”,<sup>375</sup> to keep children away from supermarkets and shopping areas (places of consumerism and materialism), TV and movies, computers (because these devices provide unwishful and invaluable input), and even from children who go to public schools (and represent a social environment which does not benefit the process of moral character building).<sup>376</sup> Growing up in certain isolation from unwanted exterior disturbances is seen as a huge advantage,<sup>377</sup> especially for the children’s personal development. If others do not interfere with the process of developing towards an ideal, it seems as if the personality deriving from this was rock solid and not to be shaken by any turbulence coming up when the process of development is concluded.

Only if they [the children] don’t get in contact with that [society] when they are little, one can make sure that they will be the ones influencing others and not the ones who will be influenced by others. Of course, they will have contact [with society] when they are grown-ups, but when they are small, they don’t have a good judgement. [A child] randomly encounters things, and randomly ... will get off course. But after having grown up, having developed a self, and when the luminosity of the self is already developed, it doesn’t matter how many more people one encounters.<sup>378</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall)

A narrow focus on positive influence to develop into a positive person that could possibly positively influence others is believed to be achieved by excluding negative effects – later, the character of the person having developed under positive influence seems like a protection shield against negative influence in a later stadium of life.

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<sup>372</sup> SZ15001; PK16003; SZ15004; PK16005; TS15003; WTS16004a/b; XM15005; CD16001; GZ16001; PK16002.

<sup>373</sup> “社会上那种很繁杂的那种环境” (SZ15001).

<sup>374</sup> SZ15001; SZ15004.

<sup>375</sup> “跟外界尽量去隔绝一下” (SZ15004).

<sup>376</sup> SZ15004; PK16005; WTS16004a/b.

<sup>377</sup> TS15003.

<sup>378</sup> “小的时候不接触才能保证长大接触的时候，是他来影响别人而不是被别人影响。就是长大了以后当然是要接触的，那小的时候，因为他没有判断力，那个，他随便接触，随便就... 他就会有摇摆。但是这个.....这个他长大了之后他已经形成了自我了，而且他自我的光明性已经展现了，那这个时候他再去接触更多的人就没关系。” (SZ15004)

Guangzhou Study Hall has a very strong idea of isolation; the headmaster calls it “closed school” (*fengbishì xuexiao* 封闭式学校) which is only focused on studying. He refers to the saying “ten years of hard studies” (*shí nián hán chuāng* 十年寒窗)<sup>379</sup> which describes a practice of long-term focused studying without anybody passing by for visit to leave the learner completely to his studies. The whole phrase he refers to derives from Li Qi’s (刘祁, 1203-1259) historical records of Jin 金 dynasty (1125-1234) *Gui Qian Zhi* 归潜志: “People in the old times talked of ten years without anybody visiting [i.e. concentrated studies]; with one action [i.e. passing the imperial examination] he becomes famous and everybody knows him.”<sup>380</sup> The headmaster explains that in the old times, people used to lock themselves away for ten years, studied very hard, and when entering into society after such a long time, everybody would be surprised by their talents, such a person would become famous almost overnight.<sup>381</sup> His study hall is operating under this ideal.

Isolation in study halls and academies – by excluding exterior influence and disturbance, designing a peaceful and pure physical environment and setting up a social constellation aimed at harmony due to like-mindedness – leaves a lot of space for the influence that is regarded as positive and necessary to become a good person. Mencius believed the human nature to be originally good, “but the society provides conflicting contexts for their different realizations, and it is in learning to make precise decisions that humans achieve their moral perfection” (Lee 2000: 182). Shutting out conflicting and intermingling influence from society is one thing which classics reading educators do. Song scholar Zhu Xi emphasized a “favorable environment for learning” (Lee 2000: 282); in classics reading education, such a favorable environment is actively and meticulously created, as has been shown in the chapters before (4.1 and 4.2), and it is one core element of education. This chapter is concentrated on action and interaction in the study halls and academies to line out how it is attempted to achieve a solid self that withstands social problems, a moral integrity that is contagious for others, and wisdom that would hopefully enlighten a whole society. In terms of a *grounded utopias*, it means that while chapter 3 shows the perceived dystopias in Chinese society as well as the imagined Confucian utopias as counterproposals, and chapter 4 draws the outlines of both physical and social space (or physical location and social context) of ideal educational facilities, the *grounds* for utopia, this chapter sheds light on how utopia is lived on these grounds. This utopia drags from tradition and creates a new traditional way of Confucian life

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<sup>379</sup> GZ15001.

<sup>380</sup> “古人谓十年窗下无人问，一举成名天下知。” *Gui Qian Zhi*. Scroll No. 7. Online version on *Chinese Text Project Ctext*: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=728575&remap=gb> (last access December 8, 2018).

<sup>381</sup> GZ16001.

for today's children in an educational environment. As Hobsbawm (1983: 1) points out, invented tradition “is taken to mean a set of practices [...] which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” Study halls and academies as *educational* facilities train learners in a new mindset and a new lifestyle aiming at a better world which are both embodied in daily teachings and school rituals, while creating a new tradition for this world.

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### 5.1. HOW TO READ THE CLASSICS: TEACHING IN ACTION

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In classes of study halls and academies, students are not divided by age but by reading material and prior experience in reading the classics. In most cases, certain age groups are prevalent in one class, but it can also be that in a class of students aged six to eight, a 12-year-old student participates, and in a class of students mostly between 12 and 14, a student at age eight is part of the group. Classes have names that point to the respective stage of learning addressed by the class, such as the “foundational class” (*zili ban* 自立班) for children to get independent in their school day, the “advanced class” (*jinjie ban* 进阶班)<sup>382</sup>, “child elementary teaching class” (*tongmeng ban* 童蒙班)<sup>383</sup> or the “class for cultivating an ideal” (*yangzhi ban* 养志班) which aims at helping the child to establish their own goals in learning.<sup>384</sup> Most class names, though, point to goals of (moral) education, such as “class of establishing moral virtue” (*chengde ban* 成德班), “class of capability and moral virtue” (*junde ban* 俊德班), “class of highest virtue” (*mingde ban* 明德班),<sup>385</sup> or “class of faithfulness and honesty” (*zhongxin ban* 忠信班), “class of virtue and modesty” (*deqian ban* 德谦班).<sup>386</sup>

These colorful names are a little bit in contradiction with the seemingly monotonous practice in class. Reading the classics basically requires the learner to sit down and read the classics – the teacher reads, and the students repeat, or the students read by themselves. However, reciting the classics in a full-time educational approach for several hours is hard and disciplined work. Reading is mostly a joint activity; loud voices, rhythmic and fast reading, being alert and attentive at all times are features that characterize a good classics

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<sup>382</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Hall B, October 26 and 27, 2015.

<sup>383</sup> Field observation, Qufu Academy, July 8, 2016.

<sup>384</sup> Field observation, Beijing Academy A, January 18 and 22, 2016

<sup>385</sup> Field observation, Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016.

<sup>386</sup> Field observation, Qufu Academy, July 8, 2016.



reading student.<sup>387</sup> Good reading comes with adequate body posture; reading is regulated by rules, and body movements in class are regulated by rules.

Leaving class does not mean leaving disciplinary space; other rooms such as dorms and dining halls and even space in between walled rooms come with their own rules. A strictly regulated life is especially true for boarding school children because their living space is also educational space. Some educational facilities have stricter rules, others are less strict. As mentioned before, study halls in Xiamen and Fuzhou are furthest away from Wang Caigui's pure classics reading approach, and also less strict in implementation of rules. Facilities visited in Xiamen also had many children in kindergarten age which is another reason for less strict rules. However, there is a common discipline within class and within study halls and academies in general, connected with the authority of Confucius, the classics, and the teacher. Interaction is strictly coordinated, and bodily positioning, movement and gesture are organized; discipline and authority are underlined by spatial division, e.g. the teacher gains a special central spot in class (see also Giddens 1984: 135-137 for disciplinary space of schools). Classroom structures, the spatial position of the teacher, as well as physical positioning of the learner are crucial in classics reading education, as chapter 5.1.1 will show. Chapters 5.1.2 and 5.1.3 are focused on the organization of interaction within study halls and academies.

Learning and living in study halls and academies is, first and foremost, structured and coordinated by schedule. Activity according to schedule is a disciplinary instrument to coordinate disciplined bodies within space (Giddens 1984: 148). A boarding school day, for example, is scheduled in a fix time frame from early in the morning until everybody goes to bed in the evening:

TABLE 2: DAILY SCHEDULE OF SUZHOU STUDY HALL A (BOARDING SCHOOL)<sup>388</sup>

Time	Subject/ Activity
5:30 (5:00; 6:00) am	Getting up ( <i>summer: normally at 5:00 am, children under age 6 at 5:30 am; winter: normally at 5:30 am, children under age 6 at 6:00 am</i> )
5:50-6:20 am	Morning exercise
6:20-7:30 am	Morning reading session

<sup>387</sup> XM15005; SZ15003; SZ15001. Field observation: Suzhou Study Hall A, November 13, 2015; Xiamen Study Hall A, October 13, 2015; Xiamen Study Hall B, October 26, 2015; Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 8, 2016; Beijing Academy B, January 21, 2016.

Exceptions: Shenzhen Study Hall C: the headmaster is a Buddhist and appreciates reading in low voice, conversation during field observation, March 13, 2016. Beijing Academy A also focuses on a deliberate speed of reading; focus is laid on every word; conversation during field research, January 24, 2016.

<sup>388</sup> Suzhou Study Hall A, November 13, 2015.

7:30 am	Breakfast
8:00-9:30 am	Reading Chinese classics
9:30-10:00 am	Break (in-between-classes activity)
10:00-11:30 am	Reading English Classics
11:30 am	Lunch
12:10-2:00 pm	Noon Nap
2:00-3:30 pm	Reading Chinese classics
3:30-3:50 pm	Afternoon snack; break (with playing and activities)
3:50-5:10 pm	Reading Chinese classics
5:10-6:00 pm	Physical education ( <i>tiyu</i> 体育); outdoor activity
6:00 pm	Dinner
7:00-8:45 (8:00) pm	Reading Chinese classics ( <i>children under age 6 end earlier</i> )
8:45-9:15 pm	Washing the face and brushing the teeth
9:15 pm	Lights off and sleeping

TABLE 3: DAILY SCHEDULE FOR BEIJING STUDY HALL (BOARDING SCHOOL)<sup>389</sup>

Time (winter)	Subject/ Activity	Time (summer)	Subject/ Activity
6:00-6:30 am	Getting up, washing up, cleaning and tidying the dorm rooms	5:20-5:40 am	Getting up, washing up, cleaning and tidying the dorm rooms
6:30-6:40 am	Ritual of bowing to Confucius	5:40-5:50 am	Ritual of bowing to Confucius
6:40-8:10 am	Class 1: morning exercise	5:50-7:00 am	Class 1: morning exercise
		7:00-8:00 am	Class 2: reading Chinese classics
8:10-9:00 am	Breakfast	8:00-8:40 am	Breakfast
9:00-10:40 am	Class 2: reading Chinese classics	8:40-10:10 am	Class 3: reading Chinese classics
10:40-11:30 am	Large break (with veggie and fruit juice and physical activities)	10:10-10:30 am	Large Break
		10:30-12:00 am	Class 4: reading Chinese classics
12:00-1:40 pm	Lunch	12:00-12:40 pm	Lunch
12:30-1:40 pm	Noon Nap	12:40-2:10 pm	Noon nap
1:40-2:00 pm	Getting up, tidying up	2:10-2:30 pm	Getting up, tidying up
2:00-3:40 pm	Class 3: reading Chinese classics	2:30-4:00 pm	Class 5: reading English classics
3:40-4:20 pm	Large Break	4:00-4:40 pm	Large break
4:20-6:00 pm	Class 4: reading English classics	4:40-6:10 pm	Class 6: reading English classics
6:00-7:00 pm	Dinner, brush teeth	6:10-7:10 pm	Dinner, brush teeth
7:00-8:30 pm	Class 5: reading Chinese classics	7:10-8:10 pm	Class 7: reading Chinese classics
8:30-9:00 pm	Washing up, going to bed, lights off	8:10-9:00 pm	Washing up, going to bed, lights off

<sup>389</sup> Beijing Study Hall, January 23, 2016 (conversation with the headmaster and curriculum sent per WeChat).

The morning begins with the classics; the evening ends with the classics. All activities in between – mostly reading the classics – are scheduled for all students to be done together. Breaks, physical education (PE) or activities and a large sleep at noon mainly intersect classics reading activity. Beijing Study Hall has scheduled a ritual of showing respect to Confucius – a performance related to education, social hierarchy, and spirituality, as will be thematized later. Full-time schedules such as these two are not a special characteristic of study halls or academies. Boarding schools, especially in rural areas, tend to have a full schedule, as sociocultural anthropologist Andrew Kipnis (2011: 41f.) shows in the context of his study on schools in Zouping county (Shandong province). The outstanding characteristics in the schedule of classics reading boarding schools are that the students’ and teachers’ days mainly consist in recitation of Chinese classics and that subjects such as bowing to Confucius and martial arts are part of the curriculum.

Day schools such as Xiamen Study Hall B and Suzhou Study Hall B have a more compact schedule; they begin around 9 am and end around 5 pm. Xiamen Study Hall B focuses on teaching kindergarten age children (under age 7). Reading the classics is not the only subject in class; English, math, music, arts and crafts, and outdoors activities are also on the plan. Reading the classics is integrated into Chinese and English classes; apart from reading the classics, teachers can also integrate storytelling, drawing, games, and other methods to teach the children. Suzhou Study Hall B is, again, focused on only reading the classics, but the study hours are not as many as in boarding schools. Schedules of these four facilities are chosen because they show the diversity among approaches to classics reading education in practice. Xiamen Study Hall B integrates reading the classics into subjects which are not explicitly “reading the classics;” Suzhou Study Hall B and Beijing Study Hall have only scheduled reading sessions for the Chinese classics; Suzhou Study Hall A has also integrated English classics and PE into the schedule. Martial arts are very common to be taught as PE.<sup>390</sup>

TABLE 4: WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF XIAMEN STUDY HALL B (DAY SCHOOL)<sup>391</sup>

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00-8:30 am	Arriving at school				
8:30-10:00 am	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
10:00-10:40 am	Break (activities, ball games, fruit snacks)				
10:30-11:40 am	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese

<sup>390</sup> Suzhou Study Hall A; Xiamen Study Hall B; Wenli Study Hall; Wenli Academy; Shenzhen Study Hall B; Beijing Academy B.

<sup>391</sup> Xiamen Study Hall B, October 26, 2015.

11:40-12:30 pm	Lunch				
12:30-2:45 pm	Noon Nap until 14:20				
2:45-3:40 pm	English (1)* Calligraphy (2)	Outdoor activities	Arts&Crafts (1) Math (2)	English	Arts&Crafts
3:40-4:10 pm	Break (activities, fruit snacks)				
4:10-5:10 pm	Study calligraphies ( <i>du tie</i> 读帖) (1)** English (2)	Outdoor activities	Math (1) Music (2)	Music (1) Martial arts (2)	Go out (1) Class meeting (2)
5:10-6:00 pm	Classes are over, parents pick up their children				

\*There are two classes in the study hall; usually they are taught separately but in the same subjects. If subjects are different, it is indicated above with (1) and (2).

\*\*Study calligraphies: students appreciate calligraphy writings by looking at the details of the writing techniques.

TABLE 5: DAILY SCHEDULE OF SUZHOU STUDY HALL B (DAY SCHOOL)<sup>392</sup>

9:00-10:00 am	First lesson of reading the classics
10:00-10:30 am	Break (Qigong, playing)
10:30-11:30 am	Second lesson of reading the classics
11:30-12:30 pm	Lunch
12:30-2:00 pm	Break (nap time, resting time, children can play by themselves)
2:00-3:00 pm	Third lesson of reading the classics
3:30-4:30 pm	Fourth lesson of reading the classics
4:30 pm	Classes are over, and parents pick up their children

Along such schedules, classics reading students are guided through their day. Further elements in educational processes that keep up the discipline are rules and rituals, embodied and guided by the institution of the teacher. These structures are the basis for contemporary cultivation of the self in such educative facilities. Reflection of these disciplinary structures is based on the classics reading educators' idea that people are highly influenced and even educated by their surrounding environments – classes are supposed to produce the morally upright people urgently needed today. Visions of a better future are very drawn into classroom activities and school life and, thus, grounded in action in specific places among specific actors.

#### 5.1.1 – CLASSROOM STRUCTURE, THE POSITION OF THE TEACHER, AND THE AUTHORITY OF CONFUCIUS IN CLASS

Classrooms in classics reading facilities look very similar. They are rather simply equipped with wooden stools and tables. Desks are lined up and pointing to the front where the teacher is usually located during class. Three examples are taken from classrooms of Suzhou Study

<sup>392</sup> Suzhou Study Hall B, November 17, 2015 (conversation with the headmaster).

Hall B as small-scale city study hall, Shenzhen Study Hall B, a larger study hall in the village, and Beijing Academy B, a large academy in suburban Beijing (IMG. 25, IMG. 24, IMG. 26, annex p. 322-323). The classroom in Suzhou Study Hall B is used by only five students and a teacher. Three tables in the first row, two in the second and one in the last are for the students who sit on stools without seat back, facing the front of the room. At the front, there are a large table and a large chair with a high seat back for the teacher. The teacher's furniture is bigger and takes more space. Important for all classrooms is the image of Confucius at the center of the front wall of the classroom, right behind the teacher's table and chair. In Shenzhen Study Hall B, the teacher's position in front of the classroom is marked with the same image of Confucius. Tables are put up in two columns; two students sit at each table on simple chairs with a small seat back. Tables point to the front and the teacher's table, again larger than the student's tables, seems to crown the two columns of the student's tables, being put at the end of the walkway between the two columns of tables. The teacher's chair is as big as the one in Suzhou Study Hall B. Slightly different is one classroom in Beijing Academy B: small tables are put together to one big table for the children, pointing to the front and to the teacher's table which is a bit higher and bigger than the children's tables. Confucius' image decorates the front wall. Given that the children in this class are still very young (ages four to six), the teacher does not sit in front but with the children to help them with their reading during class.

Common in all study halls and academies is the structure of smaller desks and stools for the students and a larger table and chair for the teacher, the teacher being in front of the classroom, and in most cases, the teacher is backed up by an image of Confucius. Visited study halls and academies in Xiamen and Fuzhou, Qufu, Shanghai and Chengdu do not have a Confucius image in class but in common rooms such as the assembly hall. The image, though, is always the same: a portrait of Confucius attributed to the Tang dynasty artist Wu Daozi 吴道子 (ca. 689-755) with the title "Portrait of First Teacher Confucius Practicing the Teaching" (*xianshi Kongzi xingjiao xiang* 先师孔子行教像). It was endorsed by the Taiwan Ministry of Education as "the most accurate representation of Confucius" in 1974 (Murray 2015: 172). On the left side, there is scripture in the picture: "(his) virtue equals Heaven and Earth, (his) Way [principles] permeates and connects past and present, he edited the Six Classics, he has bequeathed a constitution for all ages and generations" (*de mou tiandi* 德侔天地, *dao guan gujin* 道贯古今, *shan shu liujing* 删述六经, *chui xian wanshi* 垂宪万世). The teacher Confucius is presented as a teacher for all future generations. He is the one person who set the standards for proper and moral conduct (with his virtue and his principles) and for learning (with editing the classics and using them for education).

Next to the black and white image of Confucius, there are red scrolls with black ink calligraphy written by Wang Caigui. On the left side, the scroll repeats the first two lines of writing within the Confucius image. There is one change of wording: instead of “mou 侷”, Wang uses “can 參,” which means “unequal, irregular, uneven,” but also “participate, join.” On the one hand, it can be the opposite of the character in the original picture, meaning that virtue is not among us, while the Way is still valid today. On the other hand, it can be a word similar to the character in the original picture, meaning that virtue can join into the world when the Way is still valid today. Both interpretations would reveal a provocative hint to Wang’s criticism of society’s moral decline while at the same time promoting his educational approach to bring back morality via reading the classics. On the right side, Wang added “he handed down the doctrines of [the legendary rulers] Yao and Shun as if they had been his ancestors and elegantly displayed the regulations of Wen [the Literary] and Wu [the Martial] taking them as models” (*zu shu Yao Shun* 祖述尧舜, *xian zhang Wen Wu* 宪章文武, taken from *Zhongyong*, chapter 30.1, Legge 1939 [1893]: 427). Confucius himself is presented as a Master who took his principles from even greater Masters – the legendary rulers Yao and Shun. *Wen*, the sphere of literacy, and *Wu*, the sphere of physical power, are both taken as principles for keeping the physical and the intellectual in balance (or: harmony).

Confucius’ famous image in conducting the teaching (*xingjiao* image, see Murray 2015: 172) is a visible symbol for the abstract Confucian teachings and underlines the status of Confucian teachings within class. His image backing up the actual teacher in class bestows the teacher with a certain meaning, links the teacher to a deeper tradition of teaching, and supports the importance of the *institution* of the teacher as such. In class, students are confronted visually with the importance of Confucian teachings as well as with the importance of the teacher as symbolized by Confucius’ image.

Respect for the teacher and for the principle of the teacher (*shi dao* 师道)<sup>393</sup> is crucial for the traditionally oriented study halls and academies.<sup>394</sup> Students have to respect teachers because the teachers share their wisdom with them, teach them knowledge and guide them intellectually. Respect is shown in class rituals; such rituals are built on a tradition that link teacher to sage:

Chinese people value, first of all, the principle of the teacher. Look, we Chinese people used to have an inscribed board, a memorial tablet, in ancestor worship, with five characters written on it: Heaven, Earth, Gentleman, Relatives, Teacher. Look, the teacher is put here [on top]. Well, why is the teacher so important, why do Chinese people respect the teacher so much? It is because he has the principle of the teacher. It is because the teacher hands down this principle, and therefore, the teacher gains our respect, right? If the principle was not there, mankind would not... shape into a society. What is to do with this

<sup>393</sup> GZ16001; PK16001; PK16005; Dutournier / Ji 2009: 73f.

<sup>394</sup> PK16003; SZ15007; XM15005; PK16001; GZ16001; WTS16004b.

principle, who should take over the special responsibility for such a thing? It's the teacher. So a good teacher hands down this principle. In the past, only those teachers who transmitted the principle were called 'teachers,' those who didn't do it properly didn't have the right to do that. For example, if I only taught you how to drive a car, I couldn't call myself a teacher; I would just be a 'master craftsman.' Or if I would teach you how to cook. In China's past, if you'd learn a professional technique, that was only called 'apprentice' and 'master craftsman.' Only if you teach the principle, if you teach the classics and humanities, one can call it 'teacher' and 'disciple'.<sup>395</sup> (Teacher in Beijing Academy A)

The position of the teacher as on top of the five most important positions is taken from the ritual scenery of ancestor worship, a family ritual in ancient China which, just as the family precepts, was used to cement Confucian values and orthodoxy (Lee 2000: 37). Only a teacher who teaches the *Dao*, the principle, and the classics – as indicated in the Confucius image, too – has the right to call himself a teacher. He appears as a treasurer who carries from generation to generation what molds people into a civilized, educated society; the teacher makes sure that people live in a decent social texture with order and value. Confucius is taken as the embodiment of this well-respected institution of the teacher;

Confucius is the exemplary teacher for all times and generations,<sup>[396]</sup> actually, he is the teacher of all Chinese people [ever], and the teacher of our teachers, too. We all learn from him; he has the most perfect character, and his wisdom is the noblest. So we salute Confucius. Actually, that is not superstition, and it does not increase Confucius' power. Actually, he does not need us to do these things. Of course, now that we read the classics and study Confucius, we gain a lot from these areas, and we are grateful to him, so we salute him to pay him our honest respect. We can say that we honor Confucius with this respect, but we can also say that we honor ourselves with that, because Confucius talks about things which we all precisely have in our hearts; the classics are basically the expression of human nature (*renxing* 人性). So, actually, saluting Confucius means to salute ourselves, and it reminds us to study well, and to not let down the children and the parents.<sup>397</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy B)

While on the side of the learner (and today's classics reading educators can be viewed as learners, too), respect is shown as gratitude for the possibility to get closer to wisdom via the teacher's teachings, teachers in study halls and academies line themselves into the huge

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<sup>395</sup> “中国人首先非常重视师道，你看，他...我们中国人过去有个匾，就是那个祭祀的一个牌位啊，[...]上面写着五个字，[...]天、地、君、亲、师。[...]你看，师放在这里，那为什么师这么重要啊，为什么中国人这么尊重老师啊？就是因为他有个师道[...]。因为老师他是传这个道的，所以老师他是.....才得到中国人的尊重，对不对。这个道如果没有了，人类不就成了.....不成为社会了。那么这个道怎么办，谁来专门负责这件事儿，就是老师。所以一个好老师要传这个道，传那个道。那么在过去呢，只有传道的这个老师才称得上是老师，没得人没有资格的。比如说我只教给你，比如说开车，这个我不能叫老师，我只是说‘师傅’，我只是教你做饭，在中国过去学一门技术，那只能叫‘徒弟’和‘师傅’。只有教道、教经典、教人文的才能叫‘老师’和‘弟子’。” (PK16005)

<sup>396</sup> This title (*wanshi shibiao* 万世师表) was given to Confucius in Qing dynasty by the Kangxi 康熙 emperor “which is until today one of the most prominent categorizations of the sage of the past” (Matten 2017: 193).

<sup>397</sup> “孔子是万世师表，其实他是中国人，所有中国人的老师，也是我们这些老师的老师。嗯，我们都向他学习，他的人格是最圆满，最高尚的，他的智慧也是最高尚的。所以我们拜孔子啊，其实不是一种迷信，不是要去增加孔子的权威，其实他并不需要我们做这些。当然我们既然读经，既然学习孔子，从他那个地方呢，有很大的收获，那我们是感谢他的，所以我们这种拜孔是表达我们内心的一种尊敬。那这种尊敬我们可以是说尊敬孔子，也可以是说尊敬自己，因为孔子所讲的恰恰是我们心中所有的，经典本来就是人性的表达嘛。嗯，那其实我们拜孔子也是拜自己，就是提醒自己要好好去教学，要对得起孩子，对得起家长。” (PK16002)

tradition of the teacher and try to carry on the duties as manifested in Confucius. Rituals that embodied respect towards Confucius were not about Confucius as a figure in a powerful position, but about the personal benefits gained from him and appreciation of the individual. The headmaster of Beijing Academy B refers to Confucius as model teacher of all generations, and if one traced the institution of the teacher back to its very origins, one would encounter Confucius again:

We used to say that the teacher of our teacher of our teacher, traced back to the very origins, is Confucius. He was the first one to open private education, and no matter if people were rich or poor, he accepted them all. All you needed was an honest intention and a little bit of a study fee, and he would accept you. So he is the ancestor of our teachers. No matter where, but in generally, when you encounter somebody from traditional culture in China, or even if the person is not from that field, they will all say that they are grateful to Confucius because he handed down our culture.<sup>398</sup> (Leading teacher of Xiamen Study Hall B)

The teacher appears as the embodiment of education, superior to any formal institutional structure in society. Teachers in ancient China left their legacy to their disciples; they belonged to schools of thoughts but did not build schools as formal institutionalized structures to have their teachings continued and carried on over subsequent generations (Lee 2000: 43). Therefore, individual great masters gained respect for education – not institutions. While the adults know why they perform ritual respect towards Confucius, the children in study halls and academies still have to learn this. Educators want them to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of wisdom and knowledge transmitted by the teacher through time and space:

We bow to Confucius mainly because we want the children to develop a sense of deep respect for the sage's knowledge, for the classics, and for the study hall's teachers, they have to have a heart full of respect. Confucius is everybody's teacher, he is the model teacher of all times and generations. After we have ritually bowed to him, we bow to the teachers, but the teachers also return a bow to the students. This means that we are actually not real teachers, we can't be people's teachers and we can't be teachers for the classical canon, our level is not well enough.<sup>399</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Study Hall)

The Confucius image in class and the performance of bowing for respect bring back a traditionally infused notion of the teacher – which the actual teachers in class might not feel compatible with. It is a common conviction in the context of Chinese (Confucian) education

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<sup>398</sup> “那我们以前都说，老师的老师的老师追述到源头就是孔老夫子，因为他是在中国第一个开设，就是，私人的教育，不管有钱的人好，还是贫穷的人好，那他都一律地收，只要你就有这个诚心，交一点点的学费，他都收。所以这是我们老师的师祖，所以我们不管，就是说，在这个中国来说，你大凡接触到一些传统的文化，甚至不接触，都应该说，对孔老夫子要有一份恩心，因为是他把我们的文化传承下来。” (XM15005)

<sup>399</sup> “拜孔子呢，主要的目的呢，还是，给孩子们，让他们生起一种恭敬心，对圣贤的学问，对于经典，对于这个学堂的老师，要有一颗恭敬心。所以我们……相当于是孔子是我们所有人的老师，万世师表嘛，我们向孔子行礼之后，向老师行礼。但我们的老师还要向学生还礼，嗯，这个意义就是说，我们其实不是真正的老师，我们不可以做人师也不可以做经师，我们的程度是不够的。” (PK16004)



that the teacher has to be a good example; students shall become what the teacher already is (Stafford 1995: 61). Given that classics reading teachers never studied the classics in the way their students do, this credo cannot be fulfilled. However, the spirit of the ideal teacher is present within Confucius; Confucian teachings and the canonical classics are the instruments with which the ideal teachers spread knowledge and open the way to wisdom. In a last step, the rituals towards Confucius gain a notion that leads back to the beginning of the discussion of the position of the teacher, to ancestor worship:

There is another aspect; by bowing to Confucius, the children will slowly get an awareness that everybody of us must carry on, must hand down the wisdom which our ancestors have left behind, and hand down the specified knowledge, it's like that. That has a bit of the aftertaste of worship, because in the past, China used to have ancestor shrines (*citang* 祠堂) where we could worship our ancestors, and that had an established meaning over a long period of time. Well, today there are no more ancestor shrines, so now we worship Confucius in our study hall. We take Confucius as representative for all sages of the past.<sup>400</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Study Hall)

The position Confucius gains in class is linked to the past and the desire to revive a tradition that is still considered as important. Usage of his image in the study hall is justified by a break with the tradition; given that places of ancestor worship and spiritual fulfilment in a family ritual disappeared, people seek for other sources. Classes in study halls and academies become an arena of worship but focused on respect and acknowledgement of tradition, the classics, and the institution of the teacher.

Confucius' image in front of (almost) every classroom represents a lot. In everyday teaching routine, his image is a reminder for the teachers to do a good job because they are in line with the great Master and as a reminder for the students how meaningful studying the classics is because they are soaking in the words of the great Masters. In his identity of a great Master and the origin of all teachers and Chinese teaching, he is a good driver to keep people working (i.e. teaching and learning). As embodiment of the Confucian tradition and traditional education, Confucius underlines the legitimacy of the teaching taking place in class. In addition to that, the image is included in daily rituals when class starts and ends: it is common in all study halls and academies that students bow to Confucius and to the teacher before class starts, and when class ends and the children have a break. In most cases, the students would bow to Confucius first and then to the teacher. Either a teacher or a student

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<sup>400</sup> “还有一点就是，拜孔子会给孩子渐渐的让他们有一个意识，就是，我们每个人，我们是需要去传承的，传承我们祖先留下来的智慧，留下来的学问，这样。这有点祭祀的味道，因为像中国过去是有祠堂的，我们要祭拜自己的祖先，他有一个源远流长的这样的一种意义在，那现在没有祠堂了，所以现在我们在学堂里，我们是祭拜孔子，嗯，以孔子为代表所有的这个古圣先贤。” (PK16004)

would guide this ritual of respect by saying “bow” (*jugong* 鞠躬) and “get up” (*qi* 起); students jointly bow. The teacher usually responds with one bow back to the students.<sup>401</sup>

In Wang Caigui’s class in Wenli Academy, rituals such as the bowing to Confucius are perfected to the utmost degree. At 5:30 a.m. (in summer: 4:30 a.m.) students have to be in class for the first morning lecture. This lecture is just a warming up and not yet the start of the actual school day which starts after breakfast at 7:30 a.m. (summer: 6:30 a.m.). Every day starts with a ceremonial greeting to Confucius which is directed to the Confucius image at the front wall in the classroom. The routine and the accompanying notes are fixed; they are led by a student, and duties for guiding the opening rituals rotate among Wang’s students. The ritual is held in classical Chinese. The procedure is as follows:

- Student: “The morning begins with worshipping the Sage, get ready for the ceremony” (*chen shi bai sheng* 晨始拜圣, *ju li* 敬礼).

*The students in class are notified that the ceremony will start.*

- Student: “Sit straight” (*qi li* 起坐).

*The students in class sit up and look concentrated to the front.*

- Student: “Stand solemnly” (*su li* 肃立).

*The students get up and stand still.*

- Student: “Straighten your clothes” (*zheng dun yi guan* 整顿衣冠).

*Students check if their clothes are in order, pull sleeves and jackets straight.*

- Student: “Put your hands together” (*gong shou* 拱手).

*The students fold the hands in front of their chest (putting one hand over the other).<sup>402</sup>*

- Student: “Raise the folded hands for a humble greeting” (*gao yi* 高揖).

*Students bring the folded hands up to the forehead.*

*The student who leads the ceremony adds resolutions or goals for personal development and behavior to each bow that is jointly made towards Confucius:*

- Student: “To develop a conscience for all things between heaven and earth” (*wei tian di li xin* 为天地立心). “Bow” (*bai* 拜).

*The students bow to Confucius.*

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<sup>401</sup> Field observation: Suzhou Study Hall A, November 13, 2015; Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 13, 2016; Beijing Academy A, January 18, 2016, Xiamen Study Hall B, October 26, 2015.

Teachers and headmasters can add elements to these teacher greeting rituals as they please. In Xiamen Study Hall B, for example, the head teacher recites a few motivational lines with the students before they close class: “Rise up the spirit, stand up with a wide open chest, show benevolence and incline to goodness, open up your horizon, be benevolent to every person and strive for the good (“大起精神, 起身胸宽广, 慈悲向善, 心胸要打开, 要慈悲地对待每一个人, 要朝善”, XM15005). Then the children ask the teacher for a break, the teacher allows for it; and then the children express their gratitude and teacher and students bow to each other.

<sup>402</sup> Boys and girls have to fold their hands differently: girls have the right hand on top and boys have the left hand on top. That derived from the basic elements of heaven (*tian* 天) and earth (*di* 地). Earth is female (*yin* 阴), it is the bottom, so the left hand needs to be at the bottom and the right hand on top. Heaven is male (*yang* 阳) and has to be on top; therefore, the left hand is on top and the right hand at the bottom (XM15005, conversation with a teacher, Xiamen Study Hall A, October 17, 2015).

- Student: “Rise” (*xing* 兴).  
*Students get up again.*
- Student: “To set up life’s foundation for the people” (*wei sheng min li ming* 为生民立命). “Bow” (*bai* 拜).  
*The students bow to Confucius.*
- Student: “Rise” (*xing* 兴).  
*The students get up again.*
- Student: “To continue the interrupted teachings from the old times’ sages” (*wei wang sheng ji jue xue* 为往圣继绝学). “Bow” (*bai* 拜).  
*The students bow to Confucius.*
- Student: “Rise” (*xing* 兴).  
*The students get up again.*
- Student: “To achieve peace for all generations” (*wei wan shi kai tai ping* 为万世开太平). “Bow” (*bai* 拜).  
*The students bow to Confucius.*
- Student: “Get up” (*xing* 兴).  
*The students get up again.*
- Student: “The ceremony is over, return to your seats” (*li bi* 礼毕, *fu zuo* 复坐).  
*The students sit down.*

The four sentences recited by the student who leads this ceremony are famous sayings from Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) philosopher Zhang Zai 张载 (1020-1077). He came from the town Hengqu (横渠), and his literary name was also Hengqu. His famous “Four Sentences of Hengqu” (*Hengqu si ju* 横渠四句) are taken from his *Quotations from Hengqu* (*Hengqu Yulu* 横渠语录). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Four Sentences as essentials of Chinese thought and key elements of how Chinese culture can become a world culture have gained attention again among new Confucian scholars such as Feng Youlan and Ma Yifu.<sup>403</sup> Given that Wang Caigui sees himself in the tradition of new Confucian scholars and aims at better world based on Chinese culture and Confucian teaching, it is not surprising that his students recite sentences with such a big meaning when they start their school day with Confucius.

There is also a ceremony for the time that Wang first sets his foot in the classroom to check on his students in the morning. One of the students will go to his office and ask him to come to the classroom. When he arrives, the students – who were reciting their morning Sanskrit readings in the classroom – are getting ready for greeting their Master (*xiansheng* 先生<sup>404</sup>). The oldest of the students is in charge for the accompanying notes of the ritual. He

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<sup>403</sup> Xiao 2013: 116f.

<sup>404</sup> Respectful title for a teacher in the classical private schools (*sishu*); conversation with a teacher, Wenli Academy, December 11, 2015.

starts with announcing “The Master has arrived” (*xiansheng dao* 先生到). The students put their books aside and sit straight on their seats, waiting in silence for the Master to enter the room. Wang comes in, turns to the image of Confucius and bows to him. Then he turns around and faces the class. The student’s announcements continue:

- Student: “Stand solemnly” (*su li* 肃立).  
*The students get up and stand still.*
- Student: “Put your hands together” (*gong shou* 拱手).  
*The students fold the hands in front of their chest (putting one hand over the other).*
- Student: “Raise the folded hands for a humble greeting” (*gao yi* 高揖).  
*Students bring the folded hands up to the forehead.*
- “Bow” (*bai* 拜).  
*The students bow to Wang Caigui.*
- Student: “Rise” (*xing* 兴).  
*Students get up again.*
- Student: “The ceremony is over, return to your seats” (*li bi* 礼毕, *fu zuo* 复坐).  
*The students sit down.*

Then the students continue with their readings. Wang remains in class for a while, answers questions, walks through the room, supervises reciting and reading, and then returns to his office. Compared to the ceremony for Confucius, paying Wang Caigui respect looks relatively simple. There is a third type of ritual, an opening ceremony for classes during the day, which looks similar. Announcements for these procedures are done by students, duties for this also circle. A regular class is opened as follows:

- Student: “Please, the ceremony for starting class.” (*Qing, shangke liyi* 请, 上课礼仪).  
“Sit up” (*qi zuo* 起坐).  
*The students sit upright.*
- Student: “Stand solemnly” (*su li* 肃立).  
*The students get up and stand still.*
- Student: “Put your hands together” (*gong shou* 拱手).  
*The students fold the hands in front of their chest (putting one hand over the other).*
- Student: “Raise the folded hands for a humble greeting” (*gao yi* 高揖).  
*Students bring the folded hands up to the forehead.*
- “Bow” (*bai* 拜).  
*The students bow to Confucius.*
- Student: “Rise” (*xing* 兴).  
*The students get up again.*
- Student: “The ceremony is over, return to your seats” (*li bi* 礼毕, *fu zuo* 复坐).  
*The students sit down.*

The same procedure takes place at the end of each class, but is, accordingly, announced as “ceremony for closing the class” (*xiake liyi* 上课礼仪).

Some study halls have outsourced the Confucius ritual from the classroom into other spaces. In Xiamen Academy and Xiamen Study Hall B – the two facilities are run by the same headmaster – a Confucius ceremony takes place every Monday morning. Xiamen Study Hall A carries out the Confucius ritual every morning at 9 a.m. in the assembly hall (the living room of the apartment that serves as study hall); students and teachers in Shanghai Study Hall and Chengdu Study Hall likewise gather in common rooms to pay their respects to Confucius together.<sup>405</sup> There is no Confucius image in class because it is not needed for specific practice. Classrooms without the Confucius image in front fall out of the structure explained at the beginning of this chapter – the teacher’s area in class is still marked with a table, there might be a whiteboard or a blackboard behind the teacher’s table, but such features are only related with the specific work of the teacher, not with the heritage of the teacher’s position.

The picture in Shanghai Study Hall (IMG. 28, annex p. 324) is taken during class; in Xiamen Academy, the picture (IMG. 27, annex p. 323) is taken right before class. The teacher in Xiamen Academy moves around in class freely; the children sit around a group table; the teacher’s table in the back of the photo is not the central spot in the classroom – the table where teaching and interaction with the students take place is the heart of this room. This classroom structure reflects the headmaster’s conviction that education’s primary goal should be to work together with parents to help the children to develop their personality and become a person (*chengwei yige ren* 成为一个人). But just as the other headmasters and teachers, he takes his conviction from Confucius and his words in the *Analects*: Confucius’ principle to “teach students according to their abilities, without differentiating them by social status or position” (*yin cai shi jiao* 因材施教, *you jiao wu lei* 有教无类) is, in his eyes, the most important principle for proper education. He likes to gather the students around him and teach them more than one could expect in public education which was too crowded by “mediocre people” (*zhongren* 中人). Confucian education encompassed interpersonal relations, relations between countries, and the wisdom of how to be different *and* in harmony: “the gentlemen are in harmony but not the same, the small [morally not upright] people are all the same but not in harmony” (*junzi he er butong* 君子和而不同, *xiaoren tong er buhe* 小人同而不和).<sup>406</sup>

As mentioned above, Confucius rituals are occasionally outsourced into other rooms. In Xiamen Study Hall B, the Confucius image is put right at the opposite of the entrance (IMG.

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<sup>405</sup> Field observations: Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016; Shanghai Study Hall, June 20, 2016, Xiamen Academy, February 29, 2016.

<sup>406</sup> XM16001.

29, annex p. 324), and students and teachers bow to him once when they enter the study hall; the students also bow to the teacher and say “good morning;” the teachers bow back.<sup>407</sup> Confucius is much more interwoven in learning how to show respect to each other in daily interaction than in representing an educational authority in class. There is a Confucius ceremony each Monday morning before the large break (10:30 am): All children gather in the hallway (IMG. 30, annex p. 324) in front of Confucius; the teachers gather behind the children. The leading teacher remains in the back of the study hall to play music and guide everybody through the ceremony. It starts with singing China’s national hymn (*guoge* 国歌) together. Afterwards, children and teachers put their hands together (girls put their right hand in front, boys their left hand, as the rules for adequate body posture in ancient China prescribe, they raise the hands over the head, and the leading teacher directs everybody by saying “first bow” (*yi bai* 一拜), “second bow” (*er bai* 二拜), and “third bow” (*san bai* 三拜). Teachers and students remain where they stand, and the leading teacher gives feedback to the children’s learning progress and social behavior of the previous week; topics are, for example, the ability to eat alone and clean up after oneself, the ability to read the classics loudly and clearly in class, and the ability to help others.<sup>408</sup> The environment around Confucius is used to reflect on individual behavior; he is part of learning good manners.

### 5.1.2 – CLASSICS AS SECOND AUTHORITY IN CLASS

Authority in class is embodied by the teacher and supported by the Confucius as symbol for the institution of the teacher. A second authority lies within the canonical classics as vehicles that carry the wisdom of old time’s sages; they are the medium through which the sages can still be accessed.<sup>409</sup>

Classics have the highest authority. [...] In the educational landscape, the sages would have the highest authority, but none of them is alive now, they are not in the people’s world. But their writings are still there, and they are all classics. They are the works within Chinese culture that can be called ‘classics’ (*jing* 经).<sup>410</sup> (Headmaster of Fuzhou Study Hall)

Well, the classics use the wisdom of the sages; [they are] a crystallization, a summary, the laws of history, the laws of the universe, and the laws of life.<sup>411</sup> (Headmaster of Guangzhou Study Hall)

<sup>407</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Hall B, October 27, 2015; XM15005.

<sup>408</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Hall B, October 26, 2015.

<sup>409</sup> QF16001; PK16005; PK16001; CD16001; GZ16001; PK16002; PK16004; XM15005; XM16001; WTS1606; Billioud / Goossaert 2014: 231.

<sup>410</sup> “经典就是最最高的权威。[...] 教育界的最高的权威，就是那些圣人，none of them are alive now，就是他们都不在人世，但是他们的著作留下来的，都是那些经典，可以作为，中国文化里面，可以称为《经》的那部分著作，就是那些。” (FZ16001)

<sup>411</sup> “那经典就是用圣贤的智慧，这样的结晶、总结、历史的规律、宇宙的规律、人生的规律。” (GZ16001)

The classics' authority, though, is not only or not simply claimed via the authority of the sages. Rather, the sages' approximation to human nature which could unfold to the fullest in a morally upright existence is valued. Somebody who would acknowledge the authority of the sages (through their writings) would then acknowledge the authority of human nature:

Well, if a type of education does not take classics as the most important content, I think that such an education has a big shortcoming, because the classics basically are mankind's highest wisdom and the fullest expression of humanity (*renxing* 人性). That is because the classics are the expression of the sage's nature and have a deep meaningful content. So when a child reads the classics from early age onwards, it will understand the principles of life easier. [...] And then, there is a moral quality within the classics; the classics are about the moral character of the sages – you say it, whose moral character could be any higher than that of Jesus? Or for China: of Confucius? There is nobody.<sup>412</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy B)

The classics are not only written documentation of the words of the sages, but also vessels that carry the moral character of the sages; the utmost moral character is equaled to human nature. Human nature in its fullest expression is approximated by the moral character of the sages – being moral is being human. This reflects the Confucian and Mencian conviction that learning impelled the individual's moral advancement; a good moral individual was the best foundation for a good society, and this was the highest end of Confucius' and Mencius' thought (Lee 2000: 3). The sages and the classics, thus, appear as instruments to further the good of the individual, and in the Confucian logic, therefore also the good of society.

In addition to that, persistence through time is another characteristic that underlines the magnitude of the canonical classics; this persistence is directly connected to the embodiment of human nature within the classics.

These classics have experienced many years already; they are the aggregation of one thousand, two thousand years of history. They are still not outdated, and in addition to that, they talk about human nature, human nature, they are about profound human nature, not the character of [physical] nature, but the [abstract] human nature. In Chinese, we call this human nature 'ever since and eternally unchanging.' In the old times, people had this nature, and today, people also have this nature; even after another 100 years or 1,000 years, people will still have this nature. So the canonical books can stand close scrutiny, can stand close scrutiny, they are not in the trend of a time, and they will never be outdated, never outdated.<sup>413</sup> (Headmaster of Chengdu Study Hall)

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<sup>412</sup> “就，一种教育啊，他如果说不能以经典为主要的內容，我们认为他对教育来说有非常大的缺陷，因为经典本身，他既是人类最高的智慧，他也是人性最充分的表达。因为经典他就是圣人的心性的表达，那这个呢，实际上，他是内涵最深的，所以一个孩子啊，我们让他要从小来读经，他就比较容易领悟人生的道理。[...]然后，经典当中他又有品德嘛，经典他就是讲圣人的品德，你说谁的品德可能比耶稣更高？或者在我们中国（来说），比孔子更高？那没有了嘛。” (PK16002)

<sup>413</sup> “这些经书呢，都是经过了很多年的，一千年、两千年历史的沉淀。所以它又不过时，而且他讲的是人性，人性，它讲的是深度的人性，不是自然性，是人性。这个人性中文讲叫‘亘古不变’，就是它从古人是这样的人性，那今天也是这样的人性，甚至于 100 年以后他也是这样的人性，甚至于一千年以后它也是这样的人性。所以经典的书就经得起推敲，经得起推敲，它不是流行的，但是它永远也过不过时。” (CD16001)

The classics are assumed to be relevant for the people today and in the future; engaging in reading the classics today seems to be a good investment into the future. Given that the classics have survived for such a long time is also seen as special characteristic of their quality. Useless or bad writings would have vanished from the surface already; only works that gain the people's applause would survive many (thousand) years.<sup>414</sup> In their eternally non-changing quality, the classics are a fix spot within Chinese tradition; the headmaster of Guangzhou Study hall compares them to the eternal Way (*Dao*) in Chinese philosophy. Neither heaven, earth, nor the Way would ever change.<sup>415</sup> Embodying ever valid wisdom of the world, the classics appear to be teaching material that is always valuable. Reading the classics, thus, also enhances stability in child education, while public education is regarded as ever changing:

Because in China, the educational reforms within the past few decades basically changed every year; they would change teaching materials one time in three years. But the Chinese classics, the 'Four Books' and 'Five Classics' – one is used for more than 1,000 years, one is used for more than 2,000 years, and they are really not bad.<sup>416</sup> (Headmaster of Xiamen Academy)

At the core of the importance of the classical canon is its quality that remains the same while time changes and passes by. As Gordin et al. (2010: 2f.) point out, utopias and dystopias provide information on how people conceptualize their relationships between past, present, and future. Taking the classics as instrument of connection, classics reading educators draw a line between them and the Chinese who read the classics thousands of years ago; they create a bond between them and the great masters that have been examples for generations before them. As representation of human nature itself, the classics are presented as being able to connect with people regardless of time, given that time would never change human nature. The headmaster of Beijing Study Hall experienced a cultural rooting process through reading the classics when he participated in Wang Caigui's *Analects 100* classics reading camp:

Back then, I had a very profound experience, which was that I was very very close to the root system of culture, because when you spend a short while to read the classics, there is only this feeling, that all of a sudden, you have grasped the roots, like this, you are not far from the roots, not far from the roots. So, you have to continue to read the classics, and we also have to promote this principle and make more people see the benefits of the classics.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> XM15005. Wang Caigui's definition for "classics" is similar; they are works which intellectuals of different times have rated as similarly useful and valuable (Wang 2009: 5).

<sup>415</sup> GZ16001.

<sup>416</sup> “最大的特点，经典是基本上，他的文字是不会轻易变的。因为中国这几十年，二十几年来的教改，基本上年年改，三年就会换一下教材。但是呢，中国的经典《四书五经》，一个用了一千多年，一个用了两千多年，非常不错。” (XM16001)

<sup>417</sup> “当时有一个很深体会，就觉得自己离这个文化的，文化的这个根脉啊，特别近，因为你一下子读了经典，只是有这种感觉，就是你一下子抓住了根，这样，离根就不远，离根就不远了。所以呢，这个经



In reading the classics (here: *The Analects*), he felt linked to his culture in a very profound way, almost on an existential level. Not only did he consider the value of the classics for present and future, but also for a changed view of the past: “it could also provide the past with a new meaning.”<sup>418</sup> Again, different time lines are drawn together by reference to the classics. Being rooted in Chinese culture as outcome of reading the classics is one benefit that is also valued by parents,<sup>419</sup> especially by those who plan on sending their children abroad for a while. Before the children leave Chinese soil, they should be rooted to Chinese culture so that they do not leave without a cultural basis.<sup>420</sup> The conviction that for a Chinese person it is crucial to know the classics and, via the classics, Chinese culture, goes as far as excluding those who are not educated enough: “Chinese people who do not know Chinese culture, well, I think, cannot call themselves Chinese.”<sup>421</sup> (Teacher D’s husband)

The right person to make the connection between the past and the present is the teacher. A teacher from Beijing Academy A has pointed out in the previous chapter that in ancient China, only teachers who passed on a certain type of knowledge, the principles of the ancient sages as embodied in the classics, could be called teachers, and the learners were their disciples. There is one correct definition of a teacher in Chinese education; likewise, there is one correct definition of what education is and should encompass:

The most important content of Chinese education is, I think, the classics; the classics have to be the basis, yes. If you left the classics out, Chinese education would be very ordinary, for example, simple life skills or occupational skills could be education then. But with the classics, education can reach the altitude of life; only with the classics will there be deep experiential knowledge about the Way of heaven (*tiandao* 天道), the universe, laws and patterns, the nature of men. All of this basically finds its origin in the classics. From my perspective, the classics are fundamental for education, especially for Chinese education – that must be rooted in the classics.<sup>422</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy A)

Given that it is hard today to meet one of the sages of old times, the best possible thing one can do is at least read the classics that have been left behind.<sup>423</sup> The classics are today, as Teacher D puts it, “the wisest voice between heaven and earth” (*tiandi jian zui you zhihui de*

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典呢要继续读下去，而且呢我们还要推广这个道理，让更多的人也能够受到经典的好处，嗯。” (PK16004)

<sup>418</sup> “甚至能让过去重新赋予他们一遍新的这个意义。” (PK16004).

<sup>419</sup> PK16003; WTS16004b; WTS16001.

<sup>420</sup> PK16004.

<sup>421</sup> “中国人对中国的文化都不了解的话，那他，那他，我感觉他称不上是中国人。” (WTS15001)

<sup>422</sup> “中国的教育我觉得最重要的内容是以经典为核心、以经典为根本，对。如果离开了经典，中国教育就会变得很普通。比如他就是一些简单的生活技能啊、一些职业技能，但是经典他真正才有生命的高度，他才能够对天道啊、对宇宙啊、对规律啊、对人性啊，他才有很深刻的体悟。那这个就基本上都是根源于经典。所以在我看来，我认为经典对教育的作用带有根本性，尤其是中国教育，他必须根植于经典。” (PK16001)

<sup>423</sup> PK16004.

*shengyin* 天地间最有智慧的声音).<sup>424</sup> This voice is made heard in the classroom of study halls and academies by the seemingly simple act of reading and reciting the classics, the source of wisdom, which is believed to increase people's wisdom of life (*rensheng de zhihui* 人生的智慧).<sup>425</sup>

Taking into account the value of the classics and the strong bond with the admired sages of old times, it seems rather odd that the classics are “just” read out loud in class. One might think that if there was so much wisdom and inspiration for life in the classics, the teaching approach of classics reading education should start with more than just reading. However, one can also think from another perspective that the classics are considered to be so great that only by reciting them – looking at the characters, speaking the word, listening to the chorus of the recited writing – wisdom could be unleashed and would slowly find the way into one's mind; the classics are believed to be so great that nothing more than just reading them is needed to enjoy a proper education. Such a perspective is best summarized by the headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall B; she refers to the Daoist concept of “not interfering” to describe the constellation of teachers and parents towards children when classics are used as teaching material:

Our parents and teachers are in a condition of non-interference (*wuwei* 无为), they do not interfere; they do nothing (for the sake of doing it), and so there is nothing which they do not do (*wu wei er wu bu wei* 无为而无不为) [*Daodejing* 37, translated by Legge 1891: 79]. We are very passive, we give you the classics, and need you to become active, you strive to create something, create your life, and we parents are comparatively passive.<sup>426</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall B)

Children in class need to get active with the classics by themselves – this is the core of teaching in each classics reading education facility visited within this research. The different modes of interaction with the classics are best shown in a short description of the core reading and recitation techniques which are used in the context of classics reading education.

### 5.1.3 – MODES OF READING AND RECITING THE CLASSICS IN CLASS

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In class, it is usually the teacher who stands in front of the class to lead the sessions of classics recitation (IMG. 32, annex p. 325). With a loud voice and clear pronunciation, the teacher reads a sentence (or part of a sentence), and the children have to repeat immediately in choir, also with a loud voice and clear pronunciation. While reading, the children point with the forefinger to each character which they are reading out loud (IMG. 31, annex p. 325). With the visual focus on the character and the audio focus on the voice of the teacher, the learning

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<sup>424</sup> WTS16006.

<sup>425</sup> CD16001; PK16002.

<sup>426</sup> “我们的家长和老师都是在一种很无为的状态下，很无为，无为而无不为，我们很无为，我们给了你经典，需要你有为，你去这个奋斗创造，创造你的人生，对，而我们的家长都比较无为。” (SZ15007)

effect is believed to be quite high; children would learn how characters look like and sound like. After many times of recitation – how many times depends on the learner – the child would recognize the characters and be able to read the text autonomously. Students can also take over the lead (IMG. 33, annex p. 325) either when they did a good performance in reading the text fast and without pronunciation mistake or as a punishment for not being attentive enough or too sloppy in reading.<sup>427</sup> The basic teaching method which requires one person to take the lead in reading is called “*daidu* 带读” (lead the reading); the others recite in a choir following what had been read out to them which is called “*gendu* 跟读” (follow the reading). A third type of reciting a text together is called “joint reading” (*qidu* 齐读) during which nobody takes the lead; everybody is reciting simultaneously. While a new (part of a) text is usually approached by *daidu* (on the teacher’s side) and *gendu* (on the students’ side), recitation often gets a final polish with *qidu*. Reciting a piece of text in class requires the student to follow the characters quite quickly; there is no own reading pace, everybody reads in the same speed.

There are also self-study reading sessions in study halls and academies to enable the students to find their own style and rhythm of learning. In self-studying, students read their own book quietly or recite it in whispering voice. Students do not necessarily read the same books in such sessions but could. The teacher would sit in front and be available for questions that might arise during reading, for example how to pronounce a character. In this learning approach, most of the interaction in class takes place between the student and the book – as the headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall B has indicated, “we give you the classics, and need you to become active.”<sup>428</sup>

Although classics reading education requires students to stay away from electronic devices and especially the internet, technology is used in class daily. As explained in the context of the sound environment in study halls and academies, readings of the classics and classical music are played in most classrooms all day to create a positive sound environment to stimulate the senses of the students and enhance study success. CD players and tape recorders are used in classes for reading English classics such as Shakespeare and the Bible, especially in self-study. The Chinese teachers are either not fluent enough in English or have an accent in their pronunciation. In lack of suitable foreign teachers, they rely on pre-recorded readings played from small tape recorders (IMG. 34, annex p. 325). A sentence would first be read by a male voice and then repeated by a female voice. The children in class can listen to

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<sup>427</sup> Field observations: Suzhou Study Hall A, November 12 and 13, 2015; Xiamen Study Hall A, October 14, 2015; Shenzhen Study Hall, March 10, 11, 15, and 16, 2015; Xiamen Study Hall B, October 26, 2015; Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016.

<sup>428</sup> “我们给了你经典，需要你有为” (SZ15007).

the records as often as they want when rewinding the tape and starting again. They listen to the male voice and then recite together with the female voice. In Shenzhen Study Hall, the teacher would walk through class during this recitation session and ask singular students from time to time to read a sentence out loud.<sup>429</sup> Shanghai Study Hall applies a different method to involve the recorded readings in class. While reading selected writings of Shakespeare (IMG. 36, annex p. 327), the teacher and students sit around a table, the CD player at the center, and recite jointly (*qidu*). Such sessions also have a language learning effect on the teachers.

Wang Caigui has set up the goal of classics reading education as memorizing 300,000 characters; among these are 200,000 Chinese characters and 100,000 English characters<sup>430</sup> – although it is not clear what “characters” (not letters) in English language should be. Given that these 300,000 characters are the admission requirement for Wenli Academy, they are specified in the “Memorization and Recording Standards for starting school at Wenli Academy (*ruxue Wenli Shuyuan zhi baobao luxiang biao zhun* 入学文礼书院之包本录像标准)”.<sup>431</sup> Prospective students have to be well-versed in eight Chinese titles:

- 1) the *Analects*, the *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (the teaching material collection is called *Xue Yong Lunyu* 学庸论语),
- 2) *Mencius*,
- 3) the *Book of Changes*,
- 4) the *Book of Odes*,
- 5) *Selections from Laozi and Zhuangzi* (*Laozi Zhuangzi xuan* 老子庄子选),
- 6) *Selections from the Book of Documents, the Book of Rites, and the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Shu Li Chunqiu xuan* 书礼春秋选),
- 7) *Selections from Ancient Writings* (*Guwen xuan* 古文选), and
- 8) *Selections from Buddhist Classics* (*Fojing xuan* 佛经选).

English classics which the applicants should have learned are (English titles according to the cover page of the teaching books):

- 1) *Amoretti and Epithalamion by Edmund Spenser* (*Sibinsai Xiao'aishen yu Xisong* 斯宾塞小爱神与喜颂),
- 2) *Sonnets by William Shakespeare* (*Sai Weng shisihangshi* 莎翁十四行诗),
- 3) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*Zhongxiaye zhi meng* 仲夏夜之梦) by Shakespeare,
- 4) *Selections from Literature* (*Yingwen mingzhu xuan* 英文名著选),

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<sup>429</sup> Field observation, Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 11, 2016.

<sup>430</sup> Conversation with the headmaster, Suzhou Study Hall A, November 9, 2015.

<sup>431</sup> Wenli Academy: “Wenli Shuyuan wuxu chunji ruxue zhaosheng jianzhang he baoming liucheng 文礼书院戊戌（2018）春季入学招生简章和报名流程”。 Online: [http://www.wenli.ac.cn/h-nd-117.html#\\_jcp=1&\\_np=226\\_0](http://www.wenli.ac.cn/h-nd-117.html#_jcp=1&_np=226_0) (last access: December 9, 2018).

- 5) *The Holy Bible – Selective Bible Stories* (*Yingwen Shengjing xuan* 英文圣经选) in English, and
- 6) *Socrates' Defense-Apology by Plato* (*Bolatu Sushi zibian* 柏拉图苏氏自辩).

Memorization takes place in the different recitation modes as well as in self-study. Depending on the age, either children or teachers keep track of how often the children have already recited a text passage or a whole text. Small children at the ages of three to five or six require more assistance in their learning by teachers than older students; in Xiamen Study Hall B (which concentrates on kindergarten children), for example, it is already a great success when children could follow the text the teacher was reciting with the finger correctly and was able to concentrate long enough for this.<sup>432</sup> Children with more study experience in reading the classics have developed their own sense of how well they grasp a text. Within self-study sessions, they would walk up to the teachers and recite the text to have the teacher check if they mastered it already. Usually, the students join the teacher who sits in front of the class, face the wall – or look into another direction so that they could not peek into the textbook – and recite the text from their memory (IMG. 35, annex p. 326).

When the student is able to recite flawlessly, she or he can continue with the next paragraph. The paragraphs would later be recited in combination and the overall amount of memorized text would increase until the student mastered the whole classic. If that happens, the study success must be fixated; the student should be able to prove that a certain amount of characters has been memorized already. Most of the study halls and academies use a very technological way of recording study success: by taping it on video. Especially those who follow a pure classics reading approach have a designated video room (IMG. 37, annex p. 327) in their facilities<sup>433</sup> to ensure silence for recitation which, depending on the classic, might take an hour or two. *Mencius* is one of the longer classics and it takes over an hour to memorize it by heart. Recitation on camera does not take place in a listener-friendly reading pace, but in a very fast mode – just as recitation is done in class. The tapes are needed as proof of having memorized 300,000 characters when applying to Wenli Academy.

Beijing Academy A, the largest academy within this study, is an exception: at the end of each semester, the students have a huge examination to test their ability in the classics in front of Confucius (IMG. 39, annex p. 328). The Confucius image in the hall is crowned by a

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<sup>432</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Hall B, October 27, 2015.

<sup>433</sup> Beijing Study Hall; Beijing Academy B; Guangzhou Study Hall.

Others, e.g. Shenzhen Study Hall B, make the videos in the assembly hall or living room of the study hall.

Visited facilities in Fujian (Xiamen and Fuzhou) and Shanghai Study Hall do not use such methods to measure study success because they do not aim at memorization of 300,000 characters.

wooden board that says “honor a moral character and develop based on learning”<sup>434</sup> (*zun de wen xue* 尊德问学). Before the examination starts, the teachers bow three times to Confucius; so do the students after entering the hall and before proceeding to their exam station. At eight exam stations (eight tables with two teachers each in charge to supervise and evaluate the students’ performance) eight students take the exam at the same time. Each student has a different exam, depending on the classic that was learnt in the semester. For example, a student who studied *Mencius*, memorized a part of it, chapter *Jin Xin*, parts 1 and 2 (*jinxin shang* 尽心上 and *jinxin xia* 尽心下), by heart. After that, one of the teachers chooses a few text passages of *Mencius* which he reads to the student and the student has to memorize the whole paragraph that starts with the sentence read by the teacher – so the student has to be able to enter a text at different points and prove secure handling of the text without having to recite the whole book. At the end of the test, the child bows to the teacher once and then to Confucius once. Evaluation of the performance of the student takes place in cooperation of the two teachers based on an evaluation sheet. The grades “very good” (*you* 优), “good” (*liang* 良) and “medium” (*zhong* 中; there is no category for failure) are given in the following categories: clothing (*zhuozhuang* 着装), salutation (*xingli* 行礼; this refers to the bowing to Confucius and the teachers), level of concentration (*zhuanzhudu* 专注度) which is measured by the sub-categories of standing posture (*zhanzi* 站姿) and expression in one’s eyes (*yanshen* 眼神), and finally, the level of accuracy (*zhunquedu* 准确度), measured by speed of speaking (*yusu* 语速), level of distinction of the voice (*qingxidu* 清晰度) and level of fluency (*lianguanxing* 连贯性) of what is memorized. The evaluation forms also state the titles of the classics’ abstracts and the number of characters they equal; in Beijing Academy A, teachers keep very accurate track of how many characters the students master with the exams. Differently from study halls and academies (especially those that use Wang’s pure classics reading approach), these students do not have to recite a whole classic at once, but they do it piece by piece. They also have other subjects like English and math in which they are tested; they do not devote completely to the classics. Yet features of proper conduct and appearance which have been shown as being crucial especially within the ceremony of paying respect to Confucius and the teacher are even subject of examination in Beijing Academy A.

Reading and reciting the classics is supposed to have two major outcomes: (1) learners (both children and adults) learn the respective language – at least accumulate a passive basis which can be activated as soon as the person would be in the respective language environment for a longer time, and (2) students learn proper conducts and moral values. The latter is partly learning by doing, e.g. within the Confucius ceremony and when paying respects to the

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<sup>434</sup> Note: “learning” in the sense of “asking to be taught” or “seeking instruction”.

teacher; and partly it is learning within an environment of nurturing influence (*xuntao* 熏陶)<sup>435</sup> as created by the classics. As said before, understanding the classics is not in the foreground and children are not able to grasp much of the content. Hearing the words and looking at the characters, though, are considered as a good *xuntao*<sup>436</sup> – meaning that the stimulation by aesthetic characters and good words had a positive effect on the children’s character and learning. In Shenzhen Study Hall A, for example, children are taught pronunciation of English words with teaching material different from classics. In the background, the teachers play the reading of the Bible in English as a *xuntao*; the children should already get used to it because they will have to read it actively later on.<sup>437</sup> *Xuntao* appears as a teaching technique that relies on implicit and subtle influence of the children rather than active teaching. This is related to the overarching idea that a good environment produces good people.

In the process of *xuntao*, the learner is confronted with the content of the classics in form of audio and visual input; content that is read and recited on a daily basis is absorbed by the senses and passes by the mind frequently. Moral principles of the classics can also be acquired in the sense that understanding “just happens” when children are confronted with the classics for a longer time:

The more classics a child reads, the more it will understand the principles of human life (*rensheng de daoli* 人生的道理). [...] Originally, the Confucian classics talk about the systematic knowledge of self-cultivation, family order, reigning a country, and pacifying the world (*xiushen qijia zhiguo ping tianxia de xuewen* 修身齐家治国平天下的学问)<sup>438</sup> – so about how to deal with interpersonal relations. The classics are about principles how to deal with other people, to be filial and obedient towards parents, to treat leaders with respect, to command workers – anyways, they are about how to rein a country and pacify the world.<sup>439</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy B)

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<sup>435</sup> PK16002; CD16001; TS15003; PK16005; QF16001; WTS16006.

Conversations during field research: Shenzhen Study Hall A, December 29, 2015 and March 8, 11, 14, 15, 2016; Shenzhen Study Hall B, December 27, 2015; Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016.

<sup>436</sup> Conversations with headmaster’s wife, Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016.

<sup>437</sup> Field observation, Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 16, 2016.

<sup>438</sup> The interviewee summarizes the classics’ wisdom with a phrase that refers to a well-known line from the *Great Learning (Daxue)*: “Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their States were rightly governed. Their States being rightly governed, the whole empire was made tranquil and happy” (物格而后知至, 知至而后意诚, 意诚而后心正, 心正而后身修, 身修而后家齐, 家齐而后国治, 国治而后天下平; translated by Legge 1939 [1893]: 358f.).

<sup>439</sup> “所以一个孩子越读经, 他对人生的道理越能够明白, 他到了社会上呢, 越能够适应。本来像儒家的经典讲的是修身齐家治国平天下的学问。嗯, 就是, 处理人与人之间的关系, 经典讲的就是这些道理, 就怎么样与别人相处, 怎么样孝顺父母, 怎么样尊敬领导, 怎么样带领员工, 反正治国平天下啊。” (PK16002)

In this sense, recitation and memorization of the classics somewhat passively works towards an understanding of the text's content without conscious reflection of the meaning. While this can be understood as passive way of learning in a positive environment, there is also a more rigid way to understand this constellation: as mentioned before, a headmaster from Shenzhen stated that classics reading education was so successful because the environment the children are situated in is designed to be filled only with the best input and only selected content is presented to them; he says that the underlying principle of classics reading education was brainwash (*dujing de yuanli shi xinao* 读经的原理是洗脑).<sup>440</sup> Engineering an environment that brings about certain results in people seems to be an extreme version of the conviction that the environment influences a person's development.

Similarly passive and based on absorption rather than active learning is language learning via reading the classics. Wang Caigui explains the idea of language learning as accumulation of linguistic characteristics that could be flexibly expanded within the language; he elaborates on the principles from the point of view of Chinese language for foreign learners (because the interviewer and author of this study is a German):

It is very simple. At best, there is a person who can teach well, a person who knows how to lead in reading the classics. If there is nobody who can teach, one can listen to audios, to MP3s and CDs, and one will get familiar with it. When one looks at the book to compare, one can also memorize the book, and after memorizing the book, one can recognize the characters – after reading the book, one knows the characters [of Classical Chinese]. With these characters, one can go on and read something in vernacular language, and one can learn the language. Learning a language through the classics works very fast. First of all, the pronunciation is the same, and secondly, the grammar is the same. Only the thickness of texts differs: in the classics, the concentration [with regard to content] is much stronger, is more essential. Regular language is looser; when you learn with the concentrated [version of language], it is like a concentration of nutrients – learning the simpler language of dialogue will be easier.<sup>441</sup> (Wang Caigui)

Education as based on the classics seems to be rich in content; when one had learnt language and culture from the classics, one could easily build on this foundation. It also seems to be very simple in teaching concept; many teachers and headmasters share this view.<sup>442</sup> The teacher who, in most study halls and academies, occupies the central spot in class seems to have the simple task of “just reading” the classics; the child's interaction with the classics

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<sup>440</sup> Conversation with the headmaster, Shenzhen Study Hall E, March 17, 2015. The term “brainwash” only fell in this conversation.

<sup>441</sup> “很简单，有人教最好，有人教就是带他读经，没有人教他就听音频，听 MP3、CD，听 MP3，然后就听熟了，那书来对对看，他也会背书，他也会背书然后就会认字，他读这些书读很多之后他就认字了，他就可以用这些字来读白话文，他也可以学习语言。那用经典来学语言就快了，第一点，他发音一样；第二点，他文法一样，只是文章的浓度不一样，经典的浓度比较强，比较压缩，那么这个一般会话就比较松，你学浓缩的，等于是营养的浓缩嘛，你要学简单的就浓一点，你要学一些会话就容易。” (TS15001)

<sup>442</sup> SZ15007; SZ15001; CD16001; PK16002; WTS15001; conversation with the headmaster, Shenzhen Study Hall C, March 13, 2016.



does the rest of the work. Teachers appear as a nice-to-have accessories in class which is, however, easily replaceable – by an MP3 player. This conflicts with the newly stressed importance of the position of the teacher who is in line with great figures such as Confucius and, in general, great masters and *real* teachers of Chinese history. Even more confusing is the fact that in pure classics reading facilities the position of the teacher is especially stressed – students have to obey, have to show respect; the teacher has to be strict and secure the implementation of rules and right behavior in class. At the same time, Wang Caigui and headmaster who follow his approach also count on electronic devices. Electronic devices are partly needed to complement what teachers of flesh and blood cannot deliver, e.g. reading English classics. This might reveal that the teacher’s ideal is set quite high and not achievable (yet) by the teachers who are available today. In practice, though, it appears as if the teacher was just needed as instruments to bring the classics into class and to implement rules as dictated by the classics and Chinese tradition.

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## 5.2. SHAPING THE BODY AND FORMING THE SELF: IMPLEMENTATION OF RULES AND PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE

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Reciting of the classics within an environment of played readings from the classics and music creates an atmosphere in which (1) language can be learned and (2) moral character formation through positive influence (*xuntao*) can take place. The Confucian classics play the crucial role in subtly forming the (morally upright) character of the learner – i.e. within moral education (*dexing jiaoyu* 德行教育).<sup>443</sup> Even though the teacher gains a special position in class, spatially marked and visually underpinned by Confucius’ image, the classics seem to gain a superior authority, and the teacher works as instrument of making the words of the sages usable for teaching in the classroom. However, the teacher is also the instance to keep order in class; they make sure that rules are kept, and behavior is correct, i.e. adequate according to Confucian standards. The teacher is, in this sense, a disciplinary force in class – and in boarding schools, beyond class – which makes sure that conduct and behavior suit the facility’s educational framework. Rules and regulation as imposed by the teacher are measurements to physically structure the students: only with the right sitting posture, position of hands, and application of voice altitude can the classics be studied adequately (5.2.1). Physical education in study halls and academies are a supplementary subject; children should stay in good physical condition to be able to concentrate their energy on learning the classics (5.2.2) – this reflects the harmony of *Wen*, the sphere of literacy, and *Wu*, the sphere of

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<sup>443</sup> The terminology appeared in: SZ15001; SZ15003; QF16001.

physical power, which both appear in the Confucius image and the script scrolls in the classroom. Finally, life in boarding school study halls and academies is fairly regulated by different elements such as the already mentioned comprehensive schedule, and on top of that, by rules for dormitories, for the common space in the facilities, and rules and ritual in relation with daily meals (5.2.3).

### 5.2.1 – THE TEACHER’S DISCIPLINARY ROLE IN CLASS

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Following up the last chapter and the elaboration on the traditionally inspired position of the teacher in classics reading education, the teacher’s role as disciplinary force in class also rests on historical roots:

According to our ancient people’s education, a teacher has to beat and to scold, one doesn’t need to worry; letting the teacher scold and beat allows the child to cultivate a social etiquette. But we as parents need to love the child. It gets family love and learns rules for adequate social behavior, this is the best.<sup>444</sup> (Headmaster of Qufu Academy)

Requirements for teachers can be traced back to written sources of cultural importance such as the *Three Character Classic* (*Sanzijing* 三字经), a basic work for children’s elementary education since Song dynasty (960–1279; Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 20):

A good teacher has strict requirements; in our *Three Character Classic* it says, ‘if teaching is not strict, it is due to the teacher’s carelessness.’ A teacher has to be strict. This strictness does not necessarily encompass beating and scolding – that’s not how things are in China, that beating and scolding is demanded. What is strict? It means to demand for a standard, to place this standard here, and if you cannot live up to it, I won’t say that you can still get 90% [a good grade]. If you haven’t reached it, you haven’t reached it. [...] In China, we call this ‘a strict teacher produces a great disciple.’<sup>445</sup> (Teacher in Beijing Academy A)

Strictness of the teacher is related with ideas of beating, scolding, and a high standard – even though the second teacher considers the standard as more important than performing strictness in scolding and beating, he is aware of the image of the typical strict teacher as presented by the first teacher. Different study halls and academies regard the aspect of teacher’s strictness differently; while Xiamen Study Hall B, Xiamen Academy, Fuzhou Study Hall, Suzhou Study Hall B and Shanghai Study Hall put less emphasis on the teacher’s authoritarian position and

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<sup>444</sup> “按照我们古人的教育老师要打要骂，不要紧，让老师打骂，让他养成规矩；但是我做父母的疼爱他。他又得到亲情，又学会规矩，这个是最好的。”(QF16001)

[This citation is partly used in chapter 4.2 already when the roles of parents and teachers are differentiated; one part that has been excluded in the previous context is elaborated on here.]

<sup>445</sup> “一个好老师严格要求，我们《三字经》说的‘教不严，师之惰，’老师要严格啊。这个严格不是说打骂他，这在中国也不是这样的，说是主张打骂。什么是严格，就是说，用一个标准要求他，我这个标准放在这里，你达不到，那我也不能说你达不到我也给你一个 90 分，你达不到就是达不到。[...] 在中国叫‘严师出高徒’啊。”(PK16005)

strictness; Suzhou Study Hall A, Beijing Academy B, Beijing Study Hall, Xiamen Study Hall A, Shenzhen Study Hall A and B and especially Guangzhou Study Hall put more emphasis on this matter. This is also visible in class. In ancient China, the teacher used a bamboo stick, the *jiechi* 戒尺, to discipline students. In today's study halls and academies, the *jiechi* is shaped like a ruler with text carved into the bamboo, e.g. the *Analects* or the *Family Precepts of Master Zhu* (*Zhuzi Jiaxun* 朱子家训<sup>446</sup>, IMG. 38, annex p. 327).

In Beijing Academy B, the wooden stick is placed right next to the Confucius image which takes the central spot in class – the authority of the stick is visually connected to Confucius and the institution of the teacher. Occasionally, teachers would use the *jiechi* to set the rhythm of recitation by tapping it on the desk; sometimes a strong clapping on the desk would be a reminder for the students in class to be more attentive.<sup>447</sup> Teachers would also slap the children when they had done something wrong, e.g. in Beijing Study Hall: a teacher used this as punishment for a child that took something in possession of another person without asking. When it is not in use, the *jiechi* is placed on a little altar beneath the Confucius image in the hallway of the study hall.<sup>448</sup> As instrument for physical punishment in case of deviation from rules, the *jiechi* is a symbol for discipline and, in the central always visible spot, a constant reminder to behave and obey.

Corporal punishment<sup>449</sup> is, via the *jiechi* and its visible connection with Confucius, put in direct relation with educative methods of the wise men of ancient times. The *jiechi* appears as their extended arm, as tool to secure conduct according to the rules of a place that considers itself in tradition of Confucius' education. The headmaster of Beijing Academy B claims that mature academies were those that practiced corporal punishment; it was part of how children are adequately trained. This view is shared by the headmaster of Guangzhou Study Hall – both are followers of Wang Caigui and practice a pure classics reading approach.<sup>450</sup> Parental consent to make use of corporal punishment is normally given before a child is enrolled in a

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<sup>446</sup> *Zhuzi Jiaxun* is also called *Zhuzi Zhijia Geyan* 朱子治家格言 (*Master Zhu's Maxims to Manage the Family*) and refers to one of the Ming dynasty's most representative family precepts written by educational scholar Zhu Bolu 朱柏庐 (1617-1688; Zhu 1997: 32; Li 2013: 135; see also chapter 5.3).

<sup>447</sup> Field observation: Suzhou Study Hall A, November 12, 2015; Beijing Academy B, January 21, 2016.

<sup>448</sup> Field observation: Beijing Study Hall, January 23, 2016.

<sup>449</sup> In public schools, physical punishment is prohibited according to China's Law of Compulsory Education. For private homes, violence is prohibited, but not explicitly corporal punishment. (See: Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children: "Country Report for China. Current legality of corporal punishment". Online: <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/country-reports/China.pdf>, last access: December 12, 2018).

<sup>450</sup> Field observations: Guangzhou Study Hall, May 4, 2016; Beijing Academy B, January 21, 2016.

study hall or academy where such practice is common. Guangzhou Study Hall's "Parental Agreement" contains ten items which parents have to agree to:

- 1) Acceptance of the educational ideal of the study hall;
- 2) Trust in the study hall;
- 3) Respect for the teachers;
- 4) Have constant faith in the study hall and its educative undertaking;
- 5) Send one's children to the study hall for long-term studying and bear in mind that study success is not immediately visible;
- 6) Truly love one's children; this meant to support the teachers in their ways of sanction and punishment;
- 7) Cooperate with the study hall; this meant to listen to the teachers;
- 8) Not clinging to the child, putting oneself at rest, and allowing for the child to get used to the lifestyle in the study hall;
- 9) Payment of full fees for the study hall; reductions are for parents who are also teachers;
- 10) Acceptance of the study hall's lifestyle; this meant to stay away from too many considerations of material conditions of the study hall and interference in the way of life which was focused on the classics.<sup>451</sup>

In an explanatory article on the items of the parental agreement, the headmaster of Guangzhou Study Hall further explains what "cooperation with the study hall" means in detail:

Another aspect is very important: the issue of method. My own study hall practices physical punishment. In Guangzhou, everybody knows that [Guangzhou Study Hall] is comparatively strict, and that the teachers look quite mean. The headmaster [*referring to himself*] might be smiling, but the teachers are very mean. Last month, another headmaster said: 'One of your students changed to our study hall.' I said, 'Very good that he came to you.' He said, 'They said that [Guangzhou Study Hall] was very strict', but afterwards, the headmaster said, 'We need to be stricter.' All people who run a study hall think this way. Of course, we don't recommend physical punishment, and I don't support to punish children randomly, but we also can't be like those people who say, 'one can absolutely not use physical punishment,' 'one has to do it like this and that,' 'one has to encourage children and explain things to the children,' and only tend to this one side. Actually, such methods are not steady. If you really treat a child like your own child, sometimes you beat it, scold it, and even use all kinds of methods; that is all fair and reasonable. Because this way, you will for sure have a grip on them.<sup>452</sup>

Signing the parental convention means allowing teachers to use physical punishment and granting the study hall priority in setting the way of life for one's own children. In this special

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<sup>451</sup> Material received from the headmaster of Guangzhou Study Hall, May 5, 2016. The parental agreement is issued by the headmaster of Guangzhou Study Hall and has been published and circulated on the social media platform WeChat in 2016.

<sup>452</sup> Translated material from field work, Guangzhou Study Hall, May 4, 2016. The article is on the headmaster's know-how of running a study hall in which he elaborates on the study halls' "Ten Clauses of the Parental Convention." For privacy protection, the original title of the article is not stated.

Both materials can be requested via the author of this study.

case, teachers and parents do not appear in complementary roles as has been pointed out before. Parents are also under the teacher's command.

Beijing Study Hall also only accepts children whose parents agree to children's punishment in case of disobedience. The headmaster states that they would not slap the children randomly but on the heart of the hand (*shouxin* 手心) which would hurt but it was good for the child – it is supposed to give inner strength. In addition to that, each teacher had to keep a procedure for cases of punishment: teachers needed to remind the child to behave correctly first; if the child would still disobey after three reminders, punishment was allowed. The headmaster considers slapping as important measurement within child education; the worst-case scenario in the study hall was slapping the child on the bottom.<sup>453</sup> Xiamen Study Hall A supports physical punishment in education and promotes it among parents. During a parent-teacher conference in October 2015, the headmaster invited a woman trained in Chinese traditional medicine to show some traditional massage techniques for children. She confirmed that from the perspective of Chinese doctors, slapping the child does not do any harm to its overall health condition.<sup>454</sup>

Central position in class, embodiment of the heritage of ancient masters, respect, strictness, and a *jiechi* – the teacher in study halls and academies seems harsh and authoritarian. However, not all classics reading facilities value all these aspects in their teachers. Some teachers might demand certain strictness and require the students to behave according to classroom rules and manage their work packages in reciting the classics, but that is not unique for classics reading education. As mentioned before, some headmasters want their teachers to use physical punishment, others deliberately distance themselves from this; some headmasters value the central position and the traditional institution of the teacher itself and require the students to show respect, but they do neither value strictness nor punishment. However, in the context of classics reading education, several facets that are linked to the traditional position of the teacher reemerge and are justified over this linkage to the traditional past. Depending on the individual teaching practice in the respective facilities, authority structures and methods of punishments from the past can be brought back in cultural disguise, being hidden in the much-welcomed revival of traditional teaching techniques.

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<sup>453</sup> Conversation with the headmaster, Beijing Study Hall, January 23, 2016.

<sup>454</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Hall A, October 14, 2015.

## 5.2.2 – IMPLEMENTATION OF RULES IN CLASS

As mentioned before (chapter 5.1.3), the classics are recited while the learner follows the text with the forefinger, pointing to each single character and focusing on it to fully absorb it. It has to be the right hand's forefinger which points to the character and the left hand which holds the book while reading.<sup>455</sup> In addition to that, the overall body posture is defined by rules in a way that was most beneficial for reading the classics. In Chengdu Study Hall, such rules are called “the Six Treasures of Studying”:

TABLE 6: RULES FOR CLASS, CHENGDU STUDY HALL<sup>456</sup>

读书六宝	Six Treasures of Studying:
一、 心到，收心，静心	1. The mind is settled in the present, your mind is focused, your mind is at ease.
二、 坐端正，背挺直	2. You sit upright, and your back is straight.
三、 手指字，一个字一个字指清楚	3. Your hand points to the characters, you point to each and every single character clearly.
四、 眼睛看书，看手指的字	4. The eyes are reading, reading the characters which the finger point to.
五、 嘴巴跟着老师念	5. The mouth reads along with the teacher.
六、 坚持	6. Be persistent.

Basically, these rules point out in which mental and physical condition the student needs to be to adequately read the classics. Reading involves body posture, finger and eye movement along the characters, and the voice that recites what the teacher reads out loud. This has to be kept up during all classes. Xiamen Study Hall B has put up similar rules at the wall; every student in class has to know them. When the teachers observe that the students loose concentration or body tension, they point to the rules with a *jiechi* and let the children recite the rules to remind them of how to position themselves in the room.<sup>457</sup> The rules read as follows:

TABLE 7: RULES FOR CLASS, XIAMEN STUDY HALL B<sup>458</sup>

<i>zuozheng shenzhi jiao fang ping</i> 坐正身直 脚放平，	Sit straight, the body is upright, the feet are flat on the ground;
<i>zhuaxin zhizhi kai zhihui</i> 专心致志开智慧，	with whole-hearted concentration open up the wisdom;
<i>yi shou fu shu yi shou zhi</i> 一手扶书一手指，	one hand supports the book, one hand points;
<i>mu sui shou zhi xin jian ji</i> 目随手指心间记，	the eyes follow the finger, and in the mind, it is

<sup>455</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Hall A, October 14, 2015.

<sup>456</sup> Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016.

<sup>457</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Hall B, October 27, 2015.

<sup>458</sup> Xiamen Study Hall B, October 26, 2015.

*lingdu gendū qī sòngdū* 领读跟读齐诵读，

*shēngyīn hōngliàng qìxī yūn* 声音洪亮气息匀，  
*zhèng jǐ zì lǜ mò guān xián* 正己自律莫管闲，

*yī xīn zhī dú shèngxián shū* 一心只读圣贤书”

imprinted;

when leading or following in reading, and when reading in joint sing-sang;

the voice is loud and clear, the breath goes even; straighten and discipline yourself, don't be concerned with the idle;

only and whole-heartedly read the books of the sages.

Concerning the students' physical set-up, these rules are even more precise than those in Chengdu Study Hall. Each body part has its right position and its role in the process; right posture comes with the right attitude and enables the person to absorb wisdom. Straighten the self physically almost appears as the visible counterpart of straightening the self morally; being internally upright must be matched with an external upright body posture. Movements of eyes and the forefinger have to be in concert, as well as voice and breath. Concentration is to be placed on the classics only; behavior like pondering on other thoughts, wandering off with the eyes, or letting the body posture fall sloppy is not in line with a proper classics reading attitude – in theory. In practice, the children strive towards the implementation of these rules, but they do not sit at their desks immovable and read. Crucial within the rules for reading the classics is the balanced relation between body and mind.

Xiamen Study Hall A uses a similar set of rules:

TABLE 8: RULES FOR CLASS, XIAMEN STUDY HALL A <sup>459</sup>

***Dūjīng guīfān*** 读经规范

*zuòzhèng shēnzhī jiǎo fāng píng* 坐正身直脚放平，

*zhuānxīn zhìzhì kāi zhìhuì* 专心致志开智慧，  
*yī shǒu fú shū yī shǒu zhī* 左手扶书右手指，  
*mù suí shǒu zhī xīn jiān jī* 目随手指心间记，

*ěr tīng CD kǒu fù sòng* 耳听 CD 口复诵

*shēngyīn hōngliàng chuān qiānlǐ* 声音洪亮传千里

*yǎn'ěr bùwén tārén shì* 眼耳不闻他人事

*yī xīn zhī dú shèngxián shū* 一心只读圣贤书”

**Classics reading Rules**

Sit straight, the body is upright, the feet are flat on the ground;

with whole-hearted concentration open up the wisdom; the left hand supports the book, the right hand points; the eyes follow the finger, and in the mind, it is imprinted;

the ear listens to the CD and the mouth repeats it rhythmically;

the voice is loud and clear and can be heard over a thousand miles (*lǐ* 里);

eyes and ears are blind and deaf to other people's matters;

you solely and whole-heartedly read the books of the sages.

<sup>459</sup> Xiamen Study Hall A, October 14, 2015.

Physical requirements are prescribed in the same manner as in Xiamen Study Hall B, but Xiamen Study Hall A also mentions studying along recorded readings on CD. While in Xiamen Study Hall B the rules are referred to in context of teaching, Xiamen Study Hall A requires a daily joint recitation of the rules directly after the Confucius ceremony in the morning. The ceremony takes place every morning and lasts half an hour; instruction on proper behavior and rules is tightly connected with the ritual. Outer appearance needs to be neat for the ritual; proper shoes or socks in slippers were required; no naked feet are allowed to point at Confucius. For the ceremony, students and teachers gather in the assembly hall in front of the Confucius image in a square so that everyone can see. Instrumental music is played in the background. The ceremony is not performed together, but group by group according to age: first of all, the teachers (or when guests are present: all adults) step in front of the Confucius image, stand properly with feet closed and hands folded in front of the stomach (for women: right hand over left hand). The headmaster starts the ceremony by saying, “Thank you 3,000 years old Master Confucius for your wisdom.” The folded hands are taken up to the forehead and the group in front of the Confucius image bows until the headmaster demands to get up again. The second bow is to thank Master Confucius for his guidance in life. The headmaster demands everybody to rise. Then the hands go to the mouth, the chin, and then the heart and the ritual is done. Everybody has to step backwards, using the right foot first, turning right, and then go back into the square of the others. A group of children at advanced age follows the teacher’s group, and the youngest children perform their ritual at the very end (IMG. 40, annex p. 328). When the students perform the ritual, it is usually one student who guides through the ceremony, just as the headmaster does it for the adults. After everybody bowed to the Master, the little girl who led the ceremony takes off her shoes, climbs on a chair in front of Confucius, her back directed to Confucius, folds her hands on her back, puts on a serious face and then recites the rules for the study hall which everybody repeats in chorus (IMG. 41, annex p. 328). Confucius is, again, referred to in context of proper conduct with a touch of discipline in this singular case.<sup>460</sup>

In addition to the classics reading rules, Xiamen Study Hall B also displays rules for proper social interaction in the study hall which are partly drawn from classical sources of rules for children and students:

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<sup>460</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Hall A, October 14, 2015.



TABLE 9: RULES FOR SOCIAL CONDUCT, XIAMEN STUDY HALL B<sup>461</sup>

学员力行班规	Students' class rules which are to be practiced with earnestness
1. 遇见长辈或老师主动问好。	1. When meeting an older family member or a teacher, one has to take the initiative and salute them.
2. 老师、家长打电话或处理事务时，不打扰。 (人不闲 勿事挡 人不安 勿话扰 <sup>462</sup> )	2. When teachers and parents are on the phone or have things to do, one does not disturb them. (When people are busy and fully engaged, don't trouble them with your own business. When people are troubled and agitated, don't talk to them and disturb them.)
3. 师长上下课，必起立致敬；向师长质疑问难，必起立或举手。	3. When teachers start and end classes, one has to get up and pay respect; when one wants to ask the teacher a question, one has to stand up or raise the hand.
4. 坐立必正，行走须轻声缓步，不影响他人。 (步从容 立端正 <sup>463</sup> )	4. When sitting, one has to sit straight; when walking, one has to walk with slow and silent steps to avoid disturbance of others. (The walk is calm; the standing posture is upright.)
5. 读书时，不抢读，每文必指。	5. When reading, don't rush it; one has to point to each character.
6. 看见同学有不良行为，先提醒并帮助对方改正；不得已时再报告老师。 (多道人善 勿扬人恶)	6. When a fellow student's bad behavior is observed, one has at first remind and support the other to do things right; it is only to be reported to the teacher when there is no other way. (Talk more about people's goodness and don't point out people's bad sides.)
7. 赞扬别人的优点，虚心学习别人的长处。 (人有短 切莫揭 人有私 切莫说 道人善 即是善 扬人恶 即是恶 见人善 即思齐 见人恶 即内省 <sup>464</sup> )	7. Praise others' strong points and humbly learn from others' good qualities. (When someone has a shortcoming, don't lay it bare; when someone has a private matter [or: a secret], don't talk about it; when talking about people's goodness, then it's good; when pointing out people's bad sides, then it's bad; when seeing that people are good, then consider to be alike; when seeing that people are bad, examine yourself.)
8. 喝水、看书、去用餐、上洗	8. When you drink water, read, go to eat and go to toilet, proceed in

<sup>461</sup> Xiamen Study Hall B, October 26, 2015.

<sup>462</sup> Citation from the *Rules for Disciples (Dizigui 弟子规)*, *Fan Ai Zhong 泛愛眾*, 6.6. Chinese Text Project ctext, online: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=618693&remap=gb> (last access: November 25, 2018).

<sup>463</sup> Citation from the *Rules for Disciples (Dizigui 弟子规)*, *Jin 谨*, 4.8. Chinese Text Project ctext, online: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=94604&remap=gb> (last access: November 25, 2018).

<sup>464</sup> Citation from the *Rules for Disciples (Dizigui 弟子规)*, *Fan Ai Zhong 泛愛眾*, 6.7 to 6.9 [without the second halves of the sentences 6.8 and 6.9], and *Xin 信*, 5.8 and 5.9 [without the second halves of the sentences 5.8 and 5.9]. Chinese Text Project ctext, online: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=618693&remap=gb> / <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=618693&remap=gb> (last access: November 25, 2018).

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| <p>手间时，按次序进行，不争不抢。讲规则，有道义。</p> <p>9. 不在房间内玩促迷藏游戏；不踩地板，不追赶打闹。</p> <p>10. 受物必谢，鞠躬必敬。拜孔则庄重不语。</p> <p>11. 不挑食。<br/>(对饮食 勿拣择 食适可 勿过则<sup>465</sup>)</p> <p>12. 用人物，须明求，倘不问，即为偷。<sup>466</sup></p> <p>13. 做完功课，收拾好书籍文具；衣被、鞋子自己整理。学会照顾幼小同学。<br/>(列典籍 有定处 读看毕 还远处 置冠服 有定位 勿乱顿 致污秽)</p> <p>14. 保护好自己的人身安全：不与人打闹，不到危险的地方玩耍。<br/>(身有伤 殆亲忧 斗闹场 绝勿近 邪僻事 绝勿问<sup>467</sup>)</p> <p>15. 学会文明用语“请、谢谢、对不起、没关系”；远离秽污词。说好话如口吐莲花，说坏话如口吐毒蛇。</p> <p>16. 正己育人，厚德利生。</p> | <p>order, don't argue and don't rush. Stick to the rules and moral principles.</p> <p>9. Don't play hide-and-seek inside, don't stamp on the floor, and don't chase each other around.</p> <p>10. When you get something, you have to say, 'thank you,' when someone bows to you, you have to repay that with respect [and bow back]. When you worship Confucius, be serious and don't speak.</p> <p>11. Don't be picky with the food.<br/>(Don't be picky with things you eat and drink; when you have eaten enough, don't be excessive [and eat even more].)</p> <p>12. When using other people's things, one first has to ask if it is okay; when you don't ask, it's stealing.</p> <p>13. When you have finished your tasks, clean up your books and pencils; you have to tidy up clothes, blankets and shoes by yourself. Learn how to take care of your younger classmates.<br/>(When lining up the ancient books, they have their fix spots; when being ready with reading, put them back to their original place; when putting your clothes in order, there is a fix space for everything; don't place things randomly and risk that they get dirty.)</p> <p>14. Keep your own physical safety: don't quarrel and fight noisily with others, don't play in dangerous places.<br/>(When you/ your body gets hurt, it causes your parents to worry. [...])<br/>Keep away from places where trouble is easily met; keep away from bad things and don't (curiously) ask about them.)</p> <p>15. Learn civilized language, such as 'please, thank you, sorry, it's alright;' stay away from filthy words. Speaking good words is as if the mouth would be spitting lotus flowers; speaking bad words is like the mouth is spitting snake poison.</p> <p>16. Straighten yourself and teach others; strong virtue benefits life.</p> |
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These rules cover everyday life in the study hall; rules for tidying up, talking with each other, behavior in class and with other people in the study hall, especially with fellow students, are at the core. Six of the rules are taken (sometimes with little alternations, see footnotes) from a

<sup>465</sup> Citation from the *Rules for Disciples (Dizigui 弟子规)*, Jin 谨, 4.6. Chinese Text Project ctext, online: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=94604&remap=gb> (last access: November 25, 2018).

<sup>466</sup> Citation from the *Rules for Disciples (Dizigui 弟子规)*, Jin 谨, 4.16. Chinese Text Project ctext, online: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=94604&remap=gb> (last access: November 25, 2018).

<sup>467</sup> Citation from the *Rules for Disciples (Dizigui 弟子规)*, Jin 谨, 4.13. Chinese Text Project ctext, online: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=94604&remap=gb> (last access: November 25, 2018).

Qing dynasty elementary teaching book for children, the *Rules for Disciples* (compare Ji 2018: 62f.). This teaching material focuses on proper conduct for crucial interpersonal relations with parents, teachers and classmates – just as the rules in Xiamen Study Hall B do. Children are advised to control their conduct and body movements in a way that avoids disturbance of grown-ups elder, to respectfully salute (bow to) grown-ups, and to take good care of one’s own body to prevent parents from worrying. Even though the *Rules for Disciples* are not within the canon of classics within Wang Caigui’s classics reading approach, they are a part of classics reading education for several people: Xiamen Study Hall A occasionally recites the work,<sup>468</sup> Xiamen Study Hall B has adopted parts of it within their study hall rules, and the Lujiang Cultural Center which hosts classics reading activities for moral education only teaches the *Rules for Disciples* (Dutournier / Ji 2009: 67f., 71, 74).

Suzhou Study Hall A combines rules for reading the classics and for proper behavior in class within a “Classroom Routine”:

TABLE 10: RULES FOR CLASS, SUZHOU STUDY HALL A<sup>469</sup>

教师常规	Classroom Routine
一、 读书	I. Studying
1、 大声诵读，必须读出声音，吐字清楚。	1. Read out loudly; your reading voice needs to be audible and you have to pronounce the characters clearly.
2、 必须指字，精神集中，指字准确。	2. You have to point to the characters, concentrate your spirit, and point to the characters correctly.
3、 坐必直身正体，不得仰斜。座椅不得移动，不得离开地面。	3. Sitting needs an upright and straight body position, don’t turn or lean sideways. Don’t move the seat or lift it up from the ground.
4、 读书务必专心。由老师统一安排上厕所、喝水的时间。	4. Studying has to be done whole-heartedly and concentrated. Teachers organize the time when everyone can go to toilet and drink water.
二、 行为	II. Behavior
5、 在室内不跑动、不喧哗，须轻声细语，不扰旁人。	5. No running and up roaring in class; you have to speak softly and avoid disturbing the person next to you.
6、 下课时将书本合上至于书架，摆放端正在书桌正中位置。爱护书本，没有掉业折页污损等情况，如意外造成破损，需及时修补。	6. After class, the books go back on the bookshelf or are arranged neatly in the middle of your desk. Take care of the books to avoid damage like torn out or wrinkled pages. If a book is damaged by accident, repair it immediately.
7、 下课后将书本摆放端正，椅子放入桌肚。	7. After class, the desk is arranged in proper condition, the stool is put under the table.
8、 其他与上课无关物品不得带入教室。	8. Other things that have no relation to classes are not allowed to be taken into the classroom.

<sup>468</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Hall A, October 14, 2015.

<sup>469</sup> Suzhou Study Hall A, November 12, 2015.

三、 卫生	III. Hygiene
9、 自觉保持教室内外卫生，废弃物丢进垃圾桶，课桌椅上及周围地面需无杂物。	9. Take care of the classroom's cleanliness by yourself, throw trash in the trash can, and don't put anything on desk, chair and the surrounding floor.
10、 喝水杯按照年龄排列整齐，杯子把手置于同一端方便拿取。	10. Water cups are lined up the order of your age, the handles of the cups point in the same direction to facilitate taking and returning them.
11、 每日中午值日，包含清扫地面、擦拭桌面、检查物品摆放情况。	11. Every day at noon, the daily duties include sweeping the floor, wiping the desks clean, and checking if things are arranged neatly.
12、 教室内物品如水箱、灯具、桌椅等，如有损坏情况，及时报告。	12. If classroom equipment like the water tank, the lights, desks, chairs etc. is broken, it has to be reported immediately.
13、 节约水电，最后离开教室的同学关灯。	13. Save water and electricity; the students who leave the classroom last shut the lights out.
14、 每两周一次大扫除。	14. Every two weeks, there is a large clean up.

Concentrated studying, proper behavior, and preserving a clean environment are the three pillars of being a good student in Suzhou Study Hall A. Study rules are, like the rules already analyzed, basically focused on body posture. Behavior and sanitation rules largely aim at keeping the study hall tidy; there is not much advice on behavior, apart from avoiding disturbing others.

Classroom practice in Suzhou Study Hall A serves as a good example to show how rules are implemented by the teacher and how the body of the learner is disciplined: afternoon class (4:10 pm) has just started after, and children under the age of seven who cannot read Chinese characters yet are about to read *Mencius*. The teacher is sitting in front of the class at her big table, facing the children, having *Mencius* placed in a book holder. Proper conduct and outer appearance is also crucial on the teachers' side in Suzhou Study Hall A: during class, the teachers show a very solemn, serious, strict facial expression, no smile is on the face. Strictness is the core quality of teachers in this study hall. She starts to read out sentences part by part, from comma to comma, and the children jointly repeat what they hear. Students are following the text with the forefinger and looking at the characters while repeating the teacher's reading. A second teacher is in class, walking through the classroom to control where the children place the finger, if they point to the right character, and keep following correctly. If this is not the case, he helps to find the right sentence. If the children's backs are not straight enough, the teacher also corrects their sitting position by pushing gently against the back; the respective child would straighten up upon this gesture. The teacher who is in charge of the class and sitting in front of it reading for the students is equipped with a *jiechi*. When the attention of individual students ceases – the eyes wander around, there is no participation in recitation, the finger does not follow the text – the main teacher uses it to

knock on her desk loudly which get the students attention to the present situation. It is like a reminder to pay attention to what is going on in class. If the main teacher does not see any improvement upon his or her reminder, he or she stops recitation, looks at the student and points out in front of the whole class who did a bad performance in reading.

A little girl did not perform well because she did not pay attention to the teacher. She was demanded to stand at the corner of a table in the front table row in class and continue her recitation from there, being under close surveillance of the teacher. During further reading, she did not improve her attitude and had to step back from the table towards the corner of the classroom and stand still as a punishment (*fazhan* 罚站). She stopped reciting with the others completely, holding her book and only looking at the teacher. The second teacher in class took the girl by her arm to drag her into the corner behind a wooden room partition – after a short while, the girl’s crying was audible, so the main teacher raised her voice and continued with the reading, starting to sway rhythmically in her chair from one side to another, following the rhythm of her reading voice – and the student’s attention would stick with her reading. When the girl returned to her place, not crying anymore, she followed the recitation again, and the second teacher would sometimes stop next to her, listening to and controlling her reading. At the end of class, the leading teacher asks the children to stand up (*qili* 起立). The children stood up, faced both teachers in front of the class, and bowed to them (*jugong* 鞠躬), saying “Thank you, teachers, for your efforts” (*xiexie laoshi* 谢谢老师, *laoshi xinku le* 老师辛苦了). The teacher replied with a bow saying, “Everybody worked hard” (*dajia xinku le* 大家辛苦了). After that, the students turned to the image of Confucius which is placed at the wall in front of the main door of the room, bow to him and thank him, too.<sup>470</sup>

Incentives for good behavior are also given, e.g. in Xiamen Study Hall B: good resolutions are written on a pink sheet of paper, tucked to the back wall of the classroom, as a daily reminder:

*shen zuo hao shi* 身做好事,  
*yan shuo hao zi* 言说好话,  
*xin cun hao nian* 心存好念。

With the body you do good things,  
With the language you form good words,  
In your heart-mind you store good thoughts.

Body, language and the mind work together as a trio; when things are good on all three levels, a person is best cultivated. Students and teachers recite these positive rules on a regular basis. The leading teacher regards the constant repetition as setting the mind to a positive goal:

You have to say good things to others, and frequently do good things, and in your mind, you should think about good things. Then you will be surrounded by positive energy. We don’t tell them [the

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<sup>470</sup> Field observation, Suzhou Study Hall A, November 12, 2015.

children] a lot about principles, but we tell stories, watch film clips, and do a little bit of guidance on our sides, including practice a few sayings. You don't need to explain, because they don't understand. But if you read sayings on a daily basis, with the time, they will develop a pattern. For example, after class we say, 'Smile at others and be strict with yourself.' When you encounter other people, you've got to smile and be tolerant. But with yourself, you've got to be neat and strict, you've got to be reserved, and improve yourself. Of course, children don't necessarily achieve it, and neither do we grown-ups. But if you say it every day, say it every day, the child will have guidance, and there is an aim in your mind. You can strive towards a positive direction.<sup>471</sup> (Leading teacher of Xiamen Study Hall B)

In the perspective of long-term results, teachers make sure that students are in the proper condition to absorb the classics and be cultivated by hearing, reciting, reading, and touching the words of the sages. They make sure that both body and mind are in proper dispositions and work together so that the learner can be cultivated in a balanced and wholesome manner. Disciplinary force by the teacher does not only have to come in shape of punishments and strictness; rules towards positivity also an incentive for correct behavior. Discipline is, in this sense, not to be confused with negative pressure and enforcement; at the basis, it first and foremost means a regulation of the self – as foundation for cultivation. The importance of the teacher in this process is underlined by the central position in class, the respect ritual at the end of class which takes place in connection with Confucius and the disciplinary role in the implementation of proper classroom routine. Co-presence with somebody higher in hierarchy is a force that drives people to discipline (Valentine 2001: 15); a teacher who is visually and spiritually empowered by the described elements works as a force to discipline students. Under surveillance of the teacher, there is more self-discipline. Rules, regulations and rituals in class are frameworks to control students and limit their scope of action to correct behavior. In some cases, it has been shown that deviations from ideal conduct and behavior are punished by the teacher; such prospects add on self-discipline.

### 5.2.3 – SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: BODY AND MIND IN BALANCE

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Within classics reading education, physical exercise serves as physical support of mental efforts in studying the classics. All visited study halls and academies have a daily program of physical activity of at least 30 minutes duration. Beijing Academy B is the only exception; children would usually go for a run or play basketball on the academy grounds once a week, but in the winter, they rarely do sports because it is too cold outside; a substitution is an

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<sup>471</sup> “你要对别人说一些好话，就是经常做好事，然后你心里要想一些好的东西，然后你身边才会有饶一些好的...正面的能量在你身边。这就是说，我们道理不会跟他讲很多，不过我们会讲故事，或者看片子，然后会做一点点的引导，包括我们会说一些话语啊。你也不用跟他讲，因为他也听不懂。但是你天天念语言的，他是有按时型的。比如说，我们下课的时候就会念，“微笑待人庄严自己”。就是，你对待别人的时候要微笑，你要宽容一点。但是你对自己的时候要整齐庄严，你要内敛，去把自己要做好。当然也他不一定能做到，当然我们大人也不一定能做到。但是你如果天天在念，天天在念，他会有一个导向，心里会想有一个目的在这边。你可以朝向一个正确的方向走。”(XM15005)

indoors martial arts class every Tuesday.<sup>472</sup> Beijing Academy A also offers running; in Guangzhou Study Hall, students exercise but without a specific concept behind it; it is not clear in how far it can count as (supportive) sports program. Eye training and small exercises in class are not part of a designated sports program but are occasionally integrated into class routine. Shenzhen Study Hall B even offers an all-encompassing Qigong 气功 program to keep the children's bodies healthy.

Most facilities offer a traditionally rooted set of exercises in the field of martial arts (*daquan* 打拳), meditation, and traditional gymnastics, whereas martial arts are most common in the visited study halls and academies.<sup>473</sup> Martial arts are performed either in the morning or the afternoon. Both time slots have their justification in the partition of the day in imperial China: according to Wang Caigui's assistant, the late morning (around 9:30 a.m.) and the afternoon (around 3:00 or 4:00 p.m.) are the most suitable time slots for sports or physical activity. In ancient China, one day comprised 12 hours,<sup>474</sup> and people used to be very specific about the usages of each hour in terms of when to be active and when to rest: at noon (between 12:00 and 2:00 p.m.) and in the evening (around 8:00 p.m.) one should rest; sports and activities should be done in a time slot which is not designated resting time. This way, one would follow the natural conditions of the human being's body.<sup>475</sup>

Places for doing sports vary a lot. Only Shenzhen Study Hall A and Guangzhou Study Hall have a sports field close by; all other facilities use space which is available comfortably: Xiamen Study Hall B does martial arts on the terrace, Wenli Study Hall uses free space in front of the study hall, and Suzhou Study Hall A uses the parking lot at the study hall's front entrance (IMG. 45, annex p. 330). In Xiamen, children start into their kindergarten day with martial arts, while in Taishun and Suzhou children would already have completed two morning study sessions when they would jointly engage in martial arts. Students wear regular clothes and even jackets during these sessions; they do not change into sports outfits or clothes in which they can move better. Training is aimed at physical balance and inner strength; martial arts are an opportunity for the students to move their bodies in between long seating sessions. Shenzhen Study Hall A, for example, teaches *Xinyi Liuhe Quan* 心意六合拳, a system of martial arts that has its origin in Song dynasty. It used to be part of the Song army's ancient warfare technique; increasing both the strength of physical condition (*liliang*

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<sup>472</sup> Conversation with the headmaster, Beijing Academy B, January 21, 2016.

<sup>473</sup> Field observation: Shenzhen Study Hall A, Shenzhen Study Hall B, Xiamen Study Hall B, Beijing Study Hall, Beijing Academy A, Beijing Academy B, Chengdu Study Hall, Wenli Academy, Wenli Study Hall.

<sup>474</sup> The modern hour in China (60 min.) is only half of the duration of the ancient hour (120 min.) which is why "one hour" is today called "xiaoshi 小时", a "small hour". The original hour *shi* 时 is 120 min. long.

<sup>475</sup> Conversation with Wang's assistant, Wenli Academy, December 8, 2015.

力量) and physical power (*liqi* 力气); it served the purpose of self-defense.<sup>476</sup> Xiamen Study Hall B practices *Baguazhang* 八卦掌 (lit. “eight trigram palm”), a martial arts style allocated to *Neijiaquan* 内家拳, the so-called “inner boxing” which does not aim at increasing muscular force (*li* 力) but inner strength (*jing* 劲).<sup>477</sup> Traditional learning of the classics is accompanied by performance of traditional physical exercise; both literacy (*Wen*) and physical force (*Wu*) are combined in traditional learning in many study halls and academies.

Another physical activity with traditional roots is the set of gymnastics called *Baduanjin* (lit. “eight pieces of brocade,” meaning “eight fine exercises”)<sup>478</sup>, performed in Beijing Academy A and Beijing Study Hall. *Baduanjin* is a version of the gymnastic and therapeutic technique *dao yin* 导引 which means “guiding and pulling.”

‘Guiding and pulling’ is a set of gymnastic techniques aimed to let *\*qi* [气] properly circulate, expel pathogenic *qi*, heal certain diseases, keep old age away, and nourish life (*\*yangsheng* [养生]). They are performed in an upright, sitting, or reclining position, and can be combined with ingestion of breath (*\*fuqi* [服气]), abstention from cereals (*\*bigu* [辟谷]), massage, and visualization. (Despeux 2008a: 334)

In Beijing Study Hall, students exercise *Baduanjin* in the morning breaks after two sessions of studying the classics in the assembly hall in front of a Confucius image. They are standing upright and bring their bodies in different training positions which are beneficial for their overall condition and the circulation of energy (*qi*). Other practices like abstention from certain foods or massaging are not included. Exercising is placed in the break between study sessions; activity in the break facilitates concentration and physical discipline the subsequent study sessions.

Beijing Academy A has chosen a set of *Baduanjin* exercise to conclude the teachers’ morning reading session of the *Analects*. Parents and teachers are also learners in study halls and academies. In Beijing Academy A, teachers’ learning takes place on a regular basis: every day before classes between 6 and 6:30 am, teachers gather at a table in the room which is partly conference and partly teachers’ room to jointly recite the *Analects*; the headmaster also participates. Usually one sentence is recited in varying recitation speeds during the 30 minutes session. The headmaster’s assistant uses a laptop to play an audio of the respective sentence (recorded in different speeds of reading); teachers listen to it and recite what they had just

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<sup>476</sup> Conversation with the headmaster’s husband, Shenzhen Study Hall A, December 29, 2015.

<sup>477</sup> See also Despeux 2008c: 933.

<sup>478</sup> An explanation of the movements are given in the *Ten Books of the Cultivation of Perfection* (*Xiuzhen shishu* 修真十书; Despeux 2008a: 334–336), comprised of 60 scrolls which have been collected between the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> century. Texts on these scrolls, though, date back to the period between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the writings are attributed to Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾 (1194–1229?), a Daoist scholar of Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) and his circles (Skar 2008a: 203f.; 2008b: 1118).



heard. The record is simultaneously played online – via the internet, “*Analects* fellow students” (*Lunyu tongxue* 论语同学) can participate in the session from anywhere. In the second part of the session, an explanation of the recited sentence is played: an audio record of the headmaster’s explanation of what the sentence means. Even though the headmaster is present, and he could have led the session personally, the recorded version is used for joint learning; the headmaster is also a learner and reflects on what he commented before. After the reading, the teachers get up and stretch their bodies in different *Baduanjin* exercise positions to influence the body energy positively. While the mind (or spirit) is shaped by the *Analects*, the body is shaped by gymnastics. The overall goal of this study section is neither to prepare for class nor to gather knowledge on the classics, but to engage in joint self-cultivation by gradually shaping the mind and the body in a balanced way.<sup>479</sup>

Shenzhen Study Hall B is a special case concerning considerations on mind-body-balance. The headmaster used to be a Qigong teacher. Falun Gong is a spiritual practice using Qigong practices, towards which the authorities in China became skeptical at the end of the 1990s when Falun Gong groups separated from the state-run China Qigong Science Research Society (CQRS; *Zhongguo Qigong Kexue Yanjiuhui* 中国气功科学研究会) which used to oversee Qigong practices since their flourishing in the 1980s.<sup>480</sup> In 1999, the Qigong school in which the headmaster used to work closed; only seven people remained with the teacher of the closed school to continue to practice Qigong, and the later headmaster of Shenzhen Study Hall B was one of them. When her son was born in 2001, she sought for a good educational concept when, after studying Rousseau, Montessori and Japanese education, she finally decided for Chinese tradition as best educational approach. She opened her own study hall dedicated to both Chinese tradition and Qigong practices. This is perceivable immediately when entering the study hall: there is no classics reading recitation or classical music played in the background, but a continuous knocking sound: the knocking on a Buddhist wood fish (*muyu* 木鱼) which can also be heard in temples. It is supposed to help concentration (*shouxin* 收心) – to literally gather the mind in each moment of knocking. In between classes, the children engage in physical activity which deviates from all other visited facilities:

First of all, children are taught to sit in the lotus position (*shuangpan* 双盘) with their legs tied together (if they cannot yet hold the position by themselves) sitting on their chair or a mat on the floor (IMG. 44, annex p. 330). One of the teachers states that there were acupuncture points in the thighs, and the lower positioned foot in the cross-legged position stimulated the acupuncture point on the opposite leg’ thigh. While sitting in the lotus position,

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<sup>479</sup> Field observation, Beijing Academy A, January 18, 2016.

<sup>480</sup> See also Despeux 2008b: 797.

blood circulation was inhibited for a while, and releasing the sitting position also meant to release the blood which then flooded and cleaned the veins. Additionally, when the regular way of blood circulation was blocked, the blood would try to find other ways through the body and thus opened other not so frequently used veins in the body. This was a good training for the legs and prevented the children from later age-related leg problems.

The second physical practice in the study halls is doing squats in front of the wall (*dunqiang* 蹲墙): children would stand in front of the wall, facing the wall, and then squat down along the wall and get back up along the wall; this stretched the spinal column and opened up the point where head and spinal column met – and stimulate the child's intelligence (*kaifa zhili* 开发智力). Squatting is believed to make a child more intelligent (*bijiao congming* 比较聪明) and healthier since exercising worked positively on the immune system.<sup>481</sup> Such exercises are also used as punishment when not having observed the rules; teachers distance themselves from beating and yelling in this study hall. Even though special in the design of physical exercise, Shenzhen Study Hall B also aims at keeping the children in good physical condition to be in balance with a good state the mind – in this case, it means that the child's wisdom opens up.<sup>482</sup>

Meditation and meditative practice are physical exercise in a comparatively calm mode. In Beijing Academy A, Suzhou Study Hall A, Xiamen Study Hall A, and Xiamen Academy, meditative practice (*jingzuo* 静坐; in Xiamen Academy: *jingding xunlian* 静定训练) is common.<sup>483</sup> In Suzhou Study Hall A, it takes place in small sessions of silence before class, and the duration of this practice is prescribed either by the teacher or by the school bell. Students sit quietly for about five minutes to recollect their thoughts and get ready for class. In Xiamen Study Hall A, meditation is a practice in between classes, scheduled between 10:30 and 11:00 am after a short break to eat fruit. The purpose of the 10 minutes meditation is to retain mental tranquility (*yangshen* 养神). Children sit on little mats in the lotus seat, having the eyes closed and the hand put loosely on the lap with palms of the hand upwards and put one above the other. Soft music is played in the background.

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<sup>481</sup> For example, once the red eye disease (*hongyanbing* 红眼病) was brought to the study hall by a child from another kindergarten, and the teacher said that the children who did the most squatting either did not get ill or got well again after only three days. She also added that some children tried to rub the disease into their eyes because when they are sick, they do not have to go to class, but it did not work because their immune systems were too good. She herself did not do any of the squats and fell ill for 20 days (conversation with a teacher, Shenzhen Study Hall B, December 27, 2015). Interestingly, the teachers have quite elaborated ideas on what the children should do but do not apply these rules for themselves.

<sup>482</sup> Field observation and conversation with a teacher, Shenzhen Study Hall B, December 27, 2015.

<sup>483</sup> Field observations: Beijing Academy A, January 20, 2016; Suzhou Study Hall A, November 13, 2015; Xiamen Study Hall A, October 14, 2015; XM16001.

Two headmasters consider reading the classics itself as a form of meditation: the headmaster of Shenzhen Study Hall C compares classics reading practice to recitation of the Buddhist classics (*Fojing* 佛经) which had a meditative character. In the process of recitation, one did not need to apply logic thinking (*luoji sikao* 逻辑思考); words would just pass by in the course of recitation.<sup>484</sup> Similarly, the headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall B compares her students with Buddhist monks (*Fojiao de heshang* 佛教的和尚) who recite Buddhist classics in a meditative repetition which would set them in a spiritual disposition similar to that in meditation (*mingxiang* 冥想) or yoga (*yujia* 愈加). Reading the classics provided the students with a calm disposition (*anxialai* 安下来 or *jingxialai* 静下来) – the basis to gain wisdom.<sup>485</sup> This is similar to the wall squatting in Shenzhen Study Hall B that should open up a crucial spot at the spinal column and make the student receptive for wisdom.

Given the large amounts of readings per day especially within pure classics reading, the students' eyes are heavily in use. For Wang Caigui, successful learning is connected to a healthy body; a good physical condition facilitated the day-long reading. In his own academy, students therefore even train the eyes twice a day at 9:25 am and 5:25 pm shortly before class is over. Study material is put aside, and a girl announces the singular exercises which are about moving the eyes into different directions. She guides her fellow students through the following exercises while counting to eight to define the duration: look up, look down, look to the left, and look to the right. The next step is to let the eyes go in a circle five times to the left, then to the right. After the eyes have been moved into all direction, students rub their hands, cover the eyes with the hands, and then rub the face.<sup>486</sup> This is supposed to relax the eyes and keep them balanced.

Shenzhen Study Hall A has taken over this practice in a slightly modified version. After the first morning lesson (not the warming up reading phase before breakfast) and before the large morning break, the students do eye training, also led by a student. The exercises are to roll the eyes to the right side, roll the eyes to the left side, to open and to close eyes; each exercise lasts as long as it takes the leading student to count to 16. At the end, they put the right hand's forefinger in front of their faces and focus on the fingertip; this time, the girl counts to 30. Then they rub their hands and their faces for a few times. After eye exercises, they stretch arms and the back (while pressing the back straight against the wall) to activate and relax the body.<sup>487</sup> Eyes, arms and backs are the parts of the body which are affected most

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<sup>484</sup> Conversation during field observation, Shenzhen Study Hall C, March 13, 2016.

<sup>485</sup> Conversation with the headmaster, Suzhou Study Hall B, November 17, 2016.

<sup>486</sup> Field observation, Wenli Academy, December 9, 2015.

<sup>487</sup> Field observation, Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 8, 9, and 10, 2015.

by the constant sitting, holding the book and reading, which is why these body parts are addressed and activated regularly. Small exercises in and after class but also martial arts, gymnastics, and meditation are used to keep body and mind in a good balance so that the mind is supported in large reading and learning by a fit body.

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### 5.3. RULES AND RITUALS IN EVERYDAY SCHOOL LIFE

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Study halls and academies have a very tight schedule with reading the classics at the core of everyday life. Lifestyle in these facilities is attuned to the goals of classics reading education. Apart from rules in class, other main areas of living – such as daily social relations, sleeping or resting and eating – are structured with certain rules that have an educational purpose in the course of classics reading education. This simultaneously reflects the tendency towards a traditionally oriented lifestyle in study halls and academies. Rules for good behavior keep up an ideal social texture in which children could learn and understand (through everyday experience) what they should later perform in society; rules for dormitories prevent valuable resting time from exterior disturbance and guide the students’ daily sleeping routine along the ancient hours; rules in hygiene and housework aim at independence; and rules and rituals around food enhance awareness of the efforts behind something as simple but necessary as food. Discipline created through rules and enforced behavior directly link to educational benefits such as understanding, appreciation, gratitude and humbleness; discipline and rules make major contributions to gradual self-cultivation.

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#### 5.3.1 – RULES AS STRUCTURE FOR AN IDEAL SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

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Study halls and academies establish rules in class to secure discipline and optimal conditions for memorizing the classics. Rules are also there to keep up an ideal social environment in which students would learn behavior which would later be carried into society. Especially in day schools where parents stop by daily, headmasters and teachers have an eye on parents’ and visitors’ conduct – it should not impose disturbance on the social environment permeated by respect and politeness. Xiamen Study Hall A, for example, has installed a sign at the entrance to the apartment in which the study hall is located to instruct visitors on a few basic rules:

TABLE 11: VISITOR’S RULES, XIAMEN STUDY HALL A<sup>488</sup>

<p><b>来访须知</b> 为了不影 响老师教学和孩子们的</p>	<p><b>What visitors need to know</b> To avoid that teachers are disturbed in teaching and the children in their</p>
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<sup>488</sup> Xiamen Study Hall A, October 17, 2015.

正常学习与生活，来访者请注意以下六点：

1. 遇有孩子向您礼问好，请正面恭身或颌首还礼。
2. 如需要观摩孩子上课，请站在学堂休息区（距孩子 1 米以外）静默观察、聆听、不触摸孩子。
3. 避免在课室内讨论、考问孩子，以免影响孩子学习。
4. 请勿带宠物、零食、玩具来访。
5. 若携带小孩，请照顾好，勿使小孩嬉戏乱跑，以防碰撞跌伤突生意外。
6. 为了防止流感等疾病传播，请确保身体状况良好时来访。敬请各位理解、支持，感恩！

regular studies and everyday life, visitors need to pay attention to the following six aspects:

1. Should you encounter a child that is greeting you with bowing, please be proactive and greet back by bowing or nodding your head.
  2. If you need to inspect the children in class, please stand in the study hall's resting area (one meter away from the children) and look quietly, listen carefully and do not touch the children.
  3. Do not discuss with the child or ask the child question in the classroom to avoid influencing the other children's learning.
  4. Please don't bring pets, snacks or toys along when you visit.
  5. When you bring small children, please take good care of them, don't let them play and run around, to avoid sudden mishaps such as crashing or falling and getting hurt.
  6. To prevent spreading the flu or other diseases, please make sure that you are in good physical condition when you come for a visit.
- We respectfully ask everybody for understanding and support – we are grateful!

Not only are visitors advised to keep their distance from the children while they are learning, they are also asked to respond to children's salutations (bowing) with the matching gesture of bowing back. This way, the study hall makes sure that behavior learnt in the study hall would be practiced properly at least there.

On the campus of Qufu Academy, reminders on proper movement and behavior are installed for students, teachers and visitors who walk across campus (IMG. 42, IMG. 43, annex p. 329). The guidelines are focused on: walking (or lit. “making steps” *jubu* 举步), looking and listening (*shi ting* 视听), following (*suixing* 随行), going in and out (*churu* 出入), standing (*zhanli* 站立), neat clothes (*zheng yi* 整衣), and language (*yanyu* 言语). The sign on “looking and listening” starts with a citation of the *Analects*, “Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety.”<sup>489</sup> This guideline is further explained on the sign; it advises to not look at people from the side to avoid arousing suspicion and to not eavesdrop on others. A proper way to guide eyes and ears is tightly connected with proper conduct towards other people. Other rules of conduct aimed at proper outer appearance in the categories above work in a similar way: leaving and (re-)entering the house comes with ancient etiquette. When leaving the house, children need to tell their parents where they go and what they do; when they return, they have to go see them again and tell them where they were and what they did; such etiquette is called “*ru mian chu gao* 入面出告” (coming in and facing [the parents], going out and reporting [to the parents]). Such rules also apply for the academy; students need the teachers' permission to go out. Proper walking takes place in a slow and relaxed pace with steps that are not too wide, and one should achieve a slight swing while walking. Clothes might be touching the ground; when stepping over a gap, one has to

<sup>489</sup> “非礼勿视,非礼勿听.”*Analects* 12. 2 (*Yanyuan* 颜渊; Legge 1939 [1893]: 250).

lift up the clothes with both hands to avoid tripping. Jumping along in panic or hurrying in restlessness is described as movement that arouses others' ridicule. However, when encountering people of higher age or position, hurrying forward towards that person would be in order and being slow would be impolite.

There is also etiquette for properly accompanying somebody. When walking with people of higher positions, one should walk behind them while avoiding too large a distance to be able to react swiftly upon questions that might come up. However, one had to look into the same direction as the other person to oversee the situation and avoid that questions needed to be asked in the first place. When the way would go either up or down, one had to support the other, either offering a hand or support the other's back in between the shoulder blades. When meeting somebody on the way, it was appropriate to only exchange a few words and then leave, not forcing the person higher in position to talk with that person for a longer time.

Rules that tackle static situations do not include advice for social interaction. Clothes needed to be in order at all times; one had to always take good care of clothes, avoid their getting dirty during eating, walking or sports; one had to wash them when they are dirty and fix them when they are broke. The method of proper standing is described similar to the proper sitting position in class with the torso being upright, the feet pointing in the same direction, with an overall firmness like a mountain. Rules on proper language deserve a closer look – because learning the classics is very much about acquiring the language of the past, and because rules for self-expression in words are very meticulous:

言语不可轻发，须当缄默为高，即有所言，亦必低声细语，不可鲁莽喧哗。其所言之事，务据实情，不可虚狂。尤不可夸己之长，訾人之端，论世之非，评人曲直。若鄙俚之词，戏谑之说，更宜谨戒，以免招尤。

Language is not to be uttered easily; being reticent should be one's highest ideal. When one has something to say, one has to talk with low voice and whisper, one cannot be rude and rash and noisy. Everything one says needs to be according to the actual situation, one cannot lie. It is especially not allowed to overly praise one's own strong points and criticize other people's extremities, discuss the world's wrongs, and comment on people's right and wrong. When operating with vulgar and despicable words and sayings that are meant to banter with others, one better be prudent and alarmed not to evoke other's grudge.

Rules for self-expression prescribe to focus on positive aspects of people and the world; negative vocabulary and addressing negative things should be avoided – verbal taboos are established. This corresponds with the overall idea to exclude negative or disturbing input from the learning environment and expose children to positive input only. However,

considering that the spoken word within class is already limited to verbal structures of the sages as printed within the classics, such rules are a further limitation of the learner's self-expression. Sentences in a classical language can be reproduced, and positive language is allowed – possibilities to develop deeper, multifaceted and critical thoughts as well as language and expression suitable for oneself are indeed very limited.

Many of the aspect tackled in these rules or guidelines for proper conduct are in accordance with the rules in the classroom and the dorms; being neat and tidy is constantly mentioned in physical discipline. Hierarchy and behavior towards other people (of a higher position) are also topic outside of class. In class, the teacher is the most important person and of high position; outside of the classroom, the spectrum is broader, and the children need to focus on their duties towards these high positioned others. Most striking are the detailed prescriptions for everyday routine in walking around and talking. In class, proper body posture is preparatory for learning – disciplining oneself serves the absorption of the classics. In interaction outside of the class, space is disciplined, too; not only situations with people of higher hierarchy call for special behavior, but regular walking and talking, too. For every routine, there is a proper way to do it; every movement is to be considered carefully. However, some of the descriptions show that the rules cannot be kept in every detail. The guidelines for walking describe people wearing Han clothes: long robes that touch the ground need to be lifted when crossing hindrances. However, Qufu Academy does not have any dress code oriented towards traditional garments in everyday life. The rules are put up as reminders how things work traditionally; the students take them as orientation. They do not need to follow every detail, i.e. they do not need to pull up their non-existing robes when crossing a gap.

These two examples of rules show that life in study halls and academies does not only entail discipline in class, but also regulations in other fields of life. Becoming a morally upright gentleman requires an all-encompassing approach on behavior training, and this extends to all aspects of everyday routine. Assembly halls, dining halls, dormitories, and hallways are all spaces jointly used by teachers and students, and in all these rooms, activity and behavior as it would match the respective educational approach is required.

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### 5.3.2 – ROUTINES OF RESTING HOURS AND ROOM HYGIENE

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Space for living is created according to the children's needs as students. Children are supposed to memorize the classics all day. In the dorms, space is provided for the main purpose of sleeping; individual space is limited on the size of a sleeping mat or a bed. Dorms are used for sleeping, as scheduled, and conduct in dorms counts as integral part of education.

Eating and sleeping is strongly structured. Going to bed early and getting up early – that is something which cannot be achieved at home. Here, we get ready for sleeping at 8:30 pm and switch off the lights at 9:00 pm. At 6:00 am in the morning we get up when it's winter, in the summer it might even be 5:00 am, and then the noon break would be slightly longer.<sup>490</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Study Hall)

Dormitories in study halls and academies (which are boarding schools) look very similar (IMG. 46, IMG. 47, IMG. 48, annex pp. 330-331): (bunk) beds or mats for around six to eight or ten students are placed in one room. Beds are usually very tidy; pillows sit on neatly folded blankets; personal things are stored either in boxes or a shared drawer cabinet in which each child gets a drawer. Part of a good *sishu* education is that children learn to be independent in everyday issues such as keeping their dorm rooms clean. Just as order and silence in class are related to a calm study environment to memorize the classics, tidiness and calmness in the dormitory also keep the time for resting free of disturbances – and make sure that the student is well-rested and prepared for more learning. Beijing Academy B displays such rules in written form at the wall of the classroom next to the entrance to the dorm area.

TABLE 12: RULES FOR THE DOMITORY, BEIJING ACADEMY B<sup>491</sup>

**大班宿舍管理条例**

- 1、宿舍整齐、干净、有序。
- 2、每个宿舍都需要注意集体卫生和个人卫生、保持内务整洁。
- 3、床铺平整，被子叠好，枕头放于叠好的被子上，床铺上不得放除小整理箱以外衣物和杂物。
- 4、整理柜的衣物和杂物摆放整齐。
- 5、床铺下面不得放任何东西。
- 6、鞋子摆放整齐。
- 7、休息期间不许说话和做一点影响休息秩序的事情。
- 8、休息期间不许迟到。
- 9、除休息时间外不许归宿舍，特殊情况者须向老师说明。
- 10、行李箱和整理箱统一放在指定位置。

备注：宿舍管理条例有舍长监督并执行，于每日上下午课间检查，不符合标准者放下记录。

**Rules for Dormitory Management for the Big Class [i.e. for older students]**

1. The dormitory is tidy, clean, and in order.
2. Every dormitory has to pay attention to collective cleanliness and individual hygiene and keep [the room] clean in the daily routine of sanitation tasks.
3. The bed is neat, the blankets are folded, and the pillow is placed on the folded blankets. Apart from the little organizer box, no clothes and other things are to be placed on the bed.
4. Clothes and other things in the drawer cabinet are placed neatly.
5. No things are placed under the bed.
6. Shoes are placed neatly.
7. During breaks, there is no talking; no business that could influence the order of resting is allowed.
8. There is no delay of break time.
9. Apart from the breaks, it is not allowed to return to the dormitories; special situations need to be explained to the teacher.
10. Suitcase and organizing box are to be placed together in a fix spot.

Remarks: The Rules for Dormitory Management for the Big Class are supervised and executed by the head of dormitory; inspection takes place every morning and afternoon in the class breaks; what

<sup>490</sup> “我们的饮食和睡眠都很规律，早睡早起，这点是他们在家里做不到的，在这儿八点半就准备睡觉，九点就准备关灯了，早晨六点钟起床，这是冬天，夏天可能五点中起床，午休时间长一点。” (PK16004)

<sup>491</sup> Beijing Academy B, January 21, 2016.



有人言：一屋不扫，何以扫天下？可见为大者必于细，为难者必于易，勿以看小而不为。今我问学，倘若于一件事上老实大量，切磋琢磨，假以时日，必有所得，望谨记！

宿舍长：

宿舍值日生：

does not suit the standard is noted down.

Someone says: If you cannot keep a little hut clean, how are you prepared to clean the world? It is obvious that big things have small beginnings, and complexities derive from the simple; you should not neglect something just because it seems small. Now we seek to be taught, and if a matter is approached in an honest and encompassing manner, if we learn from each other by exchanging views, and look at it over a longer period of time, there must be a gain for us. With hopes that this is borne in mind!

Head of Dormitory:

Student in charge of the day:

Rules dictate a structure to be followed. This does not only apply to one's organization of things within the space, but also to people's (timely) organization: it is made very clear that there are specific times of the day during which students are allowed to use the dorm, and that is during the noon break and in the evenings for sleeping. Usage is limited according to the overall academy schedule; resting and sleeping are scheduled accordingly. Beijing Study Hall has a less rigid restriction for using the dorms; they have simply put up a small set of rules for the three times of a day the children are in the dorm (morning when getting up, noon when napping, evening when going to bed) and thereby imply that these are the times for appropriate usage of the space. Beijing Academy B is very precise also in behavior prescriptions in the dorm; no talking is allowed, children are there to rest only. Order is not only dictated by rules but secured by supervision through the head of dormitory and a student assistant. Similar to the classroom, possible action and conduct in the space are partly shaped by the co-presence of an instance of supervision – even if they do not use the space for the same things at the same time, the students know that once they leave for class, there will come the time when the supervisor goes through the dorm to inspect the condition of their beds and personal belongings. All study hall and academy dorms have their rules, but not necessarily all are pinned at the wall and not all are this encompassing. In Wenli Academy, for example, no rules are available in written form because the students are supposed to have prior knowledge in classics and good manners; they should already know how to keep the room in order. As the remarks of the rules described above reveal, keeping order in small scale would prepare the individual for larger challenges in society and adult life.

Starting the day early and going to bed early resembles a traditional lifestyle. Apart from a good sleeping routine and usage of the dorms as prescribed, children also needed to learn to clean up after themselves, wash their dishes and clean the floors after eating – another aspect of traditional child education in imperial China that is revived in contemporary study halls and academies (He 2007: 81). These tasks could teach both humbleness and independence:

The academy first of all suits a Chinese traditional way of life; yes. For example, the academy requires getting up early [...], and that is because Chinese people think that getting up early is very important; it's when *yang* energy rises grows, so you cannot sleep in. This... and secondly, the academy puts emphasis on children's work, for example, the children have to serve food, wash their own bowls, make their beds, clean up their own dorms and classrooms and so forth. We stress this; Chinese people call this 'learning to work' (*xilao* 习劳) which means that [the child] must go and do things on its own.<sup>492</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy A)

For example, the children here – look, you regularly see children here doing things on their own, they stand on their own feet, they fold their blankets, they do work on their own, swipe the floor on their own; the teachers show them a lot of things which they do on their own.<sup>493</sup> (Employee at *Dujing Baby*)

The whole study hall [experience] is very strengthening for the children's ability to deal with things on their own; they all do their own things independently by themselves. At home, they stretch out the hand and clothes come; they open the mouth and food comes; but here, it is not like that. They [the teachers] train the children to develop the capability of independence.<sup>494</sup> (Mother at Suzhou Study Hall A)

A disciplined organization of the self according to schedule with regard to hygiene and cleanliness as well as the ability to deal with everyday errands and housework are part of classics reading education and likewise believed to derive from the classics themselves:

You can also say that within our classics, we deliver this idea. For example, look at the classic *Great Learning*: The *Great Learning* is the first one of the 'Four Books,' and it is about the line of reason of traditional education. The part on elementary education in early age encompasses a few things from actual life, like sweeping the floor, responding [upon questions and upon behavior; *refers to good conduct*], and a sense of propriety, and the child also learns some basic knowledge. Then, in the part of canonical studies, the child learns to make differentiations and form an argumentation. Right and wrong, good and bad, correct and incorrect, related to all kinds of matters; they can distinguish between these. We Chinese people call this 'to investigate things' in our classics. Yes, and in this differentiation and argumentation, you distinguish between correct and incorrect, which is something that we cannot necessarily always achieve, but making things right is part of the process of self-cultivation.<sup>495</sup> (Headmaster of Qufu Academy)

Kind and respectful behavior and good manners as well as being able to keep clean and neat are part of a good elementary education upon which later self-cultivation along the classics rests. Basic rules on how to behave and keep clean could be learned from the age of three

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<sup>492</sup> “书院首先他更符合中国传统的生活方式，对。你比如说书院强调要早起[...]，这个因为，中国人认为早起很重要，对。他是阳气上来，是生发的时候，所以不可以睡懒觉。这个.....第二个是书院很重视小朋友的劳动，比如小朋友要打饭、自己洗碗、自己叠被子、自己整理自己的宿舍、教室啊，等等。这些都是强调，要，中国人讲叫“习劳”，就是他一定要动手去做。” (PK16001)

<sup>493</sup> “比如说孩子吧，孩子到了这里，你能看，因为你经常在这里看到他们会自己做，自立，自己叠被子，自己干活儿，自己拖地，很多东西都是要老师引导他们自己干。” (WTS16003)

<sup>494</sup> “整个学堂就是说，对于孩子的动手能力很强，自己的事情全部独立干，在家里衣来伸手饭来张口的，但是在这边不会。就是培养孩子独立的能力。” (SZ15003).

<sup>495</sup> “也可以说我们的经典里面都是在传递这个理念，你看比如说我们《大学》这部经典，《大学》是四书里面第一本，他讲的就是传统教育的理路。小时候蒙学部，洒扫、应对、进退，就是现实生活中的一些事情，然后再学一些基础知识。然后到经学部辨别义理，最重要的就是辨别义理，是非善恶对错，在各种事情上的是非善恶对错，都能辨别，我们中国人，我们的经典里面称它为‘格物’，啊。是，然后这个义理辨别的时候呢，对错，对错会辨别，但是我们自己不一定做得到对，那么有修养自己的一个过程，去做对。” (QF16001)

years onwards.<sup>496</sup> One-child policy and subsequent child-focused family education spoiled children and left young people with a lack in life skills. Basic life education in study halls and academies attempts to balance this lack:

Because today, in mainland China it is called ‘one-child policy,’ it is planned parenthood. Many small children are offered too much preferential treatment, yes, so it seems as if they cannot do anything [on their own], they can only study and write exams; that is not okay. And additionally, the academy is focused on putting the content of traditional culture into academy reality, for example, emphasize courtesy. Courtesy does not mean to only behave more politely, but to be able to show consideration for others. Because... This relates to the fact that China’s family planning policy has caused children to be very self-centered, and barely pay attention to others. The academy puts more emphasis on this item. You have to discover other people; you have to be aware of other people’s existence. This world is not centered on a single ego.<sup>497</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy A)

Children in study halls and academies would not only gain life skills, but courtesy would also teach them consideration for others – rules and guidelines are not intended to remain at the surface, but actually enhance children’s understanding of the rule’s deeper meaning. Reading the classics is necessarily combined with putting the classics into practice, e.g. in interpersonal relations – exemplified with the teacher-student courtesy and the Confucius salutation. Learning in the academy means to learn something for life, and it means to gain knowledge which is apparently not available anywhere else, not in public schools and not in families. In city study halls, practical or household-oriented education is reduced a little bit because the children spend less time there, but folding blankets after a noon nap and sweeping the floor after eating lunch or after a large break are also required in day schools. In addition to that, children participate in preparing and serving food.

### 5.3.3 – FOOD, RULES AND RITUAL

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Food in study halls and academies comes with commitments in three areas. First of all, dining halls and eating areas have their own set of rules and concept of accepted behavior; secondly, the food itself needs to suit the lifestyle of the places, i.e. be non-processed and simple food, at best prepared with local (farmers’) natural ingredients; and thirdly, eating itself is integrated into a meaningful everyday routine which includes prayer-like practices and, in most places, rituals towards Confucius.

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<sup>496</sup> PK16003.

<sup>497</sup> “因为现在大陆中国他叫‘一胎化’的教育嘛，计划生育，很多小朋友被照顾得太多，对，所以显得他什么都不会，只会读书、考试，这个是不行的。那再来呢，书院他也比较重视把传统文化的这些内涵变成书院的实践，比如说，他强调了礼，对礼，就不仅是行为举止要更礼貌，他也能够更多的关照别人。因为.....这也涉及到中国的计划生育政策造成很多孩子以自我为中心，他很少关注别人，书院就比较强调这一点，就你一定要发现别人，感知别人的存在。这个世界不是以我为中心的。”(PK16001)

## (1) FOOD, ITS CHARACTERISTICS AND ITS ORIGIN

China's lack in food security is a large point of criticism of today's perceived "polluted society"; capitalist reasons drove immoral businessmen to use cheap food additives or to neglect clean and safe environments of food processing (see chapters 3.1 and 3.3). Therefore, *all* visited study halls and academies at least avoid convenience (or processed) food and packaged snacks (sweets and salty snacks), or "junk food" (*laji shipin* 垃圾食品).<sup>498</sup> The headmaster couple of Suzhou Study Hall A likes to purchase locally grown products; the staff at Wenli Academy also mainly buys locally: most people who live in Zhuli village rely on local crops, ducks, geese, and chickens for living; they are self-sufficient and eat and sell what they produce. However, given that there are so many people in the academy, they also need to add products from supermarkets.<sup>499</sup> Some classics reading education facilities even grow their own crops and have the children engaged in field work and gardening: Xiamen Academy grows the majority of the consumed vegetables on their own fields, e.g. soy beans, green beans, and carrots; they are trying to eat organic (*youji* 有机).<sup>500</sup> Fuzhou Study Hall and Beijing Academy A also have vegetable fields; in Fuzhou and Xiamen, children are encouraged to take part in preparing the food. According to the headmaster in Beijing, it was typical for traditional Chinese education to include field work and agriculture (*gengzhong* 耕种) into the school day – which refers to the concept of "studying and working in the field" (*gengdu* 耕读).<sup>501</sup> Organic food and self-grown crops are not only measurements to have a healthier lifestyle, but also to create a more traditional lifestyle.

Traditional or historical roots are not only a reason to integrate fieldwork into education, but also to focus on simple and healthy food. Traditional China, as the wife of the headmaster of Chengdu Study Hall explains, used to be a country based on agriculture. Peasants were of the utmost importance because they were the ones who fed the people. Vegetables and grains were the most common products available in ancient China – food was simple and healthy, and people would not waste so much food as people did today. Every Monday, they eat vegetarian to value the heritage of farming-based food. A counter initiative to food waste in

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<sup>498</sup> Conversation with the headmaster of Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016.

<sup>499</sup> Field observations: Wenli Academy, December 9 and 10, 2015; Suzhou Study Hall A, November 12, 2015.

<sup>500</sup> Conversation with the headmaster, Xiamen Academy, February 29, 2016.

<sup>501</sup> Field observations: Fuzhou, March 20, 2016; Beijing Academy A, January 20, 2016; XM16001.

Work in the fields and education were tightly connected in imperial China. First of all, students used to get off school time in harvest season to support their families in field work (Chen 2009e: 156; Lee 2000: 390). Additionally, knowledge generation in education also embraced the agricultural society; "basic knowledge on planting, sowing and reaping" (*gengzhong jiase de jichu zhishi* 耕种稼穡的基础知识) was gained by practical work (He 2007: 81).

China today was the so-called “empty plate movement” (*chiguang pan yundong* 吃光盘运动) that promoted the idea of wasting less food, and Chengdu Study Hall supports this idea. They teach the children to be satisfied with simple food and to waste no food. The study hall teaches that based on the concept of interconnection between heaven and people (*tianren heyi* 天人合一).<sup>502</sup> The rule to eat up every meal is shared among all visited study halls and academies. When the author visited Shanghai Study Hall, it was even considered as waste that she left three grains of rice in her bowl; it had to be emptied *completely*.<sup>503</sup> Eating up is, in the context of traditional education, considered to be a good virtue:

Look, when [my daughter] is eating, she would eat up everything, and leave not the tiniest little bit on the plate. This is the smallest of the moral virtues. She settles at a saving and economized level and would not tell you that she wants to have this or that.<sup>504</sup> (Mother at Beijing Academy B)

Common food in study halls and academies is rice (or millet) porridge with vegetables and steamed buns in the morning, and rice and vegetables (sometimes with tofu, eggs, fish or meat) for lunch and dinner. Fruit is only consumed by children in South China as a snack during breaks. In Suzhou Study Hall B, they barely eat fish or meat and focus on vegetables in their diet; less meat and seasonal vegetables was healthier for the children.<sup>505</sup> As the wife of the headmaster of Chengdu Study Hall states, most vegetarians or vegans in China were either related to Buddhism or the field of traditional culture.<sup>506</sup> In fact, some facilities are completely vegan, such as Beijing Academy A; their health concept entails organic (partly self-grown) and simple food. The headmaster also runs a vegan restaurant close by.<sup>507</sup> In Shenzhen Study Hall B, vegan food is considered as both healthy and environmental-friendly. Saving water, electricity, and using paper scarcely are measurements of the facility that go in the same direction.<sup>508</sup> Only taking as much as one needs from nature and from the food prepared in study halls and academies is a performative confession of humbleness and the acceptance of a simple and non-luxurious and non-capitalist lifestyle. The embodiment of the way of life of the ancient sages is not only done via reading the classics and letting the words and stories of the sage pass by the ears and the inner eye, but also by eating like the sages and taste the simplicity of a lifestyle inspired by ancient ideals. The only facilities without a clear food

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<sup>502</sup> Conversation with the headmaster’s wife, Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016

<sup>503</sup> Shanghai Study Hall, June 17, 2016

<sup>504</sup> “你看，吃饭，她能吃得干干净净的，一点都不剩饭。就从最小美德，她是节减地放，不会说你，哦，要这些东西。” (PK16003)

<sup>505</sup> Field observation, Suzhou Study Hall B, November 17, 2015.

<sup>506</sup> Conversation with the headmaster’s wife, Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016.

<sup>507</sup> Field observations, Beijing Academy A, January 20, 2016.

<sup>508</sup> Field observations, Shenzhen Study Hall B, December 28, 2015.

concept were Beijing Academy B and Guangzhou Study Hall; they value simplicity in food, but apart from that, there are no further considerations.<sup>509</sup>

## (2) WORDS OF GRATITUDE

Boarding schools offer three meals, day schools two meals per day which are consumed together. Study halls and academies have designated dining areas; in small-scale city study halls, they are located in the living or assembly room (e.g. in Xiamen Study Hall A and B); in larger study halls and academies, food is served in large halls or even separate buildings (e.g. Beijing Academy A). Only Guangzhou Study Hall uses the school canteen of the privately-run elementary school with which they share school premises. Access to the eating areas is only possible during eating times. Depending on the size of the study hall or academy and the age of the children, the students either serve themselves or they find a bowl of food in front of them provided by elder students or teachers. All facilities – except Qufu Academy – have in common that children have to recite words of gratitude (*gan'enci* 感恩词) every time before they start to eat; each facility has their own version chosen by the respective headmaster. Words of gratitude are jointly recited from the heart in the same rhythm. Children have to sit still; in most facilities, children and teachers fold their hands for the recitation, and some even close the eyes. The overall imagery reminds of Christian prayers before eating.<sup>510</sup> Prayers, sacrifice and kneeling in front of Confucius are practices that would traditionally be found rather in Confucius temples (Sun 2018: 206) but now finds space in study halls and academies.

Four examples of words of gratitude from Xiamen, Suzhou, and Beijing give a taste of the contents:

### *Words of Gratitude, Xiamen Study Hall A:*<sup>511</sup>

粒米杯汤，盘中蔬，得来不易，

细嚼慢品，用心尝，感谢天下。

感谢大自然的恩赐！感谢父母的养育之恩！

感谢老师的辛苦教诲！感谢同学的关心和帮助！

感谢农夫的辛苦劳作！感谢所有付出的人！

对饮食，勿拣择，  
食适可，勿过则。

A grain of rice, a cup of soup, and the vegetables on the plate do not come easy,

Chew carefully and taste it slowly, try the flavor with concentrated attention, and thank the world.

Thanks for the bounty of nature! Thanks for the parents' kindness of upbringing!

Thanks for the teacher's efforts in teaching and instruction!

Thanks for the classmates' consideration and help!

Thanks for the peasants' hard work! Thanks for the efforts of all people!

Don't be picky with things you eat and drink; when you have eaten enough, don't be excessive [and eat even more].

<sup>509</sup> Field observations, Beijing Academy B, January 21, 2016; Guangzhou Study Hall, May 4, 2016.

<sup>510</sup> SZ15007.

<sup>511</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Hall A, October 13, 2015.

*Words of Gratitude, Xiamen Study Hall B:*<sup>512</sup>

感谢天地，感谢父母，感谢老师，感谢众生。  
对饮食，勿拣择，  
食适可，勿过则。  
感谢父母的养育之恩，  
感谢老师的心情教导，  
感谢同学的关心和帮助，  
感谢大自然的恩赐和所有付出的人。

Thank you, heaven and earth, thank you parents, thank you everybody.  
Don't be picky with things you eat and drink; when you have eaten enough, don't be excessive [and eat even more].  
Thanks for the parents' kindness of upbringing,  
Thanks for the teacher's heartily guidance in education,  
Thanks for the classmates' consideration and help,  
Thanks for nature's bounty and everybody's efforts.

The contents of these two pre-meal prayers-like paragraphs are very similar; they are mainly about thanking the most important people in one's life for their efforts which benefit one's own life. The figure of the peasant or farmer appears as the provider of food which is not produced easily. As said before, eating organic, locally grown food with a focus on vegetables and grain while standing away from food waste and overeating is an attempt to eat more "originally Chinese" like people in ancient China; in ancient China, peasants were the core for people's survival. Nature as the ground for all living, of course, is also mentioned. Xiamen Study Hall A especially points out that food is a product of hard work; the suggestion to chew it slowly and taste it carefully has an almost meditative undertone and encourages the eater to appreciate the taste as strongly as the hard work behind the food probably was. Two lines are drawn from the *Rules for Disciples (Dizigui)*; they suggest accepting food as it is available and to eat only as much as needed – this is also integral part of the classroom rules in Xiamen Study Hall B. The leading teacher considers the prayers as part of teaching proper conduct of which showing respect to teachers and saluting Confucius every morning when entering the study hall were further complementary elements.<sup>513</sup> A teacher in Wenli Study Hall also views the prayers as completion of the children's learning of proper conduct:

Actually, the children do not only learn the classics in the study hall, but there are also aspects of everyday life, for example that they have to recite words of gratitude before eating. [...] Before eating, they have to express their gratitude to their parents, heaven and earth, to peasants and the seeds, hard work – these things of everyday life. Additionally, before and after class, they have to pay their respects to the teacher, and paying such respects is an everyday politeness, an everyday respect, and then there is gratitude in everyday life. I think that this is very important.<sup>514</sup> (Volunteer teacher and mother, Wenli Study Hall)

<sup>512</sup> Field observation, Xiamen Study Hall B, October 26, 2015; XM15005.

<sup>513</sup> XM15005.

<sup>514</sup> “其实，就是孩子在学堂不光是学习这些经典，另外还有一些日常生活中的，比方说，他们吃饭之前要念感恩词 [...] 就是他们在这边吃饭之前要感恩一下，要感恩父母，感恩天地，感恩农民，包括种子，辛勤的工作，这些，就是，日常生活的。还有这个，每天上课下课还要跟老师行礼，就是这样，要对老师行一下礼，就是那一种，日常的礼貌，日常的尊重，还有日常的感恩。这个我觉得是很重要的。” (TS15002)

Praying is about appreciation what one has in life, and about appreciation of other people's efforts in the things available for the children. In Beijing, the focus is similarly on gratitude towards the social environment the student is surrounded by on a daily basis.

*Words of Gratitude, Beijing Academy A.*<sup>515</sup>

感谢父母赐给我宝贵的生命， 感谢天地赐给我生存的空间， 感谢老师为我开启智慧， 感谢同学伴我健康成长， 感谢生命中所有的一切。	Thank you, parents, for the gift of my valuable life, Thank you, heaven and earth, for providing me with space for existence, Thank you, teachers, for developing my wisdom, Thank you, classmates, for accompanying me in healthy growth, Thanks for everything in life.
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Interesting is the reference to heaven and earth as entities who provide space for existence instead of nature as provider of life. According to Han dynasty scholar Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179-104 BCE), the most fundamental powers in the cosmos were heaven, earth and the human; when the bonds between these three core powers worked well, society was in harmony (Lee 2000: 197f.). Humans appear in a humble position within the verse above; heaven and earth *grant* them (space for) existence amidst them. Children learn awareness for other things and powers in the world.

Suzhou Study Hall A makes a reference to one of the Ming dynasty's most representative family precept written by educational scholar Zhu Bolu 朱柏庐 (1617-1688) *Master Zhu's Maxims to Manage the Family* (*Zhuzi Zhijia Geyan* 朱子治家格言) which became basic material for teaching morality in the family (Zhu 1997: 32; Li 2013: 135).

*Words of Gratitude, Suzhou Study Hall A.*<sup>516</sup>

一粥一饭，当思来之不易， 半丝半缕，恒念物力维艰。  感恩父母、感恩老师、感恩师傅、感恩同学。	With each bowl of porridge and rice, bear in mind that it did not come easy [it was hard for the farmers to grow crops]. With each piece of silk and each thread, ponder how hard it was [for the tailor] to make [your clothes]. Thanks to the parents, the teachers, the master workers [German <i>Meister</i> ], and to the fellow students.
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The reference to *Master Zhu's Maxims to Manage the Family* is in the first two lines. Not only do peasants get credit for their hard work, but also masters of other fields of handicrafts, with the tailor as representative. After that, gratitude is expressed to people with core roles in the students' lives, as in the other three examples. As Billioud (2018: 1, 4) and Thoraval (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 8) have pointed out, it is the common person that gains recognition

<sup>515</sup> Field observation, Beijing Academy A, January 19, 2016.

<sup>516</sup> SZ15007.



in the world of reading the classics, e.g. workers, peasants and grassroots scholars. Words of gratitude address common people and acknowledge the importance of their work for everyday life and well-being.

Reference to a well-known family precept is interesting not only in terms of the content but because of the reference itself. Study halls and academies did, in many cases, start out as homey schools in people's living rooms and are still located in private apartments and villas. Education as the duty of the family is one of the reasons that drive classics reading educators to engage in this education; in a Chinese world without family precepts, people seek for new sources to find out which family education was the best for their offspring (see also chapter 4.2). Within the pre-meal prayers, references to Master Zhu reveal that the study hall takes over a part of what was part of family education in ancient China – providing the students with an ethical attitude towards the world. The headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A explains that the children should learn to value and treasure material things needed daily (like food and clothes) more and be grateful for what they have.<sup>517</sup> In Fuzhou, the explanation is similar:

For example eating: we tell our children that each bowl of food, no matter how it tastes, is [the product of] the farmer's experience of the process from spring and summer over autumn to winter. From sowing to harvesting, there are so many people who did their efforts for you. Even though you did not go and grow the crops, you still get to eat them. If you don't value it, how do you deserve it, right? Therefore, we Chinese are very particular about the emotional attitude of cherishing what we have and use it deliberately and carefully. We are very particular about how to appreciate things. Not wasting food is not only about saving resources, but there is a deeper meaning behind it; it is about cherishing our blessings (*xifu* 惜福).<sup>518</sup> (Headmaster of Fuzhou Study Hall)

Behind every material thing that can be consumed, there is the story of production that needs to be borne in mind. The headmaster of Shanghai Study Hall goes as far as asserting that with a change in seemingly profane habits, one could change society into a better one:

Today, I ate here [in the study hall]; the bowl was put down, and the chopsticks placed well, and I said, 'Thank you heaven and earth, thank you parents, thank you teachers, thanks to all living creatures,' I am thanking for everything. Well, actually, I start to eat, and I eat up until the last grain of rice, and then I put [bowl and chopsticks] down. Look, such a simple thing, in a life that everybody has to experience, and I beautified it. We have to beautify every process in our lives, make our hearts happy – that is what we do in the study hall. Look, I am only looking at such a small detail – what if we would even transform space in such a manner, and our minds? Our society? The living conditions of our mankind? Actually, look, everything that science invents is all for the purpose to make life more beautiful, but it is not only something that simple inventions can make happen, we also need to rely on our conscious soul, and only when we throw our beautiful souls into society, we can unite our so-called innovative material

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<sup>517</sup> SZ15007.

<sup>518</sup> “比如说吃饭 [...], 我们跟孩子讲, 你所吃的每一个饭, 不管好不好吃, 对农夫来说, 他经历了春夏秋冬的整个过程。从播种到收获, 多少的人为你付出, 虽然你没有去耕种, 但是你也一样吃到它, 如果你不珍惜的话, how do you deserve it, right? 所以中国人其实很讲究惜福的感念, 就是讲究珍惜, 不浪费粮食不仅仅是节约资源, 背后有更深刻的内涵在, 就是要惜福。” (FZ16001)

goods, all kinds of scientific measurements, and let our lives change into better ones; the beauty reveals itself in the small details.<sup>519</sup> (Headmaster of Shanghai Study Hall)

Being grateful every day for the things in daily routine, such as eating, in combination with an appreciation of what one has is the starting point for beautification of life; with the right attitude, there are more parts of life that can be changed and improved. The core is the humane, the attitude, the spirit, or the soul of the person which is seen as the sole source of profound change of society; all innovations, methods and new paths would be worthless if people involved *with* these items would not have a positive attitude. In this spirit, the wife of the headmaster of Chengdu Study Hall holds the view that the prayers before eating had a good influence on the food and the food carrying positive connotation then entered the body and nourished the person with positive energy.<sup>520</sup> Just as a daily recitation of the classics are believed to change the personal character to a better one, daily eating while carrying gratitude in one's heart does the same. Adequate consumption of food is another way to induce change, possibly later even within the larger society; for the moment, it is still tied to the physical space of study halls and academies.

### (3) CEREMONIALS BEFORE MEALS

With the verses of gratitude, students are not only taught decency and economical use of resources, but also keeping the hierarchy between teachers and students. After the recitation of the verses and before eating, the students first ask the teachers to eat, “Teachers, please start to eat” (*qing laoshi yongcan* 请老师用餐). Teacher would reply with a “please everybody, eat” (*qing dajia yongcan* 请大家用餐) and then students could start eating.<sup>521</sup> Even in eating, a common courtesy encompassing respect for the teacher has to be kept. In Beijing Academy A and Wenli Academy, rituals before eating are carried out in a larger ceremony that encompass words of gratitude and involve the worship of the spirits or Confucius.

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<sup>519</sup> “我今天在这里吃饭，碗一放，筷子放好，那我说“感谢天地，感谢父母，感谢老师，感谢众生”，都要感谢一下。那么确实，我就要把饭开始吃了，吃完以后我把每一粒米都吃干净，我放好。你看，简单的一个东西，其实把生活，每一个人都要经过的一个生活，我把它美化。我们要做的就是把我们的生命过程的每一个过程，如果都能够美化，让人心愉悦，那这个就是我们[学堂]想做的事情。[...] 那么你看，我们只看到了这么一小点，尚且如此多的改造空间，我们的心灵呢？我们的社会呢？我们人类所有的生活形态呢？其实你看我们任何的科技发明一切都是为了生活的美好，但不只是简单的科技手段带来的，是靠我们自觉的心灵，美好的心灵投射到这个社会的时候，才会结合我们所谓的创造的物质啊，各种技术手段，把我们生活变得非常美好，这个美好是在细节上体现的。”(SH16001)

<sup>520</sup> Conversation during field observation, Chengdu Study Hall, April 25, 2016.

<sup>521</sup> Field observations: Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 8, 2016; Guangzhou Study Hall, May 4, 2016; Wenli Academy, December 9, 2015.

Beijing Academy A gathers teachers and students for having their daily three meals in the *Hall of Analects* (*Lunyu Tang* 论语堂) which is named after the *Analects* as the most famous work that is brought in relation with the figure of Confucius. Before breakfast, the community of the academy worships Confucius together (IMG. 49, annex p. 331). In the morning at 7 a.m., students and teachers gather in the hall for breakfast. Right after entering, people take a bowl and chopsticks and fill them with porridge, vegetables and steamed buns. Then they take a seat. The headmaster would eat with his family in his villa on the premises of the academy. At the back of the hall, there is a large stage; the hall is also used for assemblies, lectures, and receptions. A large Confucius image in the background is illuminated by the stage's spotlights, and a small table is placed under the image. A male teacher and a girl student are on stage, lightening up incense and placing it beneath Confucius. The teacher leaves the stage, and the girl waits for him to return with a boy fellow student. With the teacher in the middle, the three walk towards the image of Confucius and line up in front of him, facing Confucius and having the backs turned to the people in the audience. Once the alignment is finished, all students and teachers in the audience stand up and face the group on stage in silence. A bell rings. People raise their folded hands to their front heads. The bell rings again, and everyone bows to Confucius; the bell rings for a third time, and everybody rises again. There is only one bow to Confucius – different from the Confucius ceremonies described in the context of opening class – and nobody recites any verses while they salute to the Master. After the bowing, the teacher and the boy leave the stage. The girl remains, turns around, walks up to the front of the stage, facing the audience. She puts her right hand on her heart and starts to recite words of gratitude from the heart (IMG. 50, annex p. 332); people in the audience repeat after what she says. After finishing her recitation, she leaves the stage; people sit down, turn to their bowls and eat in silence.<sup>522</sup>

A simpler ritual is carried out in Beijing Study Hall. The kitchen is located on the first floor of the building next to the hallway (or assembly hall) which is decorated with a Confucius image. Food is served in a large room in the basement which is furnished with large folding tables and benches. Before lunch, children have a break in which they exercise *Baduanjin* gymnastics (see chapter 5.2.3); a group of children on kitchen duty carry trays of food and pots of rice into the basement. After exercising, the children go to lunch. One of the children who is on kitchen duty carries a bowl of rice and a little bit of each dish prepared for lunch upstairs, walks towards the image of Confucius, places the food bowl beneath his image on a small altar table, and bows to him four times. Then he leaves and joins the others for lunch. In the meantime, there is no audience to watch this gesture as it happens while

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<sup>522</sup> Field observations, Beijing Academy A, January 19, 2016.

everybody else is occupied with going downstairs, washing hands, finding a place to sit, getting a bowl and serving themselves with food. Teachers are helping the children with the food while the boy carries out the small ritual. A female teacher explains that serving food to Confucius when they eat is a sacrifice (*jisi* 祭祀) related to Confucian religion (*Rujiao* 儒教); it was similar to sacrifices in Buddhism (*Fojiao* 佛教).

Meanwhile in the basement, children and teachers wait for everybody to arrive at the tables. Everybody is required to sit upright and in silence, close their eyes, and recite words of gratitude. A boy leads the recitation and everybody else repeats in choir. Afterwards, the teachers are asked to start eating, and then the teachers grant everybody to start eating. Who has finished already takes his or her dishes, walks to the end of the room, turns around to everybody, announces that one is ready with eating, and adds that everybody else should take their time; the others reply with a “thank you” and continue with their meals. This is a signal of courtesy not to rush those who need more time or would like to eat more.<sup>523</sup> This is a behavior observed in all study halls and academies except for Beijing Academy A where the dining hall is quite large, and one would not hear the children’s voices anyways.

Most elaborated is the ritual to the spirits, not to the figure of Confucius, as carried out in Wenli Academy. The dining room itself is very simple; walls are white and tiled to half of its height. There is no wall decoration, no Confucius image or the like. Dark brown tables and matching simple stools are the furnishing. In a hygiene cupboard, students store their bowls and chopsticks. Only Wang Caigui and his students eat in this room; Wang counts as the only teacher. Other staff members eat in the staff dining hall. Wang’s table is located at the head of two table rows at the one end of the room; at the opposite side, there is a simple wooden desk on which everyday items such as oil and soy sauce and a whiteboard for notes are placed. Mops for cleaning after eating are allocated next to that table.

However, a complicated etiquette dominates this rather simple room. Wang sits at the long side of the front table; the oldest student (*xuezhang* 学长) sits to his right side and the author to his left side when she was present in the scenery. Both places at the side of his table (marked with “x” in figure 1) are reserved for people with a higher position within the given social environment; advanced age and study experience as well as a higher position, e.g. in the role of a guest, entitle for important sitting positions at the table. In absence of guests, either the two oldest students, or Wang’s assistant teacher, a young female who supports him in his daily tasks, and the oldest student, would sit with Wang. All other students take their seats along the table row according to age; starting from older and sitting in front (close to Wang) to younger and sitting closer to the end of the table row.

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<sup>523</sup> Field observations, Beijing Study Hall, January 23, 2016.

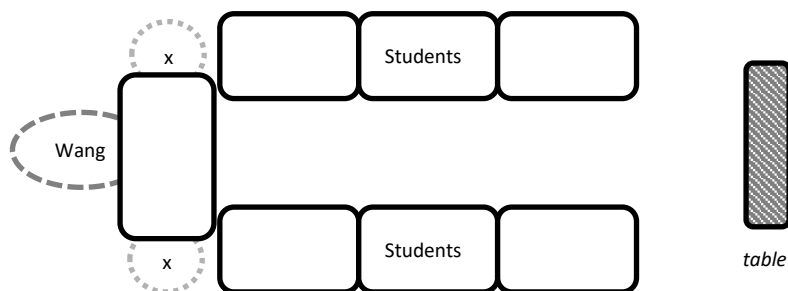


FIGURE 1: Seating arrangement in Wenli Academy, dining hall

As example, the breakfast scenery is selected. The students enter the dining hall when the food is already placed in the heating container, take their bowl and fill it with rice and vegetables, sit down on their spot at the table quietly and wait for everyone to sit down. In the morning, there are also large bowls with steamed bread (*mantou* 馒头) on the tables. When everybody is sitting down, one of the students starts to announce the ritual; another student supports Wang in performing the ritual. It starts with the announcer saying, “be serious and quiet” (*su jing* 肃静). Everybody is silent. One girl with an extra empty bowl and a pair of chopsticks gets up and walks to Wang Caigui, approaching him from the side. She holds the bowl and the chopsticks up to her forehead, having her head lowered a little bit and looking to the ground; she does not look Wang in the eye or and she does not face him straight forward. She waits at his side, holding up the dishes. He gets up, stands behind the table, turns around and faces her. They both bow to each other; first the girl bows and presents the bowl and chopsticks to Wang, then Wang bows and receives the dishes with both hands while he is still in a half-bowing body posture. They both avoid facing each other straight and upright; they are interacting with devote body postures, showing respect for the respective other person.

Wang sits down with the bowl and the chopsticks; the girl is waiting with a certain distance on his left-hand side behind him. Wang uses the chopsticks he just received to pick up small pieces from every dish in his own food bowls and a piece of steamed bread and puts them into the empty bowl he received from the girl. Before he puts the pieces down, he holds each one of them up in front of his forehead, closes his eyes, and then he puts them down into the bowl. Three kinds of food are picked carefully and placed into the bowl. He then gets up again, takes the bowl with the chopsticks placed diagonally on top, and walks to the girl; with a slight bow, he hands over the filled bowl, and the girl receives it repeating the same slight bow. Holding the bowl with the pieces of food and the chopsticks placed on top in front of her forehead, she walks to the other end of the room; her head is lowered, and she is looking down. When she arrives at the small table at the wall at the other side of the room, she puts the bowl with the chopsticks on the table. Everybody else has supervised the ritual in silence. After the girl puts down the bowl, the announcer declares the end of the ritual. The girl sits

down. Wang and his students then recite words of gratitude; they recite the same line of *Master Zhu's Maxims to Manage the Family (Zhuzi Zhijia Geyan)* which is also recited in Suzhou Study Hall A (see above). This is the fix part of their words of gratitude which never changes; the second part changes occasionally. Wang freely adds small literary pieces which they can recite together for a while and then changes it again. In December 2015, they recited the first part of Thomas Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence* (which is also printed in one of Wang's books on English classics). The section recited reads as follows:

“The Declaration of Independence

1 When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of Nature and Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights,

2 that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments is<sup>[524]</sup> instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of these people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established<sup>525</sup>”.

The text is cut in the middle of the sentence because section 2 is finished at this point. Only the first two sections as marked in Wang's reading book are taken for recitation before eating. On the one hand, recitation of the *Declaration of Independence* that stresses individual rights above the government and finds its structure to be subject of people's decision within an environment that holds up traditionally infused strict hierarchy seems misplaced; on the other hand, study halls and academies came into existence because there is a certain dissatisfaction with China's current social institutions. However, given that such texts are only recited and at a later stage, usually in Wang's academy, understood based on commentaries and dictionaries, it remains unclear in how far thought and ideas influence the students' or teachers' attitudes and actions. This would be a good starting point for follow-up research.

At the end of the pre-meal recitation, they jointly recited the *Song on Enjoyment in Learning (Le xue ge 乐学歌)* by Ming dynasty philosopher Wang Geng 王艮 (1483-1541):

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<sup>524</sup> Mistake in the original version available in Wenli Academy.

<sup>525</sup> Version taken from a handout placed on one of the dining tables; Wenli Academy, December 9, 2015.

《乐学歌》  
人心本自乐，自将私欲缚。  
私欲一萌时，良知还自觉。  
一觉便消除，人心依旧乐。  
乐是乐此学，学是学此乐。  
不乐不是学，不学不是乐。  
乐便然后学，学便然后乐。  
乐是学，学是乐，于乎！  
天下之乐，何如此学？  
天下之学，何如此乐？

*Song on Enjoyment in Learning*

A person's heart-mind is originally and inherently happy, [but] the self is tied up by selfish desires.  
Once selfish desires have sprouted, the conscience turns back to self-awareness.  
Once there is awareness, they [the desires] will be erased, and the person's heart-mind is happy as before.  
Happiness is to enjoy this lecture, and learning is learning this happiness.  
Being unhappy is not learning, and not learning is being unhappy.  
Being happy facilitates subsequent learning, and learning facilitates subsequent happiness.  
Happiness is learning, learning is happiness, alas!  
How about learning the world's happiness?  
How about being joyful about the world's learning?

This poem promotes learning as in combination with happiness; being free of selfish desires is presented as the key to happiness and the absence of selfish desires through awareness the pre-condition for being able to sense this happiness. Learning and happiness are put together in various correlations, leaving behind the impression that happiness and learning necessarily belonged together. Given that learning does, on the way to happiness, activate conscience and awareness of selfishness to overcome it, the actual clue to happiness as presented here is discipline. In this spirit, the poem suits the learning environment at Wang's academy where rituals and manners are conducted meticulously quite well.

After reciting the poem, the student who is in charge of announcements asks Wang to start eating; Wang would take a bite and then allow everybody else to eat. Ritual and recitation last approximately ten minutes. During meals nobody talks. Silence while eating is a rule in most study halls and academies, but not in all; especially city study halls that take care of children in kindergarten age are less restrictive. An eighteen year-old female student of Wenli Academy explains the background of their ritual: it is meant as a sacrifice (*jisi* 祭祀) to worship the spirits (*shen* 神) or the heaven (*tian* 天) in general; it was not connected to the figure of Confucius: It was, furthermore, not important which spirits in particular would be addressed with the ritual; it was supposed to express their general gratitude (*biaoshi gan'en* 表示感恩) for the food that they all consume – similar to the purposes of reciting words of gratitude in study halls and academies in general.

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#### 5.4. INTERSECTIONS OF RULES AND RITUAL: THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF LIFE IN STUDY HALLS AND ACADEMIES

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Study halls and academies are very particular on activities within everyday life. The act of eating, for example, is subject of many considerations connected with health, consumption critique, and a historically grounded Chinese lifestyle. In many facilities, meals are integrated

into a larger ceremony which requires the teachers and students to value what they have in life and reflect their own – humble and interdependent – position and existence in the world. Similar to rules for reading and behavior in class, the ritual is focused on self-restraint that comes with a constructive concept on how to equip the restraint self with valuable moral categories. At the same time, figures such as Confucius or the abstraction of spirits and heaven gain a position within worship. This position can be underlined by a Confucius image, but does not necessarily have to. In Wenli Academy, the whole elaborated procedure of picking, carrying, and delivering pieces of food from one end of the room, from Wang’s table to a table on the other end of the room, which requires silence and attention of present students and guests, grants the spiritual figures behind this ceremonial to take space in the room. In the context of the classroom, the ritual salutation of Confucius has been pointed out as part of teaching proper conduct and keeping the right social hierarchy – with the teacher at the center – which is also part of learning how to behave properly towards people of higher positions. There is a clear educational part of ritual worship on the students’ side. However, the adults who initiate classics reading activities and education themselves also find something in worshipping Confucius, the spirits, or the abstract way of heaven: peace and fulfillment. The line between education and spirituality is blurry in classics reading education.

#### 5.4.1 – EDUCATIONAL CHARACTER OF CONFUCIUS RITUALS AND THE SPIRITUAL CHARACTER OF EDUCATION

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Religious and lay teaching in imperial China was often mixed and took place under the same roof. According to Lee (2000: 587f.), both Daoist and Buddhist temples in Tang China had, for example, institutions devoted to the education of laymen. At the ages of seven (boys) or ten (girls), children were eligible for temple schools. A student had to learn to restrain the self and stay away from certain behaviors (such as killing, evil intention, accepting unrighteous money or property) and to focus on fair-mindedness and harmony in clan relations. Additionally, the student learnt how to place the self into the adequate correlation with other people. Among the most important relationships that had to be formed were the relation to the ruler, the father, and the teacher – the teacher being under the top three. Within an environment that stresses both behavior restrictions and a fix framework of right positioning among people, the formation of the master-disciple relation took place – a relation that is kept within a framework of strict rules and social concepts in today’s study halls and academies, too. “The interesting thing is that at the centerpiece of the ceremony for officially taking the vow to enter the Taoist order is the performance of ‘three bows’ (*san-pai* [三拜]) to the teacher *cum* master.” (Lee 2000: 588) The same performance is today used to show respect to



Confucius and his teachings. Bowing to Confucius, a gesture taken from tradition, is perceived with a different meaning today, though.

The leading teacher of Xiamen Study Hall B emphasizes the ritual worship to Confucius in reference to educational practice in imperial China while distancing herself from contributing to today's Confucian religion:

Worshipping Confucius does not count as religion. Today's Confucianism (*Rujia* 儒家) brought along Confucian religion [sic] (*Rujiao* 儒教). [...] I don't know when they emerged, but they are not a major religion in this country. Maybe one can say that both don't count as religions. We also don't believe in religions. We don't believe in Confucian religion, but we study Confucianism. What I want to say is that we don't believe in the God or Christianity, but we read stories from the Bible to the children. The reason why we bow to Confucius is because we want to pay respects to him. And because in the Chinese tradition, a tradition from ancient times onwards, one bows to the teacher. When, in the old times, a child went to school, starting at the age of seven, the father, grandfather, or a senior from the village would take the child and dried meat, or money, to the study hall – as school fee. And then, the father or family's senior would first pay respects to the teacher [at the study hall], which meant that even my father and my grandfather would respect the teacher. And as a child, you must respect the teacher, otherwise you would not listen carefully to the teacher and you wouldn't learn anything properly.<sup>526</sup> (Leading teacher of Xiamen Study Hall B)

Gratitude towards the teacher and for his efforts used to be good manners not only for children, but also for adults in imperial China; rituals of respect are, in this logic, not considered as particularly religious rituals. In Shanghai Study Hall, the Confucius ritual is the starting point for regular conversations about the students:

We perform a courtesy for Confucius every day, and the children see my every move and every action. For example, we say 'stand serenely,' for example, we bring our clothes in order. Every day when we honor Confucius, we have to wear new Han clothes, light incense in a solemn environment. We perform our salutation to Confucius, and then we talk about our individual shortcomings of the previous week; we have to talk about it with the others. [...] This is a slow process of cultivation; some children do well, and some children don't do well; and we continuously talk about it.<sup>527</sup> (Headmaster of Shanghai Study Hall)

While respect towards Confucius is performed in proper dress and atmosphere, students use the time to point out in which aspects they are not yet well enough – as if the master

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<sup>526</sup> “拜孔不算宗教啊。那个现在儒家，它有一个儒教出来。[...] 这个儒教我不知道是什么时候出现的，但是它并不作为我们国家很主要的的一个宗教。可能说，应该都不算是宗教。我们也不信奉宗教。不信奉这个儒教。但是我们学习儒家。这就好像说，我不信奉天主教或者基督教，但是我会一样拿圣经的故事来讲给小朋友听一下。我们之所以拜孔，是因为表示对这个孔老夫子的一个崇敬。因为在中国的传统里面，自古有一个传统，就要拜师。以前，上学的时候，小朋友到了7岁的时候就要上学，上学怎么上呢，那个爸爸呀，或者爷爷，或者村里的长辈啊，就带着他，就拿着一些肉干，以前，或者一些钱，学费嘛，就去到那个学堂，然后呢，这个爸爸，和这个家里的长辈，就首先要跟那个老师行礼，表示连我爸爸、连我这个爷爷都对你老师很尊重。那你这个孩子你必须尊重老师。否则你在这边对老师没有足够的尊重，你这个，听不清楚老师说的话，你也不学到真正的东西的。” (XM15005)

<sup>527</sup> “我们每天礼孔，孩子们就会看到我的一举一动，比如说我们说肃立，比如说我们要整顿衣冠，把衣服整理好。我们每天礼孔的时候，我们都要穿上我们新式的汉服，在那个庄严的环境之中我要点香，我们大家礼孔，我们要谈一谈，我们这一个礼拜来，我们哪些方面的不足，我们要跟大家讲 [...] 这都是一个慢慢的养成的过程，有些孩子做的很好有些孩子做的不好，这都是我们要不断的去讲。” (SH16001)

Confucius, but also the teacher, would supervise this session of critical self-reflection which is part of the process of constant improvement and self-cultivation.

First of all, children learn respect for authority. Children should learn rituals for respect from early age onwards.<sup>528</sup> This does not only have the benefit that rituals and behavior are trained from early age onwards, but also that the authority of classics reading education is demonstrated and implemented at a time in which children are quite receptive. Confucius is valued as master of all teachers; the teachers are the authorities to teach the children classics; the classics are the vehicles with which the wisdom of the sages is transmitted to the students, also via the teachers. Both authorities, the teacher and the classics, seem to gain their value through the ritual. Both authorities are also needed to provide the framework for self-cultivation, the development and moral improvement of the individual. The sages are regarded as valuable examples; rituals of respect manifest their position as idols in the eyes of the individual (imperfect) person.<sup>529</sup> Therefore, secondly, children learn self-respect and engage in self-cultivation. Holding Confucius in high regard through the ritual is, a step further, equaled with a gain of self-esteem and self-respect; valuing Confucius as expression of inner respect (*neixin de yizhong zunjing* 内心的一种尊敬) could simultaneously increase self-respect because Confucius was the embodiment of what everybody carried in their hearts and minds (*women xinzhong suoyou de* 我们心中所有的).<sup>530</sup> Xiamen Study Hall B and Xiamen Academy also end the weekly Confucius ritual with a talk about students' performance. Respect and self-respect are highly intertwined in the educational effect of the (Confucius) rituals.

However, even though the performance of bowing and rituals around meals themselves might not be categorized as religious by the Confucian activists, there is a perceivable overlap between the function of religion and the function of education in the practice of classics reading education. A teacher in Beijing Academy A and the headmaster of Shanghai Study Hall give an explanation for this: education in ancient China used to be centered on Confucian classics, and these classics provided the ground for morals, rules, and a *common belief* (*gongtong the yizhong xinyang* 共同的一种信仰).<sup>531</sup> China's traditional society did not have a religion, but Confucianism required self-cultivation and *inherently motivated good conduct, even performed when nobody else was watching and could possibly praise the good deed* (*shendu* 慎独). Confucian learning had the effect of experiencing a peaceful settlement within

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<sup>528</sup> PK16001.

<sup>529</sup> TS15001; XM16001; PK16001; CD16001.

<sup>530</sup> PK16002.

<sup>531</sup> PK16005.

life which resembled the function of religion and at the same time showed the effect of *transformation through education* (*jiaohua* 教化).<sup>532</sup> Confucian learning was related to belief but not to religion:

Our Chinese culture requires you to believe if you want to learn; if you don't believe but you go ahead and learn, it is all exterior and there is no way. I am also eager to believe. Yes. First you have the trust and then you can return to Confucianism and learn. [...] We learn Confucian teachings, and we believe in Confucian teachings. Chinese culture is all about belief, but that is different from a religion.<sup>533</sup> (Headmaster of Qufu Academy)

Confucianism, Confucian thought, and Confucian teaching are all seen as part of one complex of Chinese culture. Buddhism and Daoism are also rather categorized as part of culture in line with Confucianism instead of making a difference between Confucian philosophy, Buddhist religion, and Daoist religion and thought.<sup>534</sup> Sharp definitions were, in the eyes of most educators, a matter of Western science; Chinese culture was aimed at unity; partitions due to conceptual categorization are not only not necessary but also not appreciated. Wang Caigui goes as far as criticizing the whole form or system of Western (Christian) religion because it was source for an increase of interpersonal gaps: different opinions on faith could evoke conflicts between father and son and even friends; a follower of one religion could kill a believer of another religion and even gain appraisal for that: “Because of your faith, you kill a person of another faith, and you gain the appraisal of God (*shangdi* 上帝).”<sup>535</sup> What he accepts about religions is the religious spirit (*zongjiao jingshen* 宗教精神) which would, in essence, be morality (*daode* 道德), similar to the Confucian classics, and that would, of course, be worth reading and memorizing.<sup>536</sup>

The issue of Confucianism being a religion or having the potential of becoming a religion today or not, is not unfolded in detail here. This study limits the discussion of religion to the spiritual experiences in Confucian ritual and education which are relevant within the context of classics reading education.<sup>537</sup> Therefore, the author follows the terminology coined by

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<sup>532</sup> SH16001.

<sup>533</sup> “我们中国文化讲你要学都要信，你要不信你，你去学，都是一种外在的没有路，我也是认真信的，是。也是先信然后再回归到儒家的学习。[...] 我们就学儒学，信仰儒学。所以我们，因为他中国的文化都是一种信仰，但是这种信仰有别于一种宗教。” (QF16001)

<sup>534</sup> FZ16001; WTS16002; WTS16004a.

<sup>535</sup> “你是因为信仰杀死异教徒，你是得到上帝的这个祝福的。” (TS15001)

<sup>536</sup> TS15001.

<sup>537</sup> Literature on religious characteristics of Confucianism and (challenges of a potential) institutionalization of Confucian religion is quite diverse: e.g. Sun (2013, 2018), Billioud and Thoraval (2008), Billioud and Thoraval (2015); David A. Palmer (2009) “China’s Religious Danwei” in *China Perspectives*, to name just a few.

Sun (2013) elaborates on the conceptualizations of modern religions in China by the CCP, the historical developments of religions in China, of Confucianisms and Confucian ritual in imperial state power, and the shift of the discussion of Confucian religion from academia and politics into broader discussion. She points out that

Billioud and Thoraval's (2015: 108f.) who talk about the *spiritual quality* of popular Confucianism rather than religious characteristics. They set aside the typical sociological category of "religion" (*zongjiao* 宗教) given that it does not have conceptual roots in Chinese culture. Instead they concentrate on the concepts of "faith" or "trust" (*xin* 信) to approximate the character of ritual and worship in popular Confucianism. They discovered in several research cases that Confucianism was used as the functional side of "settling down for life and work" (*anshen liming* 安身立命); it provided a meaning for life and work. Two women whom they interviewed talked about their conversion to Confucianism in a phase of life characterized by meaninglessness, aimlessness and confusion; within Confucian thought (as promoted by Wang Caigui), they found something to be satisfied with and settle down spiritually:

Woman A, a restaurant owner in Shenzhen, found her way to Confucianism over Buddhist teachings of wisdom after life-changing experience: her parents grew up under Mao, she herself served in the People's Liberation Army, and took the career path from waitress to director of a restaurant in the growing economy of the 1990s. Her life was full of money, but lacked spirituality, she had no code for behavior, her life was wild, she was in confusion and fell from one superstition into the next, until she discovered a CD from Wang Caigui. After a personal meeting in 2004, she decided to disseminate Confucian wisdom among children and society by organizing classics reading sessions for children and her employees in her restaurant as well as conferences on Confucianism to which customers and friends were invited. She considers Confucian teachings as possibility of refuge for humanity since there are no racial or religious limits (Billioud / Thoraval 2015 111–113). Her reorientation in Confucianism meant a radical shift in her worldview and a reconfiguration of her value system; Billioud and Thoraval speak of a "conversion" to Confucianism. Woman B turned to Confucianism after a traumatic experience in the business world. She left the hotel business which she experienced as dirty and immoral and rediscovered Confucian and Buddhist<sup>538</sup>

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academics who support the becoming of a religion for Confucianism are often also supportive of the classics reading movement (Sun 2013: 89-90). If the *dujing* circle can also be understood as a religious community might be an interesting question to ponder on, but it is not in the center of this study.

<sup>538</sup> Buddhism and Confucianism appear in combination quite frequently. One reason might be the threefoldness of the main lines of thought in Chinese culture which is defined as Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian thought as mentioned above. In addition to that, or as different explanation of this phenomenon, Billioud and Thoraval (2015: 119-120) state that in the 2000s, promotion of Confucian education was often carried out by Buddhist adepts. One specific example is the Pure Land Buddhism organization, led by Master Jingkong (Jingkong Fashi 静空法师), which is supported by Confucian businessmen (*rushang* 儒商) and aims at educational transformation (*jiaohua* 教化) of the learner. Buddhist and Confucian thought come together within classics reading education, and it could be questioned if Buddhists made use of Confucian education and Confucian rituals to have space for their own belief. Because research data only occasionally hint to this topic and Buddhism in disguise of Confucianism is not a major topic of this study, it is not further pursued. Ji Zhe (2018: 61-89) has a closer look on such links.

culture over talking to an old woman; it reminded her of the things her grandparents used to learn – people she remembered as wise and trustworthy. She also “converted” to Confucianism, embracing a set of values such as trust, sincerity, and filial piety, and promoting Confucian rites (Billioud / Thoraval 2015: 114–116). In times of confusion, Confucian thought, teaching, and ritual performance serve as tools to settle one’s thoughts and settle in life – *anshen liming*.

Headmasters, teachers, and parents within the world of classics reading education show similar phases of disorientation, helplessness, and aimlessness when they opened their own study hall or academy or quit their old life to devote themselves to teaching and reading the classics: the leading teacher of Xiamen Study Hall B sought for guidance when facing problems and difficult emotions in life;<sup>539</sup> the headmaster of Beijing Study Hall found a place for spiritual fulfillment that could substitute the ancestor shrine (*citang*) – the place to worship the ancestors before the Cultural Revolution.<sup>540</sup> Classics reading activists appreciate education for providing them with an idea what is moral and what is not, a direction of where to navigate in life, for principles that could be of help when one faces hardships and difficult emotions in life. The hook can either be the abstract principle or way of heaven (*tiandao*) or the generalized half man half spirit figure of Confucius.<sup>541</sup>

Just as in the case of the two business women, Confucian education is chosen as something people almost “convert to” because it offers shelter (*guisu* 归宿) for the self if one encounters difficulties and negative emotions in life,<sup>542</sup> it shows the direction in life,<sup>543</sup> something that keeps people in order because it offer rules – while heaven makes you keep the rules because you fear heaven and are in awe,<sup>544</sup> and it tells you how to take care of yourself and your life.<sup>545</sup> This can be summarized under a general spiritual and personal “settlement” in life in the just mentioned terms of *anshen liming*:

In Chinese culture, we talk about ‘settling down for life and work’ (*anshen liming*). Isn’t it the greatest if a person finds a [peaceful] place for the own body and mind? If you are not settled, you don’t have any values or meaning, you have a messy life and die an unworthy death, right?<sup>546</sup> (Headmaster of Guangzhou Study Hall)

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<sup>539</sup> XM15005.

<sup>540</sup> PK16004.

<sup>541</sup> SZ15007; SH16001; XM15005.

<sup>542</sup> PK16006.

<sup>543</sup> FZ16001.

<sup>544</sup> SZ15007.

<sup>545</sup> SH16001.

<sup>546</sup> “我们中国的文化就是讲‘安身立命’嘛。一个人安顿自己的身心，这个不是最好的吗？你自己身心都不能安顿，那你就没有价值没有意义啊，烂生烂死，是不是？”(GZ16001)

Teacher D explains the need for classics and ritual practice directly with the absence of something similar to Western religion as keeper of order in a society and with the absence of Confucian culture within Chinese society for many decades:

Because in our whole country, there hadn't been a cultural tradition for one hundred years, we are estranged from our culture. Within our own education, we barely came into contact with what our ancestors left for us, with the side of wisdom – apart from the few things we learnt in school. But no matter if you have this wisdom or not, you still need to face life. And we ourselves – well, I was successful in business quite early around the age of 20, and I thought that this success meant everything. But later on, you encounter emotional problems, family issues, and problems between people. And you will realize that all of this so-called success you had earlier is not sufficient for you to solve these problems. So, to put it easily, in the past, I thought that money could solve everything, but later I thought, when money is not able to solve things, you naturally yearn for something, you seek something, you [want to] learn something that helps you to solve life problems. So, naturally you start to understand life problems.

Because in the West, there was neither a Cultural Revolution nor our May Fourth movement, religion has always been there in the West, and religion offered a certain peace in life. Well, and our Eastern peace in life are the three schools of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism – like religion in the West, they are the teachings of life we rely on. Well, and in the past, we also didn't have this education, so we didn't have anything on which our lives (*xingming* 性命) could rely on. So when you come to think that this is a problem, you naturally will develop a striving and an urging towards this. Following your growing understanding of the classical texts (*jingwen* 经文), you will realize that the principles are perfectly justified (*lit.* in line with the principles of heaven and earth), they are true and not empty, and in the past, you didn't know all this; it's like that.<sup>547</sup> (Teacher D, headmaster of Shenzhen Study Hall A)

The revival of Confucian education appears as a valid counterpart to Western religions in the aspect of social functions, i.e. helping individuals to solve their problems in life and supporting societies in keeping their order by managing interpersonal relations. May Fourth and the Cultural Revolution, both incidents that attacked (and subsequently erased) Chinese tradition, are regarded as reasons for a huge gap in Chinese culture; this gap is to be closed by teaching children Confucian tradition from early childhood onwards. Education is the project that enables people to decide what is right and wrong, what one should do and what one should leave. When Max Weber analyzes Confucianism and its potential of being a religion of China, he argues that being morally good or not was a question of education only and not of theology – which is the part of religion that explained good and evil (Weber 1959: 153; Beck et al. 2012: 139). Since education took over a part that Weber defined as crucial for defining a

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<sup>547</sup> “因为我们整个国家一百年都没有这个文化的传统，所以我们对文化是很陌生的。那从我们自己生活的教育里面呢，就是我们除了上学学到一些东西，对于我们这个民族祖先留下来的，关于智慧方面的，是几乎没有什么可能去接触的。但是你无论有没有这种生命的智慧，你总要面对生活。所以我们自己是因为，嗯，我在二十几岁很早都有经商上的成功，然后以为这就是一切的成功。但是后来，你会面对感情的问题，家庭的问题，人与人之间的问题。你会发现原来，你之前认为的所谓成功，是不足以解决这些问题的。所以，我很简单表述就是，我之前认为钱可以解决一切问题，后来觉得，钱不能解决的时候，就自然的有一种向往，去追求，去学习，什么可以解决人生的问题。所以自然就开始，对人生的问题开始有一些了解。因为西方他没有我们的文革，也没有我们的五四，所以西方的宗教是一直在的，他的宗教会给予生命上的安顿。那我们东方生命的安顿，就是靠儒释道三家，相当于西方宗教一样，是我们这种性命之学的这样的依靠。那我们之前又没有这种教育，所以我们的性命没有这样的一种依靠。所以当你认为这是一种问题的时候，你自然会对他生起追求和向往。随着你对那些经文有一点点了解你会发现那个道理是天经地义的，嗯，真实不虚的，而你以前都不知道，就这样。” (WTS16006).

religion as religion, Confucianism did – together with many other reasons – disqualify as a religion how we know and define it (in Western terms). In the context of reading the classics, education intentionally takes over tasks that could also relate to religion; education can provide guidance in life that could otherwise (only?) be provided by a religion. Personal settlement and spiritual richness through education is actively sought for. Even though not being a religion formally, one should, as Billioud and Thoraval (2015: 108f.) have already pointed out, acknowledge the social function of Confucian teaching and ethics which resembles the social functions of a religion.

#### 5.4.2 – THE ADULT READER OF THE CLASSICS: SELF-REFLECTION, SELF-HELP AND SPIRITUALITY

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There is a tension in the field of spirituality in study halls and academies: on the one hand, teacher and Confucius rituals are interconnected with strict rules of conduct; there is a specified liturgy behind pre-meal rituals, especially in Beijing Academy A and Wenli Academy. Formalized behavior and the emphasis of order are the focus of the rituals' part that is integrated into children's education. Yet there is another part to rituals and worship that appeal to the adults in classics reading education: seeking for a meaning in life, for a fulfilling task, and spiritual development. Seeking spirituality in rituals can be compared to what the sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow defines as the “seeking” moments in spirituality in demarcation to the “dwelling” moments:

Whereas a spirituality of *dwelling* emphasizes ‘habitation’ and ‘requires sharp symbolic boundaries to protect sacred space from its surrounding’, a spirituality of seeking emphasizes ‘negotiation’ and ‘draws fewer distinctions of such magnitude’. Dwelling-oriented spirituality emphasizes order, formal liturgy and tightly bound and formalized sets of rules – ‘individuals are expected to conform to these rules, indeed to internalize them’ – while seeker-oriented spirituality emphasizes the individual search for sacrality, which may well be found in everyday experience rather than formal institutional settings. (Beck et al. 2012: 145)

While these distinctions have been made to explain spirituality in an institutionalized religion and spirituality that is individually designed by a person not necessarily following a specific religion, they also show quite well that rituality can be chosen as source of spirituality for somebody who seeks fulfillment on another, maybe spiritual, level.

Adult classics reading sessions have been introduced in chapter 3.4 as opportunities to join forces in the classics reading movement. While reading the *Analects* in the *Analects 100* classics reading camp, for example, the headmaster of Beijing Study Hall experienced a strong connection with the classics and with the people who joined him in reading the *Analects*. He found a source in the words of the sages that enabled him to critically examine

his inner attitude and behavior; the personal support he encountered in the *Analects* made him feel a sympathetic bond between him and his own culture.<sup>548</sup> He shared his personal insights with other participants who also reflected themselves based on the words of the classics; it looks similar to a self-help discussion group and is a platform for joint self-cultivation among the adult participants of the reading camp. Similar sessions are, for example, the *Analects* reading group for teachers in Beijing Academy A which closes with a set of *Baduanjin* gymnastics to relax the body after making concentrated use of the mind (see chapter 5.2). Teachers and parents in Xiamen Study Hall B gather around the *Analects* every Thursday evening to engage in joint learning, improvement of educational skills, and seek for guidance for better actions. These few examples are just to remind of the various forms of reading circles and camps around the classics which bring together interested (young) adults; the common thread that holds these gatherings together is the search for guidance and guidelines in life; they seek for a change within their life through education – Billioud and Thoraval (2015: 18) summarize this aim under the concept of *jiaohua* 教化.

One example of Billioud and Thoraval's (2015: 77f.) research that shows the *jiaohua* process for adult classics reading education is Yidan Xuetao 一耽学堂 in Beijing, a study hall that offers adult classics reading activities. The headmaster is convinced that self-transformation in the educative process has to be accompanied by physical activity; every morning session starts with a set of gymnastic exercises which root in ancient self-transformation practices. Cultivation of the self required the internalization of ancient classics on the one hand and activity that slowed down the breathing, purified the heart, and strengthened the vital energy. Gaining energy (*qi*) and approximating the spiritual dimension (*shen* 神) through practice led to higher perception and serenity, to authenticity and humanity. Given that people's problems in the past and today were very similar, wisdom from the past could still help today. The transformation of the self comes along with ritual practice: once a week, the adult learners would perform respect ceremonials in form of bowing and kneeling, burning incense and reading prayers in front of a large Confucius image. According to the headmaster, such rituals were clearly non-religious and aimed at the "renaissance of the individual" (Billioud 2011: 294).<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>548</sup> PK16004.

<sup>549</sup> Closer to a religious site was the "Holy Hall of Kong" (Kong Sheng Tang 孔圣堂) in Shenzhen which was established in 2009 in Donghu Park (Donghu Gongyuan 东湖公园); it offered space for developing a religious Confucianism. In the main hall, there is an altar with an image of Confucius and incense; it is used for ritual, music, readings and courses. Singular elements which are visible in this space mirrors what can be found in study halls and academies; however, the "Holy Hall of Kong" is conceptualized for and focused on ritual in the first place, and education is a side element. For academies and study halls, it is the other way around (Billioud 2010: 209f.). Both places, though, offer space for spiritual development.



Helping, improving, and transforming the individual and its life – reading the classics for adults is hard work on the self. Very popular in this respect are the *Analects* who are in the center of Wang Caigui’s study camps and many reading circles. The complex of mobilizing the classics for individual self-help reminds of Yu Dan’s<sup>550</sup> popular version of the *Analects*, *Yu Dan Lunyu xinde* 于丹《论语》心得 (*Confucius from the Heart. Ancient Wisdom for Today’s World*) with which Yu Dan gives advice for a happier life. Her interpretation of the *Analects* is not based on (philosophical) analysis of Confucian theory, but on everyday knowledge and intuitive associations that can be related to the original text (DeBlasi 2015: 74–78). Her focus is on individual issues of life:

She discusses how to deal with regret and disappointment at the things that happen to us, how to develop and maintain friendship as a buffer against the harsh realities of social life, and how to deal with the challenges and opportunities that day-to-day encounters with other people bring our way (Hammond 2015: 104f.).

Taken together, Yu Dan’s work sees the tradition as a whole as providing an antidote to the pressures of modern society. [...] Her contribution [...] is that she has formulated this eclecticism so that it can resonate with audiences that are looking to minimize the pressures of the frenetic, modern life (DeBlasi 2015: 78).

Hammond (2015: 106) refers to Daniel Bell when he calls this approach an “apolitical self-help program.” While Yu Dan’s is a commented version of the *Analects* that presents itself as a self-help guidebook full of everyday wisdom, participants of classics reading education use the original and uncommented version of the classics for their readings and recitations. The self-help character of classics recitation is not specified explicitly but is integrated into the practice of reading and reciting the classics via the hopes and needs of the adult participants themselves and the practice in addition to the readings designed by teachers and headmasters.

Self-cultivation and self-help are two concepts which appear to be tightly related within adult classics reading education or activity. As mentioned before, guidance in times of confusion has often been stated as reason to either open a classics reading facility or engage in classics reading education.<sup>551</sup> Especially interviewees in Wutongshan, the famous classics reading village, stress that reading the classics provides people with a new outlook on life (*renshengguan* 人生观) and new values (*jiazhi guan* 价值观),<sup>552</sup> reading the classics allowed for thoughts from a higher position of human nature,<sup>553</sup> and for a change of lifestyle and

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<sup>550</sup> See also chapter 1.4.1.

<sup>551</sup> PK16002; GZ16001; FZ16001; XM15005; WTS16003; TS15003; WTS16002; WTS15001; SZ15007; PK16004; SZ15004; PK16005; PK16006.

<sup>552</sup> WTS15001; WTS16001; WTS16002.

<sup>553</sup> WTS16003.

habits (*shenghuo xiguan* 生活习惯).<sup>554</sup> That could be related to the fact that Teacher D operates there and life changing experiences through reading the classics is one of her major topics within the promotion of classics reading education. A step further, classics reading educators also find the *meaning* of life within the classics:

In the past, I wouldn't think about life and death at all, about the value of life, I would not put too much thought into that. But when I encountered classical culture, I immediately felt that men of great sanctity (*gaoren* 高人) talk to you, for example like the ones in Chinese Buddhism, like Confucius, like Mencius, and in Buddhism like Buddha (*Shijiamouni* 释迦牟尼) including the eminent monks of great virtue. Their written prohibitions tell you that you have to look ahead towards the meaning of life and settlement of life and death early enough, that you have to have something with which you pass from one to the other side; otherwise, it will be very superficial. Formerly I thought that I definitely was on the upper level of life or thought that it was better to be economically well-equipped, and life looked leisurely and carefree. But as for the understanding of life and death, or the recognition of life and death, I think... I didn't have that and I might have even been completely misled and have drifted from the right path. This was my greatest change [after encountering classics reading education].<sup>555</sup> (Headmaster of Xiamen Academy)

The classics are seen as sources for something beyond every day and profane life. As the headmaster of Xiamen Academy reflects, the classics provide food for thought that opens the door to a dimension of life that supersedes the material; he can actually enter a spiritual dimension and engage in contemplation towards the future based on words from the past, uttered by great men whom are worth to listen to. It is almost as if the classics embodied a revelation of the message of the sages; the headmaster of Beijing Academy A has a similar perception:

I say that the classics are the soul of Chinese education. Why? Because the so-called classics are all the truest portrait of the innermost being of the sages, they reveal all the secrets of the universe [the world and the cosmos], so I think that the classics are, on a certain level, the center of education. Of course, with the classics I don't only mean a few books, but I mean the argumentation and the thought of the classics, yes. For example... we Chinese can call it 'wisdom,' and that can guide people's everything.<sup>556</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy A)

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<sup>554</sup> WTS16001.

<sup>555</sup>“那个时候根本就不会考虑到说，比如说，关于生死啦，关于人生价值啦，不会有更多更深的考虑，但因为接触了传统文化，一开始就感觉就那个，高人就告诉你，那比如说像中国佛教的，像孔子啊，孟子啊，那佛家的像释迦牟尼啊，包括其他一些高僧大德，他们的这些文字禁例就会告诉你呀，你应该早早的对那些、对于生命的意义，对于生死的了结，你要有一些前瞻啦，就一定要有一些过渡，否则很形相的，我就觉得，以前你肯定是走在那种上层或者生活那一个，好一点就会觉得，哎，这个能，经济比较好、生活看起来比较逍遥自在一点，但是对于生命的了悟，或者生死的这种.....认识，那...我估计一点都没有，甚至会完全误导，或是走偏的，这就是最大的一个，一个变化。”(XM16001)

<sup>556</sup>“我说，这个经典，其实是整个中国教育的一种灵魂。为什么呢？因为所谓的经典都是这些圣贤，都是他们的内心最真实的写照，是他揭示了这个世界宇宙包括人的所有的秘密，所以说我就是觉得经典某种程度上他就是教育的一个中心。当然这个经典指的不只是那几本书，我指的是经典的义理、经典的思想、经典的精神，对。你比如说...我们中国人也可以把它称之为‘智慧’，这个是可以指导一个人一切的。”(PK16001)

Wisdom within the classics supersedes knowledge within regular textbooks;<sup>557</sup> wisdom of the sages (*shengren de zhihui* 圣人的智慧) makes the classics “omnipotent” for a usage in all fields of life.<sup>558</sup> Education along the classics provides a dimension above simple factual knowledge and prepares the learner for adopting a spiritual outlook on life; they can strive towards the high example of the sages. Adult learners are especially aware of this facet of the classics.

So, people can, with their limited life, reach an unlimited... unlimited spiritual level or world, and that we can call being a sage.<sup>559</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Study Hall)

Whereas ritual is of educational purpose for the child as it teaches rules and discipline, it is of spiritual value for the adult. This way, it works as a balance for both a lacking moral education in early childhood and spiritual or religious seeking for guidelines in adult life.

While the user of classics reading education might seek for something that can be a source of spirituality, Wang Caigui looks at the issue of religion from a higher angle and another perspective. He is convinced that Confucian morality is more suitable for our modern society than Western religion. If one would combine the Western democratic system with Confucian morality (and let go of religion), one could create a democracy of morality in which no crimes would be committed anymore. Such a system of social governance should be applied worldwide to have all societies profit from well-organized and moral societies. His argumentation is translated in detail because it is very complex:

American democracy, or European democracy – let’s say, Western democracy, is not regarded as perfect from the Chinese perspective, from the perspective of Chinese New Confucians. Mou Zongsan has a deeper opinion on democracy: he traces the performance of Western democracy back to one side, and that is the system (*zhidu* 制度); this system is alright. But if you want to do democracy well, there is actually a higher rule for ruling – people have to have morality. If you don’t teach people morality and you only have the democratic system, there are many rules of the law, but you still cannot keep people in order. So there are people who claim that the US, or actually the whole world, is like that. [...] Because the Eastern world learnt from the Western world. It started from Japan, they learned from the West, and then China learned, then Korea, and all the other countries had no saying anymore. [...] If people don’t have morality yet, they can go ahead and stay away from violating the law, but they can be selfish. So, a few people are very clever and make use of the many loopholes that the law cannot cover, and they commit fraud. Confucius says that the ruling of society has two levels, ‘to show the way with the principles and to bring [the people] in line with moral virtue,’ so one is morality, and the other is law. But if one uses morality to rule the people, and all people obey the morals, then naturally nobody would commit any crimes. If one uses laws to govern the people, nobody would dare to commit a crime, but of course that is only not daring to do it and nothing more. This way, only moral democracy is true democracy; this is the ideal of New Confucianism. The students I train will be able to be political leaders, they will be able to be leaders in a moral democracy, or not? Well, isn’t this moral democracy

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<sup>557</sup> See also TS15001; PK16004; SZ15004; WTS15001; GZ16001.

<sup>558</sup> SZ15003.

<sup>559</sup> “所以人可以，以有限的生命去达到无限的这个……无限的精神上的这样一个层次或者是境界，那这样我们就可以称为是圣贤。” (PK16004)

something which the whole world should be doing? It is so easy, but the Westerners haven't thought of it, that's very odd, but the New Confucians have thought of it.<sup>560</sup> (Wang Caigui)

Wang criticizes the lack of morality in the Western world which is, in his eyes, dominated by America. He relates this to the source and core of Western morality which would both lie within religion. Religion would have declined in the Western world when science (especially natural sciences) had gained more and more impact – religion would be contradictory to science, and science won superiority, so the source and core of Western ethics, the Christian religion, suffered a setback.<sup>561</sup> More important than that is, however, the importance he ascribes to a Confucian solution not only to save the Chinese society, but the world society. Reading the classics and the creation of a “classics reading atmosphere” (*dujing qi*) in society could make both China and the world better. After the individual and its family would be upright and moral, the nation state (China) would be in order, and as a last step, the whole world would be in peace. For Wang, Confucian thought does not balance the lack of religion, but is superior to religion and could be a good tool to create peace and harmony among people.

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#### 5.5. CONCLUSION: CULTIVATION AND CULTURAL EMPOWERMENT THROUGH READING THE CLASSICS

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Reading the classics – both Confucian and English (or: Western) – is aimed at actively creating a morally upright person as a counter proposal to the image of the deviated immoral businessman, the corrupt politicians, the shallow nouveau riches, and people who devote their life to materialism. Recitation of the classics not only fills the learning environment with positive words, but also aims at activating human nature. Personal development along Confucian education would shield against negative social influence and avoid that people who studied the classics would develop into the just described negatively perceived stereotypes in

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<sup>560</sup> “美国的民主或者欧洲的民主，就西方的民主吧，现在在中国来看，在中国新儒家来看，他不是完美的。所以牟宗三先生，他对于民主有一个更深的看法，把西方的民主，这样子的，他们的表现把他归在一边，这个叫制度，这个制度是对的。但是民主，要把民主做好，其实还有一个政治的一个最高的原则，就是人人要有道德。如果你不教人道德，你只有民主的这个制度，很多法律，你还是不能治理人。所以有人这样子说，说美国，其实是整个世界都这样，[...] 因为东方世界都学西方嘛，从日本开始学然后中国学，然后韩国学，其他的国家就不用讲了[...] 因为人如果还没有道德，他就可以不去触犯法律，他就可以自私，这样。所以，就有一些聪明的人就设计很多法律抓不到的漏洞，就去骗钱，这样。[...] 所以孔子讲的，嗯，他说治理社会，有两个层次，‘道之以理齐之以德’，一个是道德；一个是法律。但是如果用道德来治理人民，人民都守道德，那自然就没有犯罪，如果只是用法律来治理，大家是不敢犯罪，但是心里面都想要犯罪，当然他不敢而已，这样。[...] 这样子的话，有道德的民主才是真正的民主，这是新儒家的理想。那我培养的学生呢，将来能够做政治领袖，他能够做一个有道德的民主的领袖，不是吗？那这个有道德的民主，不是应该让整个世界都做吗？就这么简单，但是西方人想不到，这个很奇怪，那新儒家就想得到。” (TS15001)

<sup>561</sup> TS15001.

contemporary society. The classroom is a space of good conduct and rule-based performance: physical discipline in prescribed body positions, ritualized performance to show and train Confucian-inspired respectfulness and politeness, and activity such as eye training, martial arts, and gymnastics, train the students' body on a daily basis. Rules of behavior, recitation of the classics, and the artificially created positive environment in and around study halls and academies shape the mind and the learner's character. As a teacher in Beijing Academy A puts it, "those who are close to cinnabar will get red, and those who are close to black pigment (for ink) will get black" (*jin zhu zhe chi, jin mo zhe hei* 近朱者赤, 近墨者黑).<sup>562</sup> A carefully designed environment filled with aesthetic pictures, good sounds (of classical music, classics readings, and sounds of nature), with a neat social structure that brings interpersonal relations in order and ways of interpersonal conduct guided by clear values influences the people within the environment; this way, the environment supports the educational goals of the classics reading facilities.

Rules to define and guide appropriate behavior are defined by the people who run the study halls and academies – their children and students would acquire a Confucian-based morality and not the moral code as defined by the Chinese government. Educators and parents are, to a certain extent, free to design educational space according to their own ideas, ideals, and needs; they design their own place for living, learning, and personal development. What they perceive as having gone wrong in their own past and in China's history, they can balance with a practice that would avoid making the same mistakes again. What they perceive as inappropriate influence for their children, they can substitute with something they personally approve of.

Children, the main beneficiaries of child classics reading education, live and learn in an environment free from examination pressure and competition on good grades in public education. However, on the other side of the coin, students are confronted with a highly regulated environment: reading performance, conduct and interaction, and rituals in everyday life have to be carried out appropriately. They are acting in highly regulated space on a daily basis, having body postures, behavior, classroom routine and self-expression defined and supervised by others. Rules and routines "mark" the students' bodies and selves with the Confucian lifestyle, tradition-infused behaviors, and trained habits (see also Valentine 2001: 24). If students want to continue their studies at Wenli Academy, they even have to learn 300,000 characters – a task not easily managed. They are free to learn the classics in their own pace, but they have to learn the classics by heart and they have to adopt the study halls' and academies' everyday life rhythms; there is no time to encounter things apart from Confucian

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<sup>562</sup> PK16005.

tradition and the classics; often, things and activities unrelated to tradition cannot even be found in the learning environment. Parents and parent-teachers or headmaster-parents, though, widely believe that it was beneficial for the children to have clear structures to follow and to not waste too much time with useless activities such as playing electronical games and watching TV in leisure time or with the exam-oriented learning in public schools.<sup>563</sup> The ambition to not waste any time of the child's precious childhood is clearly reflected in the dense curriculum which, especially in boarding schools, does not leave any large time slot open for idleness.

On the basis of reading the classics, individual learners are believed to be able to unfold their human nature (*renxing*) to the utmost degree. Approaching the ideal of the morally upright gentleman (*junzi*) is related to cultural empowerment of the individual and, in a broader perspective, of society: many individuals being grounded in Confucian tradition sum up as groups of people in Chinese society being grounded in tradition. This dynamic of influence from smaller to broader circles is also implied in the chain of improvement from individual over family and country to the world in the *Great Learning*.<sup>564</sup> Empowerment is directly related to the classics. Many interviewees reflect personal development and empowerment along the classics in metaphors and images of plants which reveal prosperity and strength. Furthermore, reading the classics is presented as a method to enhance better personal growth:

This question is raised by a lot of mothers – after the child is born, it develops naturally and that's okay. But actually, talking about natural development – in Japan they made an experiment. There is a tomato plant, a tomato, and that grows into a bush. I think that this is a very good example for a comparison. It is the same. Well, if we take a tomato, and it will grow on proper soil, with the proper amount of sunlight and fertilizer. If you now take this plant and treat it with special nutrients, nutrient fluid, and cultivate it with a special method, provide a special amount of sunlight, and irradiate it with infrared light. Well, the first plant may grow 50 tomatoes, but do you know how many the other [specially treated] plant will grow? When it grows into a bush, it will grow 3,000 tomatoes. So that's why I think that natural growth has the good of natural growth, but if you use another method, it will have its own value and meaning. We don't reject it [the natural development], it also has its development, also has its own development; it lies in your choice.<sup>565</sup> (Employee at *Dujing Baby*)

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<sup>563</sup> SZ15001; TS15002; WTS16001; GZ16001; PK16002.

<sup>564</sup> See also chapter 5.1.3, p. 204, note 438: "Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their States were rightly governed. Their States being rightly governed, the whole empire was made tranquil and happy." (Legge 1939 [1893]: 358f)

<sup>565</sup> "这个问题很多的妈妈也是会问到我们这个问题，就说，哎我的孩子生下来之后我就想让他自己去自由的去成长就行了。但是其实，自然的成长，在日本那边，他有一个做过一个实验哈。就是他有一个茄子树啊，就是一颗茄子，番茄、西红柿，然后他能长成一棵树。他，我觉得可以用这样一个例子来做一个比喻。就是它同样的就是，这边的一颗西红柿呢，就是在正常的土壤、正常的阳光、正常的这个肥料去成长。然后呢，这一株的话，他就给他提供专门的这个营养，营养液，专门的培养的方法，然后给他专门的这个阳光，给他红外光去照射。那，这株他大概能长出大概五十颗的西红柿，但是你知道另一棵

In the light of this example, classics reading facilities appear as places in which people take special care of students and, thus, offer better conditions for their personal growth. Children growing up on such a basis would have a richer disposition and would simply be better than without such a treatment. The headmaster of Beijing Academy B uses a similar comparison to convince parents of the long-term benefit of sending their children to a classics reading facility like his academy – especially pure classics reading education is difficult to communicate:

What we do is that we provide the child with a basis; and reading the classics in an honest way is actually the best. It is like planting a tree: the tree planter takes good care of watering the roots but would not care about the leaves; he would not care about the leaves but just water the roots very well. Well, the leaves will grow. The period of compulsory education [<sup>566</sup>] is a period in which the basis is laid; actually, it is a period for putting down the roots, and we take a grasp of these roots and do it like this [with reading the classics]. But normal people, average parents, are very uneasy, they wish for the leaves to sprout very quickly, and they want to see that their children can perform (*biaoxian* 表现), they want to be at ease, and they don't have very far-reaching prospects.<sup>567</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy B)

Similar to the tomato case, the logic is that good work at the basis was the ground for subsequent good growth and abundance in the results: the tomato fruit and the leaves are the items that grow at the latest stage and are taken as indicators for the overall condition of the plant; more leaves and fruit are signs of a high-quality plant. Students that have the possibility to grow on classics reading soil are very likely to grow a lot of leaves and fruit; such results are long-term consequences, though, and only visible after a few years of studying.

The headmaster of Guangzhou Study Hall has a similar narrative:

We provide the best basis for the children: the best method to nail down the basis is to read and memorize the classics. If you first absorb them and, a step further, put down the basis, [the child] will have a developed future. So, we are different from other systems, we are very pure (*danchun* 单纯), almost only read the classics, in an honest way and in large quantity. [...] In China, we say, 'ten thousand methods converge in one,' and we've [also] returned to this. It's like a tree: the roots of the tree appear as if they were not enough, but the leaves are all grown from there. So they are enough. Even though the roots of the tree are not perfect, the tree in its wholeness is perfect. But everything is grown from there, so it is perfect.<sup>568</sup> (Headmaster of Guangzhou Study Hall)

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它能长出多少西红柿吗？他长成的是一棵树，它能长出三千多颗。所以说，我是认为，自然成长他是有自然成长的这个好，但是你用另外的这种方法他会有他的价值和意义，我们不要去排斥他，他有他的发展，他也有他的发展，就看你怎么去选择。”(WTS16003)

<sup>566</sup> The headmaster is referring to children's age span in the years of compulsory education, i.e. ages six to 15 or 16.

<sup>567</sup> “那我们是在给孩子打下一个基础，这样老老实实读经，这个其实是最好的。就好像我们栽一棵树啊，那栽树人就好好去浇他的根，你不要去管他的枝叶，不管他的枝叶，只要把他的根浇水浇好了，那它的枝叶就会长出来。那这个义务教育阶段，它是一个打基础的阶段，实际上他是一个扎根的阶段，那我们就抓住这个根本去这样做。但一般的人啊，一般的家长啊，他都是太着急了，他都是想很快的看到这个枝叶长出来，看到自己的孩子能够表现，他觉得放心，他没有那种长远的眼光，所以这一点我认为是最难的。”(PK16002)

<sup>568</sup> “我们就是给孩子打好最好基础，打基础最好的方法就是让他读经典，背经典。先吸收进来打好基础，他将来就会有发展的前途。所以和其它的体系不一样，所以我们是单纯，几乎只是读经，老实大量读

Again, the educator is responsible for the beginning stage, for the roots, and the rest would be the results of a (successful) ground work. All three examples show that the focus is on doing things right in the first phase of education; only with a solid ground work, the learner could become a person with a solid character – richness in character and personality are equaled by the leaves and fruit in the examples. The better the initial work is done, the better the later outcome of the person. However, it is also implied that there is a certain amount of self-responsibility on the side of the learner; the learner must do his or her own efforts to grow and sustain the fruit of success; support is provided not to increase the later outcome of education, but to initiate things correctly at the beginning. Having the classics learnt by heart, the reader had the chance to understand and apply the classics throughout life; different occasions might bring the person to understand and apply the classics differently, and there is supposed to be a life-long learning effect.

A second image which educators and parents have in mind when they talk about their children's development along the classics is the children's position on a higher spot or higher level to which they rose to via reading the classics. Reading the classics meant for the student to get in contact with the sages' wisdom and both the sages and their wisdom are in a superior dimension; reading the classics enabled the reader to approach this high-level dimension and gain a broader the perspective, looking at things from another angle.

The classics are on the highest position within culture, and they have an all-encompassing universality; if you learn these few books well and then learn other things, it will turn out to be very easy. All of a sudden, you will stand on a very high position; you will really stand on the shoulders of giants. If such a child reads classics from young age onwards, its starting point is very high.<sup>569</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy B)

As for my child, I hope that my child will be able to read the 'Four Books' and 'Five Classics' in their entirety and that she will later have a forward striving mind, a positive and active attitude, and a good heart when facing life. This way, the path she chooses – she does not necessarily have to be something special... very rich or very far developed in a certain business, but I hope that she will be a happy person, and that it will be helpful for her later in life. Because she stands on the shoulder of the sages, she will have a very broad mind to face all that, all the common ways and customs, how should I say that – because today, this society is too restless (*fuzao* 浮躁); small children are easily drawn into that and they are [negatively] influenced. If she can make it and read through these books, her heart will be stabilized and steadier, well... the most important thing is to do it in the proper way like the people in the past, but to live a simpler and happier life.<sup>570</sup> (Mother at Suzhou Study Hall A)

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经。[...] 中国讲‘万法归一’啊，我们归到这个一。就像这个树一样，树根看起来好像不够，但是，上面所有的枝叶都是从他这里生出来的，所以他是够的。虽然一个树根他不是完整的，整棵树才完整，但是所有东西都是从他这里生出来的，所以他才是完整的。”(GZ16001)

<sup>569</sup> “经典他是处于文化最高的一个位置，他有他的笼罩性，就是你把这几本经典如果学得很好，再学其他的東西，都会变得非常的轻松。就是，你一下子站在高处，就真的是站在巨人的肩膀上，这样的一个孩子从小读经，他的起点就非常高。”(PK16002)

<sup>570</sup> “对我的孩子啊，我是希望我的孩子能够通过读这些四书五经哈，她以后，她有一颗向上的心，乐观积极的一个心态，然后一颗善良的心，去面对生活。那样的话，她的路，不要说她要怎么样，嗯.....很富有，或者要事业上非常发展，但是我希望她做一个幸福的人，在她以后，对她以后人生道路来说，是



Longing for the children's happy life based on the classics is, on the one hand, positive concern by parents who wish the best for their children. The need to counterbalance the influence from society is, as said before, the other side of the coin. On top of that, today's adults who grew up in a time when it was not possible to study the classics regret their lack of cultural roots.

[If I had learnt the classics from childhood onwards], I would be different, for sure. My outlook, my wisdom, my whole setup would be different. If you'd stand on the shoulders of a giant, how would that be the same? You hold hands with the sages, you emulate the virtuous, how could it [be the same]? We haven't read them when we were children, and now that we are adults, it is too late. Because if you haven't read them from childhood onwards, if you haven't studied them, you might have read a few bad [books], and their level is not good enough. These things also influence you, pull you, pull you down, that's right.<sup>571</sup> (Headmaster of Guangzhou Study Hall)

Personal and cultural empowerment through reading the classics was not a choice a few decades ago but is a valid and possible choice today. What parents and educators have missed, they can at least provide for their children and later generations. Classics reading education is a method to ensure a good and adequate intellectual and spiritual mindset for later generations; this is an important long-term concern behind the approach.<sup>572</sup>

The utopian desire of a better Confucian future is vividly pictured by sprouting and blooming personalities, solid and steady as trees, with a rich intellectual world – rich of thoughts as a tree is rich in leaves or a well-grown tomato plant is full of red and ripe juicy tomatoes. Steadiness and richness are paired with highness; the individual horizon is raised and opened up to enable children to see things from another perspective, to have a better overview, a better orientation in life and understanding of life, and better capacities to deal with issues they might face. The literary images drawn in the narrations of the educators – all parents – show a person that is well-situated both on the ground and in the lofty higher areas; that person seems to have it all. Apart from the specific images in relation with cultural and self-empowerment through reading the classics, the empowerment is also felt while reading the classics:

Many people would read [the classics] even though they would not understand what they meant, but they would be aware that they would be full of strength (*liliang* 力量) after reading them. And in work,

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有帮助的。因为她站在圣人的肩膀上，她会有一颗非常宽大的心去面对那些，就是这些世俗上的那些，就是怎么说呢，因为现在这个社会太浮躁了，小孩子容易被卷进去他们会受到一些影响。如果通过读这些话，她的心就会很安定，很稳定，他会，就是说……最主要的就是说，按照正常的像以前那些人那样，但比较简单的，比较幸福的去生活。”(SZ15003)

<sup>571</sup> “那肯定不一样啊，我的眼界、我的智慧、我的格局就不一样啊。你就站在巨人的肩膀怎么会一样呢？是不是？你和圣贤手把手，啊，见贤思齐，怎么会一样呢？我们从小没有读过，长大就来不及了。因为你从小没有读过，没有读过这些，你可能读一些不好的，程度不够的，那些东西也会影响你的，把你拉，拉下来的，是吧。”(GZ16001)

<sup>572</sup> TS15001; SZ15004; PK16004; WTS16002; WTS16004a/b; CD16001.

in life, and in managing family relations, they would practically apply the classics' wisdom; that is the special characteristic of the Chinese classics; it's very miraculous. Now, if the people of a family clan all read them, or if a couple, husband and wife, both read [the classics], and when they then fall into a misunderstanding, they would not each claim to be the person who is right but take the words of the sages as basis for reference. That phrase has been proved before; over 2,000 years of history, people have proved it, and such a proof is awesome – you can call it a truth, or it can serve as a very good reference for us; a moral standard or an inspiration by wisdom.<sup>573</sup> (Headmaster of Xiamen Academy)

Why do they [the classics] still exist? And why are they so important? Because they are not just about a few sentences; they are not – how should I say it – they are very important for people's lives, because, ehm... after reading the classics, you will realize that when you interact with people and deal with issues, when you encounter difficulties, the classics will help you, and give you strength (*liliang* 力量).<sup>574</sup> (Volunteer teacher and mother, Wenli Study Hall)

Classics reading educators and parents show their empowerment through the classics by engaging in classics reading education and choosing a life which they find suitable. If, however, the educational outcome of classics reading education could really bring about young people with character traits that resemble the ideals as mentioned above remains in the dark. There are not yet many students who have finished their studies in classics reading education on secondary school level; and there is yet no student who has started to read the classics at age three (or even in fetus stadium), finished 20 years of classics reading education, and then entered into higher education or working life. The first child raised with the classics from pregnancy onwards is Teacher D's son who was seven years old during field research in 2016. No data on possible life paths or future life trajectories when going through with classics reading education are available. It is not possible (yet) to check how far the visions behind classics reading education can be realized in personal lives, where the visions remain visions and what other (unwanted, unintentional and unforeseen) effects and results these visions have. However, it is possible to mark a few edges and point out where classics reading education hits real boundaries in practice and where utopia is inflicted by the attempt to make it become real.

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<sup>573</sup> “很多人他是，读了，他不知道是什么意思，但是他就觉得，内心会因为读了他而充满力量。而他在工作中、生活中、在家里关系的处理中，他就会应用到那里面的智慧，这是中国经典的特色，很神奇的。那么，如果是一个家族的人都有在读的话，或者说夫妻都有在读的话，当遇到一些矛盾的时候，就不会说公说公有理婆说婆有理，而是会以圣人的话作为一个参照的依据。那个，那句话是已经印证过，两千多年来，历朝历代的人去验证他，证明那个是，非常棒的，可以称之为真理的，或者是给我们非常好的一个参考的，那个道德标准、智慧的启迪的。”(XM16001)

<sup>574</sup> “为什么它还在呢？为什么它这么重要呢？就是因为它不光是讲了就这些句子，不光是.....怎么说，就是对人的生命是重要的，因为，恩.....读了经典会发现，在你为人处事的时候，在你遇到一些困难的时候，经典都会帮助你，给你力量。”(TS15002)

## 6. REACHING UTOPIA? CLOSING REMARKS TO TODAY'S CLASSICS READING EDUCATION

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As Gordin et al. (2010: 6, 13) argue, utopian thinking in its characteristics to transgress boundaries deviates from established ways of thought and action; it explores something new, different and/or alternative and is, thus, a good method to understand the mechanisms of change – in the case of classics reading education, it supports an understanding of how (some) people cope with the past and counterbalance lack in the present. Images of the distant past show an enactment of neatly dressed, fairly cultivated, literary well-versed, polite Chinese people who interact within a social texture of Chinese cultural imprint: the five major human relations (*wulun* 五伦 or *wuchang* 五常) were clearly defined and subject of basic education in the China of the past: “service to one’s superiors, including parents, faithfulness to one’s friends, the search of wisdom in the sense of perfect moral uprightness: these are the proper content of education” (Lee 2000: 177; 304). Images of the near past depict intellectual ruptures at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, how people turned against their tradition, their classical writings, and their own people in the 1960s and 70s, how students rebelled against teachers, children against parents, and so forth. What remains is something close to nothingness: a state of uncertainty, insecurity, helplessness, and meaninglessness – a lack of certainty, stability, direction and meaning. As Bregnbæk and Bunkenborg (2017: 5f.) introduce it in their research on the interplay of “emptiness” and “fullness” in contemporary Chinese social realities, “lack” is rather emptiness than nothingness; something feels out of place, it is not there *anymore* but should be there; maybe it had been there before. Lack can be the substance of a very creative process to bring about or bring back something to fill in. This creative product carries traces of the feeling of missing behind it; it can be (imaginatively) produced overly full and rich – as rich as a utopia.

Social critique, disillusion about the own and public education, and the tension between an overly positive image of China’s distant past and the emotionally charged image of China’s close past within a state of missing order and certainty, classics reading education emerged. Private actors, with and without a background and experience in education, become educators and read the Confucian classics out loud with their students; Shakespeare and the Bible are also frequent literature. Isolated from a hasty, consumption-oriented capitalistic, loud and unhealthy city life in anonymous residential districts, suburban villas, and building complexes in the countryside, educators try to settle within a world of classics reading education, filled with beautiful tunes of classical music, readings of the classics, aesthetic nature paintings, and people who interact in a way their ancestor might have done it. Instability and uncertainty are met with a structured environment: life is brought to its essence

– study/work, eat, sleep – and lived in a rhythm that considers human needs according to ancestral knowledge on the activity modes of the body (parts); the rhythm is accompanied by rules how to move and interact in certain rooms, how to take care of the physical space of living and learning as well as the own self. Confucian utopia in classics reading education is informed by the past and highly concerned with the past, both as means to counterbalances mistakes and mishaps of the past as well as to reactivate resources to fill what has been lacking for so long.

Life in study halls and academies strives towards high goals: memorizing the most important classics (300,000 characters) and become a gentleman (in the case of pure classics reading), or at least read the most important classics and acquire a basic set of moral values (as in the facilities in Fujian province). It does so not only by efforts of the mind, but also by engaging in physical activity, in ritual, and a certain lifestyle of simplicity – simple food, simple dormitories, no luxury good or electronic devices, just books and people, a little bit of housework, and a mode of education that requires the students to do the same thing every day in the same way. This comes along with learning to be satisfied with it, in an almost Epicurean hedonistic frugality. Behind the lived simplicity and the embodiment of a traditionally inspired lifestyle stand the high goal of creating a Chinese society that is more like the social microcosms within contemporary study halls and academies. The utopian vision is very much grounded within the walls of the classics reading facilities, within everyday rituals and customs, within the educational mode, and the group identity among activists within the classics reading circle. Even though activities are scattered, look different in different places, there is still a common basis to the movement; the classics reading movement, thus, tries to implement a utopian vision in action, revealing its characteristic as *grounded utopian movement*.

Classics reading education facilities are places designed to address the lacks people feel in life; a Confucian utopia reached through education takes the actor to another place, far away from the depressing reality. In educative practice, the utopian vision is enacted in class, in the interpersonal relationships, and embodied in people, their thoughts, their identity, and their actions in the very present. This is how utopia corrupts itself in practice; a *no*-where cannot be dragged into existence *some*-where; when bright utopia meets the allegedly dark and depressing reality, something inevitably has to crumble. This is where trade-offs of the imagined future become visible: within the classics reading movement, there is a small southern China counter movement in opposition to Wang Caigui's pure classics reading approach because his high ideals for the future are regarded to cost children too much of their health and happiness in the present. In addition to that, whereas classics reading education

promises a bright future for the learners, society, and the whole world on the long run, it is unclear in many cases what the learners should do with their near futures after finishing classics reading education, given that graduates would have to find their ways in a society that is not (yet) the idealized future society of Confucian morality with a focus on spiritual more than materialistic life.

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#### 6.1. TRADE-OFFS IN THE STRIVE FOR HIGH IDEALS I: THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF CLASSICS READING PRACTICE

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Striving for huge ideals comes with a price to pay. In order to reach the goal of an improved society, many children would have to go through classics reading education and serve as transmitters of morals and Confucian morality within the large society. To be able to do that, they have to absorb the words of the sages, embody a traditional lifestyle, and train their different Confucian social roles as obedient students and children. Beijing Academy B even tries to keep interpersonal relations pure to make sure everybody sticks to their designated role: “Well, today, in normal schools, and even among young students, they make friends and fall in love. We don’t allow this, we don’t have that here, and when we discover something like that, we end it, haha.”<sup>575</sup> This is a single case – still, it shows in which directions social training towards an ideal can go. At the same time, development of the individual is a huge topic, even and especially among classics reading educators. Children are supposed to be individuals that suit the contemporary world, and for that, they are required to develop an individuality that is based the classics. Different role models for behavior and choices for everyday action and activities are quite limited in many facilities though, especially in pure classics reading facilities.

The result of pure classics reading education are critically reviewed by classics reading educators who decided to stay away from Wang’s pure approach. As said before, study halls and academies often take Wang Caigui’s pedagogy as a guideline, as inspiration, or at least study it, but not all facilities actually implement a pure classics reading approach which is only and solely concentrated on reciting the classics. Especially in Fujian province, classics reading educators did not only take a distant stance towards Wang’s approach, but even oppose it. Study halls and academies in Fujian province who are in the “Fujian Traditional-style Private School Association” (Fujian Sishu Lianyihui 福建私塾联谊会) are only networking with schools that favor an open-minded classics reading approach which offers

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<sup>575</sup> “然后那个现在，一般的学校，甚至在小学生都有谈朋友谈恋爱的，啊，我们这边是不允许的，没有的，发现了我们会开除的，哈哈。” (PK16002)

more than recitation all day long. Representatives of this network are Fuzhou Study Hall, Xiamen Study Hall B, and Xiamen Academy. Xiamen Study Hall B once organized an evening discussion with a teacher from the “Guangdong Traditional-style Private School Association” (Guangdong Sishu Lianhehui 广东私塾联合会) who had his children taught in the pure classics reading facility Guangzhou Study Hall for a while and shared his experience with the educational approach. An overview over the issues experienced in the practice of reading the classics shows the dark side of the tough journey towards a utopian ideal:

According to the visitor from Guangdong, pure classics reading meant that education consisted in nothing else than to read and memorize the classics; physical education, leisure time program, and other subjects would not exist. He claims that this approach of teaching was only chosen because study halls of this model were easy to operate and administrate; Guangzhou Study Hall did not dare to offer anything else in their curriculum.<sup>576</sup> At the beginning, many parents from the region sent their children to the study hall (including himself), but in the end, many took their children out of that study hall because they were unsatisfied with the teaching and mostly parents from other provinces (*waidi de jiazhang* 外地的家长) continued to send their children there – but would not have the possibility to visit often and to see everything that was going on. The teacher claims that they would only be so successful because Guangzhou Study Hall did not have high demands towards teachers and parents.

He furthermore explains that pure classics reading education was a contradiction to the character of people-run education which was open to a plurality in approaches and methods and not only one single focus. Most of the followers of the pure classics reading approach were highly focused on sending their children to Wenli Academy which would be similar to the trend in public education to send one’s child to a good university – Wang’s academy should not be the only goal. The teacher further criticizes that even in Wenli Academy which is led by Wang Caigui himself, none of the students started to read the classics in the pure approach when they were little but entered “half way” (*zhongtu chulaide* 中途出来的) after having spent time in the public education system already. Those who started pure classics reading at a young age struggled with the learning of Chinese language (especially within the characters). The teacher gave the following examples from personal experience in Guangzhou:

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<sup>576</sup> This is a common critique of classics reading facilities: the headmaster of Shenzhen Study Hall C explicitly stated that Wang Caigui’s approach was the easiest one if one wanted to teach the classics – which was why there were not many facilities that created their own approach (conversation with the headmaster of Shenzhen Study Hall C, March 13, 2016). However, in Xiamen, Shanghai and Fuzhou there are educators who go different ways.

- Some children loose interest in learning altogether; they are not willing to do anything in class anymore and when they go home on vacation, they also do not want to do anything.
- Some children have constant throat inflammation because they have to recite aloud from morning till evening.
- Some children do not grow anymore – their body would actually stop growing. Especially when the children start at a very early age, they would not grow healthily anymore.
- Many children who start reciting the classics very often and never went to a regular elementary school do not know how to read and write. They listen to the teacher’s recitation, they look at the characters and tip on the characters, but they do not make the connection between pronunciation and character. [They also do not learn writing techniques.]
- Many children do not develop their own interest in reading (*yuedu xingqu* 阅读兴趣).
- Small children were still vulnerable in their feelings and emotions and they would suffer (*shousun* 受损) a lot because they were really afraid of the teachers. Strictness and punishment are two important characteristics of a teacher according to the pure classics teaching approach and the teachers would often overly punish (*laoshi guodu chengfa* 老师过渡惩罚). They are even too afraid to tell their parents about their anxieties.
- Small children who are enrolled in a boarding classics reading school would not get enough attention concerning their emotional side; loving affection was missing (*quefa guan'ai* 缺乏关爱).<sup>577</sup>

While language learning and the development of personal interest in studying are two elements largely praised by classics reading educators, it seems as if practice occasionally not only not reached high goals but even caused the opposite. The leading teacher in Xiamen Study Hall B had a similar experience with a child who could memorize a lot but was throwing up each time when eating lunch after a whole morning of memorization, as if there was a counter-reaction.<sup>578</sup> While there is a lot of praise among classics reading educator for Wang Caigui, his efforts for people’s education, and a lot of hope that his approach might bring some change, many things seem to not look as rosy in practice as they do in theory. Fujian’s turn in the classics reading approach reflects this and is at the same time a very strong example yet for the overall attraction of Confucian education. Negative examples and setbacks are reasons for changing one’s direction, not to abandon it. It seems as if idealism has hit reality and brought a more moderate and less ideal approach of classics reading education to Fujian already.

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<sup>577</sup> Observations and discussions in a conference for classics reading educators and parents, Xiamen Study Hall B, June 23, 2016.

<sup>578</sup> XM15005.

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## 6.2. TRADE-OFFS IN THE STRIVE FOR HIGH IDEALS II: UNCLEAR PROSPECTS FOR INDIVIDUAL FUTURES

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So far, there are no students who have gone all the way through classics reading education, but there are many students who left public school to learn the classics which raises the question of the children's future development in the sectors of (further) education and employment. Among parents, teachers, and headmasters, rave of a possible bright and happy life within the child's or learner's future is in unison. A critic of full-time classics reading education who is also a teacher in traditional education but only for weekend courses argues that once the children are cut off from the educational system, their future would become very unclear; full-time study halls and facilities were very unclear about the (possible) future paths on which their graduates could move on.<sup>579</sup>

Many study halls and academies actually state that their main consideration was not the later work or career of the student, but to make sure that the basis was laid and that the person could lead a happy life later on.<sup>580</sup> Specific choices of occupation would later depend on what the child had learnt, how it used that knowledge, and what the child and the family chose as direction of further development.<sup>581</sup> It could be that they chose a humble life without a special career:

Even if my child wouldn't want to go to work and stay at home, well... quietly work close by, and would be happy, I would also be happy to have a bowl of porridge to eat, or congee to drink, a spoon of water also makes me happy; I don't care. If my child is happy, I am happy, it's like this.<sup>582</sup> (Mother at Suzhou Study Hall A)

Other voices claim that employment would be the same, independent of the educational path. One just had to prove that somebody had skills and ability, and people would be willing to hire that person. Society and companies would furthermore become more and more aware of the value of classics reading graduates once this education was properly established within society.<sup>583</sup>

Given that classics reading graduates would normally not have any diploma and would therefore not be eligible for regular employment or employment in the public sector, they could open their own business (preferably in the cultural sector) or take over their parents'

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<sup>579</sup> SZ15006.

<sup>580</sup> SZ15004.

<sup>581</sup> SZ15003; WTS16001; WTS16004b; SZ15002.

<sup>582</sup> “他哪怕觉得，他不想去外面工作，他就在家里面，就是说……安安静静的在附近工作，他觉得我是开心的，我吃一碗稀饭也是开心的，我喝一碗粥也是开心的，我舀一瓢水也是开心的，也无所谓。他能觉得开心就觉得开心，就是这样子。” (SZ15002)

<sup>583</sup> PK16005; PK16002.



business and be self-employed.<sup>584</sup> Apart from that, vocational training after study hall or academy education would be possible; the most common subject mentioned is traditional Chinese medicine (TCM, *Zhongyi* 中医) which can be learnt from a practical master of TCM outside of the university.<sup>585</sup> Other possibilities were to learn artistic skills (*cai yi* 才艺), a classical instrument (*chuantong de yueqi* 传统的乐器), e.g. Qin (*guqin* 古琴), or classical painting (*chuantong de shuhua* 传统的书画). It would also be possible to return to the public education system, engage in self-study, go to university, and then at best remain in education, e.g. as teacher for the classical canon (*jingxue laoshi* 经学老师).<sup>586</sup> This would enrich the field of classical culture and classics reading education and possibly make sure that in the future, young people in China could continue to acquire skills and knowledge in their ancestor's culture. Reading the classics and engaging in traditional culture would, thus, aim at increasing people who could teach other in reading the classics and traditional culture and keep the new classical educational approach alive in practice.

Alternative ways for further educational and occupational development are found in studying abroad or working as a translator or English teacher (based on memorization of English classics).<sup>587</sup> Designing own ways leads classics reading educators both abroad, like in the case of the headmaster Fuzhou Study Hall who has established bonds with a Christian private university in the US that would accept his graduate students after passing the TOEFL and IELTS tests.<sup>588</sup> But also within China, arrangements with universities are made to guarantee further education. Beijing Academy A and Beijing Normal University were in negotiations in January 2016 to directly accept a certain number of academy graduates for the study program of National Studies education (*guoxue jiaoyu zhuan ye* 国学教育专业).

“The director and leaders of Beijing Normal University care a lot; they came to the academy many times. So now they are making plans how to support a few of our students in the ability to enter university as the students of the public education system do. We are currently in negotiations on this, and I believe that there will soon be good news.”<sup>589</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Academy A)

According to the news feed on the website of Beijing Academy A, the first eight students of the academy's highest class successfully entered the study program of National Studies

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<sup>584</sup> WTS15001; PK16002; SZ15004.

<sup>585</sup> WTS16002 // SZ15004; CD16001, PK16005.

<sup>586</sup> PK16005; QF16001; PK16002; SZ15007.

<sup>587</sup> TS15001; CD16001; SZ15004; PK16002.

<sup>588</sup> Presentation by the male headmaster, Fuzhou Study Hall, March 19, 2016.

<sup>589</sup> “师范大学他们的院长、领导也很关心，他们来过多次，来过书院。所以他们正在设计，要想办法能够帮助这边的这些学生，让他们也能够和体制内的那些学生一样，也能够考到大学里面去，所以这个事情我们正在探讨，我相信很快就有好消息了。” (PK16001).

education in the School for Continuing Education [and Teacher Training] at the Beijing Normal University (*Beijing Shifan Daxue Jixu Jiaoyu Xueyuan guoxue jiaoyu zhuanke* 北京师范大学继续教育学院国学教育专业) in November 2016.

Lastly, classics reading educators direct the responsibility for further education to Wenli Academy which is still a high educational goal for many participants.<sup>590</sup> Wang's conviction is that a gentleman, a *junzi*, does not worry about a career and money, but is concerned with the cultural side of life (*wenhua shengming* 文化生命). Followers of his approach share this view.<sup>591</sup> They are convinced that personal development and a good character are the things to worry about, and not later possible achievements in life.

I hope that their [my children's] happiness will be built on their own inner strength and not on some material external things.<sup>592</sup> (Volunteer teacher and mother, Wenli Study Hall)

Even the classics (the *Analects* and the *Book of Changes*) are cited to support this view:

In the *Analects*, there is a sentence stating that 'the gentleman does not worry about having a position or not but worry about how to be suitable for one'.<sup>593</sup> It means that a man of virtue does not worry about not having established a position, or having a position or not, or that he doesn't have a reputation.<sup>594</sup> (Headmaster of Beijing Study Hall)

You don't worry about the position but with what you fill a position, right? The superior man keeps his weapon concealed about his person.<sup>595</sup> How does a skilled person need this, right. [...] So it depends on what he puts his will on; if somebody is determined to be an expert of scholarship (*xuwen jia* 学问家), he will choose this path; or if somebody is determined to be a politician, he chooses the path of politics, or when he is determined to be a businessman, he will be a businessman. No matter what, he still first needs to perfect himself, right?<sup>596</sup> (Headmaster of Guangzhou Study Hall)

Wang Caigui puts his educative and social ideal over profane life:

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<sup>590</sup> WTS16004a; SZ15004; CD16001; GZ16001; PK16004.

<sup>591</sup> PK16002; GZ16001; TS15002; PK16004.

<sup>592</sup> “我希望他们的幸福是建立在自己内心的强大上面，而不是这些外在物质上面。” (TS15002)

<sup>593</sup> The original sentence is slightly different: “子曰：「不患無位，患所以立」” and translates into “the Master said, ‘A man should say [added by Legge], I am not concerned that I have no place, I am concerned how I may fit myself for one.’” (*Analects* 4.14, Legge 1939 [1893]: 169)

<sup>594</sup> “《论语》里面有一句话，说，‘君子不患无位，患所以立’。就是说一个有德的人，就是他不担心有没有他的立足的位置，或者说是有没有他的地位，或者说有没有名气。” (PK16004)

<sup>595</sup> Citation taken from the *Changes of Zhou (Zhou Yi 周易)*, “The Great Treatise II” (繫辭下 - Xi Ci II), Legge 1899: 390. The section from which the citation is taken talks about the right moment to make a move in hunting; a wise man makes his move in the right moment and keeps his weapon concealed until the time has come; then the wise man will be successful. Similarly, the classics reading learner will also be successful when the right moment has come.

<sup>596</sup> “不患无位，患所以立，是不是？君子藏器于身。有本事的人哪还需要这些，是吧。[...]所以看他立志做什么，有人立志做一个学问家，那他就走这条路嘛，或者他立志做一个政治家，他就走政治这条道路，或者他立志做一个企业家，就做企业家。那怎么做，他还是要先完善自己嘛，是不是？” (GZ16001)

Well, they [the students] want to be true persons, but they don't strive for life, they don't strive for being a person of [normal] life, they strive for being a person of ideals, they are like me, they turn into people who strive for ideals, and they are not people who strive for a profane living.<sup>597</sup> (Wang Caigui)

Personal development is the focus of Confucian education, not preparation or training for working life. Classics reading education distances itself from exam pressure in public education, and also from competition on jobs in working life and on the labor market. Education and work gain a new meaning. If, however, graduates of study halls and academies could really pursue such a plain and happy life also has to remain in the dark given that there are not yet many students who graduated from such facilities – many returned to public school in secondary school level – and none who went through all stations of classics reading education. Further research in this area is needed.

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### 6.3. POWER OF THE PEOPLE IN EDUCATION? RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CLASSICS READING EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY MAKING

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Many classics reading educators and parents state that classics reading education is not yet widely accepted, neither by the government nor by society.<sup>598</sup> As main reasons, unawareness and ignorance among people and politicians are brought up. Activists are convinced that with growing awareness, the number of study halls and academies will increase. So far, the existence of classics reading education is regarded as indicator for its necessity as well as sign for the need of an educational reform.<sup>599</sup> Classics reading education is believed to have the power to take over the lead in Chinese education (*Zhongguo jiaoyu de zhudao* 国教育的主导)<sup>600</sup> even beyond China as “Eastern humanistic basic education” (*Dongfang de renwen jichu jiaoyu* 东方的人文基础教育).<sup>601</sup> The core element in the power of classics reading education was that it is not supported by the government, but an initiative by people who follow their dreams and implement their ideals:

The position of traditional-style private schools is not provided by the government for us; well, and there was also nobody who said what it was in reality. This position is developed, like Wenli Academy of our Professor [Wang Caigui]. There is no special professor title, and nobody gave it to him, but the people accept him as such. I think that within the developments of our contemporary world, the acceptance of the people and the direction of the spirit of the people are very important things that are

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<sup>597</sup> “就是他们要做一个真正的人，但是他们不是为生活而追求的，不是追求生活的人，是追求理想的人，就是跟我一样，他们变成一个追求理想的人，而不是追求生活的人。” (TS15001)

<sup>598</sup> See especially SZ15007; CD16001; PK16002; QF16001; PK16001; GZ16001; TS15003; SH16001; PK16003.

<sup>599</sup> See SZ15007; PK16004; WTS15001; WTS16002; WTS16003; TS15001.

<sup>600</sup> WTS15001.

<sup>601</sup> WTS16002.

worth to rely on. That is also an important helping hand for the whole country's future basic education; it helps you to think, to consider why things are what they are, and that you have to ponder on it.<sup>602</sup> (Headmaster of Shanghai Study Hall)

This headmaster stresses the power of the people who brought up educational facilities on their own; their educational approach had the capability to question and change existing ways of raising (Chinese) children. Another headmaster in Suzhou adds that without the influence of the government, they could develop an educational approach as they considered it to be best.

The current situation is actually very good, [the government] neither supports nor opposes us, and a bunch of people secretly built something up, and a bunch of children have first grown with it [classics reading education], and then one can talk about it again. Because if the government would now completely ban the *sishu*, it would be a heavy loss; if it would draw *sishu* [education] back into their own [educational] system, it wouldn't be good either. Because... if the government includes you, you will have to – for example, when you think about what should be learnt, they will surely check on you and examine you, they will have all kinds of... well, you cannot teach very purely [pure classics reading education] anymore, and that is not good. So, I personally hope that this time will be prolonged.<sup>603</sup> (Headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A)

Absence of governmental interference left space – freedom – for own creations; people used their critical thinking, initiative, joint powers, and creativity to find a way of very active educational participation. In addition to that, they claim to have achieved what public schools cannot: revived Chinese culture (*fixing Zhongguo de wenhua* 复兴中国的文化的) in class<sup>604</sup> by going back to their nation's roots (*guojia minzu de genben* 国家民族的根本).<sup>605</sup> Being quite small in scale so far, many believe that their impact will get bigger – when they have more people on their side. “It is very fragile now, like a firefly with weak light. But in the future, it will shine with radiance.”<sup>606</sup> Both people and government would gradually accept classics reading education in its existing form.<sup>607</sup> By 2016, activists noticed that the government positively accepted the classics, National Studies, and traditional culture in

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<sup>602</sup> “私塾的地位 [...] 不是政府给我们的,好,也不是哪一个人你说的,实际就是这样。这个地位就是做出来的,就像今天教授在文礼书院,没有特级教授这个封号,也没有任何可以给他的一个封号,但民间对他的认可。我认为在这个,今天这个世界这样一个发展的状况下,民间的认可,大众的心灵的向往,是一个非常值得考量的事情。也是对于整个国家未来的基础教育很重要的一个.....这个叫做,这个叫.....助力,帮助你思考,你看到为什么这样,你要去思考。”(SH16001)

<sup>603</sup> “就是目前的这种现状其实挺好的,就是他也不支持也不反对,然后就是有一批人先默默的把它做起来,有一批孩子先成长起来,然后再说。因为现在国家彻底取缔私塾也是重创,那如果现在收编私塾其实也不好。因为...只要国家收编你,那他一定会有一个,比如说我们自己想学什么,他一定会管你的,他会检查啊,他会有各种的那个.....那你就不能做的纯粹了,所以都不好,所以我...我...我个人是希望能够延长这个时代。”(SZ15004)

<sup>604</sup> PK16002.

<sup>605</sup> GZ16001.

<sup>606</sup> “他很弱小,像萤火虫一样,微弱的光。但是未来,他会光芒万丈。”(PK16001)

<sup>607</sup> PK16002; FZ16001; SZ15004; TS15003.

general; the government even promoted classical culture within public education (compare chapter 1.4). Wang Caigui and his followers celebrated the 2016 decision by the government to promote reading the classics and learning National Studies in elementary and secondary schools as part of the realization of the “Chinese Dream” (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦). Tea culture, national paintings, Beijing opera, traditional calligraphy, traditional painting as well as traditional music are further elements to achieve this goal.<sup>608</sup>

However, such progress was promoted in context of National Studies, not classics reading education in people-run study halls and academies. Factually, the Chinese government did show a first response to classics reading education by mentioning it for the first time in a *legal document* in 2017: in the “Notification for Good Work in Student Enrolment and Starting School in the Course of Compulsory Education in 2017 by the General Office of the Ministry of Education” (*Jiaoyubu bangongting guanyu zuohao 2017 nian yiwu jiaoyu zhaosheng ruxue gongzuo de tongzhi* 教育部办公厅关于做好2017年义务教育招生入学工作的通知), the Ministry of Education for the first time refers to “classics reading classes” (*dujingban*) and “traditional-style private schools (*sishu*); they reach out to local educational offices and public education institutions and ask them to pay attention to children who learn in classics reading facilities and make sure that they find their way back into the system. The whole passage reads as follows:

Strengthen the performance of all parties’ duties. Compulsory education is education which is implemented uniformly by the State and shall be received by all school-age children and adolescents. The parents or other statutory guardians of school-age children and adolescents shall ensure that school-age children and adolescents go to school to receive and complete compulsory education. The education administrative department of the local people’s government at provincial level uniformly plans and determines the year and month of birth for the children who are to enter elementary school first grade according to the legal requirements and actual situation. Every education administrative department of the local people’s government on county, town, and township level has to strengthen the monitoring and controlling of the groups that provide children with education in the context of tradition [<sup>609</sup>]; in addition to that, they have to pay high attention to students who from ‘sishus’, ‘classics reading classes’ and other training facilities on social level. According to the requirements of the Compulsory Education Law, school-age children and adolescents must enter a school and receive compulsory education; schools and educational departments must immediately take over the responsibility for students who are deprived of education and dropped out of school, encourage their return, registration and formal admission [to school]. For those who actually need to postpone schooling due to physical health conditions or the like, parents or other statutory guardians have to apply to the education administrative department of the local people’s government at county level and can only postpone formal education

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<sup>608</sup> Wang Caigui Classics Reading Education Promotion Center: “Jiaoyubu jue ding zai quanguo you’eryuan、zhongxiaoxue tuiguang guoxue jingdian jiaoyu 教育部决定在全国幼儿园、中小学推广国学经典教育”. Online: <http://www.aidujing.com/a/5753.html> (last access: November 1, 2018).

<sup>609</sup> The very dense phrase “*chuantong kongzhuo baoxue zhongdian qunti* 传统控辍保学重点群体” refers to groups of educators who teach children in school-age at educational facilities that focus on traditional education; i.e. they spend their time of compulsory education in tradition-focused educational facilities.

when being granted permission; they are not authorized to replace the State's uniformly implemented compulsory education by homeschooling.<sup>610</sup>

The Ministry of Education actively interferes within the sphere of classics reading education and homeschooling for the first time. As discussed in chapter 1, private education such as homeschooling and people-run schools are possible alternatives to state-run schools; legal leeway granted for these institutions have been partly occupied by classics reading educators when they argued that reading the classics with friends' children was homeschooling or that parents of classics reading students should be granted to choose study halls and academies as one of the "other educational facilities" (*qita jiaoyu jigou* 其他教育机构)<sup>611</sup> which are mentioned in the Law on Compulsory Education, for example people-run schools (see chapter 1.3). It seems that there is now an explicit restriction to parental choice in formal schooling; children who were deprived of schooling should be encouraged to return to a regular school.

However, as a journalist of the official state-run news agency Xinhua states, it is not further specified if there will be legal consequences for the *parents* if they continued to practice homeschooling or to send their children to classics reading classes and privately-run traditional schools.<sup>612</sup> Only schools and educational offices are addressed directly; schools are required to make students' formal school administration possible. For classics reading parents, it has long been common practice to register their children officially in a public school, apply for long-term leave, and send their children to a study hall or academy. Even though schools are asked to motivate students to return to school, and postponing education (e.g. asking for leave) must be justified by physical inhibitions, the common procedure does not necessarily

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<sup>610</sup> “**强化履行各方义务。**义务教育是国家统一实施的所有适龄儿童、少年必须接受的教育，适龄儿童、少年的父母或者其他法定监护人应当依法送其按时入学接受并完成义务教育。就读小学一年级儿童的截止出生年月由省级教育行政部门根据法律规定和实际情况统筹确定。各县（市、区）教育行政部门除加强对传统控辍保学重点群体监控外，要高度关注接受“私塾”“读经班”等社会培训机构教育的学生。适龄儿童、少年未按《义务教育法》相关规定入学接受义务教育的，学校及教育部门要立即落实失学辍学学生劝返、登记和书面报告责任。对于因身体健康等原因确需缓学的，父母或其他法定监护人应向县级教育部门提出申请，获批准后方可缓学，不得擅自以在家学习替代国家统一实施的义务教育。” The Ministry of Education, in: “Notification for Good Work in Student Enrolment and Starting School in the Course of Compulsory Education in 2017 by the General Office of the Ministry of Education” (*Jiaoyubu bangongting guanyu zuohao 2017 nian yiwu jiaoyu zhaosheng ruxue gongzuo de tongzhi* 教育部办公厅关于做好 2017 年义务教育招生入学工作的通知), published on February 22, 2017, Online: [http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A06/s3321/201702/t20170222\\_297025.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A06/s3321/201702/t20170222_297025.html) (last access: October 27, 2018).

<sup>611</sup> The argument is that children did not necessarily have to go to *public* schools; “other” facilities were also acceptable by law. When study halls and academies would be categorized as such and children could be sent there to receive education, they would be valid choices for parents to fulfil their obligation to enable their children to receive education (Wu / Li 2013: 178).

<sup>612</sup> Liu Yang 刘洋: “Jiaoyubu jiaoting ‘zaijia shangxue’ guonei yiyou 6,000 ren shijian 教育部叫停‘在家上学’国内已有 6000 人实践 . In: *Xinhua News Agency*, online: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/2017-03/03/c\\_1120562954.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2017-03/03/c_1120562954.htm) (last access: October 27, 2018).

have to stop because of this. Another favored possibility by classics reading parents is to send the child to a study hall for the first six years and to the public system only for secondary school – as the headmaster of Xiamen Academy states, the schools cannot reject to formally register a student who has not yet had a school registration due to regulations of the Compulsory Education Law. Such late registrations might also be facilitated for parents based on the new regulations by the Ministry of Education.

Billioud (2007: 58) – who has brought the political and popular spheres of Confucian revival in dialogue in his research – has considered the interplay of policy making in the broader area of Confucian revival and popular Confucianist activities partly as response to popular and academic demand and partly as attempt to keep hold on the cultural formations resulting from the revival of (Confucian) tradition:

Government policy, in this sense, is more a matter of dynamic interaction with an ongoing and widespread cultural phenomenon than a directive from on high. It makes possible an expansion of the range of experience for individuals, a deepening of their relationship to certain aspects of their own history and culture. At the same time, policy adapts and responds to the demand made possible, producing a tradition that serves the interests of the state and reinforces social cohesion. (Billioud 2007: 58)

Or, as he has recently put it, Confucian activities on non-political levels are “increasingly embraced not by but within the state apparatus” (Billioud 2018: 8).

The notification “On the Content of the Responses to Draft No. 3,140 (Category of Cultural Propaganda, No. 225) of the 5<sup>th</sup> Session 12<sup>th</sup> Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference National Committee” (*Guanyu Zhengxie shi’er jie quanguo weiyuanhui di wu ci huiyi di 3140 hao* 关于政协十二届全国委员会第五次会议第 3140 号 (wenhua xuanchuang lei 225 hao 文化宣传类225号) 提案答复的函) from September 8, 2017, might be another step into the direction of classics reading education being embraced within state education. Before 2016, the focus for teaching and teacher education was laid on “traditional culture” (*chuantong wenhua*). From 2016 onwards, the Ministry of education started to organize “core teacher training in reciting, reading, and talking about Chinese classics” (*Zhonghua jingdian songxiejiang guban jiaoshi peixun* 中华经典诵写讲骨干教师培训). Classics reading activities in class as well as in other (social) activities are presented under the government’s umbrella. The document stated that starting in 2007 already, the government launched a series of activities called “China recites – rhythmical recitation of the classics” (*Zhonghua song – jingdian songdu* 中华诵·经典诵读) to enhance classics reading activities among the people. Recitation of the classics is furthermore explicitly marked as governmental responsibility:

According to the ‘Suggestions concerning the Implementation of the Development Program for Propaganda of Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture’ by the General Office of the CPC Central

Committee and the General Office of the State Council,’ it is clearly stated that the Ministry of Education and the State Council take over the duties of implementing the ‘Program for Recitation of Chinese Classics.’<sup>613</sup>

In the “Notification on Printing and Distributing the ‘Proposal for Implementing the Work Program of Reciting Chinese Classics’ by the Ministry of Education, State Language Commission” (*Jiaoyubu guojia yuwei guanyu yinfa ‘Zhonghua jingdian songdu gongcheng shishi fang’an’ de tongzhi* 教育部 国家语委关于印发《中华经典诵读工程实施方案》的通知) from September 26, 2018, the idea of reading the classics is drawn even closer to the government. The core of the program is summarized as follows:

‘Recite the classics in vernacular language; standardize the wordbooks of the Chinese nation.’ The basic tasks of the program on reading the classics of the Chinese nation are to establish morality, cultivate the youth, and educate the core moral values of socialism; its core contents are to pass on and enhance excellent Chinese traditional culture, to revolutionize culture, and the forward-striving culture of socialism; its main forms are activities of cultural practice such as recitation, writing and explanation and the like; its basic support lies within teaching material, informational platforms, and the cultivation of people’s talents; its basic target groups are the larger youth, teachers, parents and people who are interested in traditional culture; it fully unfolds the important role of language in propagating and developing Chinese excellent culture; it is the basic color for a good life of the youth; it provides helpful support for the people’s cultural self-esteem.<sup>614</sup>

The government regards culturally underlined language skills as an important political soft power that enables people to talk about the Chinese nation in their concepts, with their words, to support Chinese thought. While classics reading education in private hands aims at individual development and a harmonious Chinese society, the CCP places cultural education and language skills under larger political goals. In this logic, a decent education along Confucian classics could even support the establishment of the “One Belt – One Road”

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<sup>613</sup> “Genju Zhonggong zhongyang bangongting ‘guanyu shishi Zhonghua youxiu chuantong wenhua chuanchengfazhan gongcheng de yijian’, mingque jiaoyubu, guojia yuwei chengdan ‘Zhonghua jingdian songdu gongcheng’ shishi renwu 根据中共中央办公厅、国务院办公厅《关于实施中华优秀传统文化传承发展工程的意见》，明确教育部、国家语委承担‘中华经典诵读工程’实施任务。” In: Ministry of Education: “On the Content of the Responses to Draft No. 3,140 (Category of Cultural Propaganda, No. 225) of the 5<sup>th</sup> Session 12<sup>th</sup> Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference National Committee” (*Guanyu Zhengxie shi’er jie quanguo weiyuanhui di wu ci huiyi di 3140 hao* 关于政协十二届全国委员会第五次会议第 3140 号 (*wenhua xuanchuang lei 225 hao* 文化宣传类 225 号) 提案答复的函). Online: [http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb\\_xxgk/xxgk\\_jyta/jyta\\_yys/201803/t20180305\\_328773.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/xxgk_jyta/jyta_yys/201803/t20180305_328773.html) (last access: November 1, 2018).

<sup>614</sup> “普通话诵经典，规范字书中华”。中华经典诵读工程以立德树人、培育社会主义核心价值观为根本任务，以传承弘扬中华优秀传统文化、革命文化和社会主义先进文化为核心内容，以诵读、书写、讲解等文化实践活动为主要形式，以课程教材、资源平台及人才培养建设为基础支撑，以广大青少年、教师、家长和中华文化爱好者为基本对象，充分发挥语言文字在传承发展中华优秀传统文化中的重要作用，为青少年的美好人生打下鲜明中国底色，为增强人民群众的文化自信提供有力支撑。” In: Ministry of Education: “Notification on Printing and Distributing the ‘Proposal for Implementing the Work Program of Reciting Chinese Classics’ by the Ministry of Education, State Language Commission” (*Jiaoyubu guojia yuwei guanyu yinfa ‘Zhonghua jingdian songdu gongcheng shishi fang’an’ de tongzhi* 教育部 国家语委关于印发《中华经典诵读工程实施方案》的通知)。Online: [http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A18/s3129/201809/t20180929\\_350445.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A18/s3129/201809/t20180929_350445.html) (last access: November 1, 2018).



initiative (*zhuli yi dai yi lu jianshe* 助力“一带一路”建设) because language would bring together people's hearts and minds. The government considers it their task to establish classics reading classes and a system of teaching material (*jiangou jingdian kecheng he jiaocai tixi* 构建经典诵读课程和教材体系) as well as to establish a nationwide cultural atmosphere of reading the classics (*yingzao quan shehui songdu jingdian de wenhua fenwei* 营造全社会诵读经典的文化氛围). The latter two tasks – establish classes, material, and an atmosphere of reading the classics – has been in the hand of classics reading activists so far. It now seems as if the government claims to be leading in these tasks. Combining recent developments (2016-2018) on the government's side of classics reading education, it could mean that either (1) Wang's concept of bringing back the classics into the public school curriculum has started to bear fruits, or (2) it might be as the headmaster of Suzhou Study Hall A feared: once the state interfered with their education, it would lose its core vision, and the freedom to autonomously design classics reading education would be gone. However, since the approximation between privately initiated and governmentally regulated classics reading education has just started, further developments remain to be observed. It can be stated, though, that tradition-inspired educational approaches initiated among the people (*minjian*) have become so powerful that the government has acted in the matter.

*Later addition:*

After the research for this study had been finished, the Chinese government took further action in the case of classics reading facilities. On March 21, 2019, the General Office of the Ministry of Education issued the “Notification for Good Work in Student Enrolment and Starting School in Regular Elementary and High-Schools in the Year 2019” (*jiaoyubu bangongting guanyu zuohao 2019 nian putong zhongxiaoxue zhaosheng ruxue gongzuo de tongzhi* 教育部办公厅关于做好 2019 年普通中小学招生入学工作的通知) and tightened the regulations on education in classics reading facilities. The ministry points out that in recent years, measurement to reduce the so-called “school picking fever” (*xuanxue re* 择校热) in which parents actively chose the schools they wanted their child(ren) to attend, had slowly started to work. In this context, it poses measures to control school dropouts in direction of societal classics reading facilities:

According to the law, it must be guaranteed that school-age children are enrolled in a school. The legal regulations based on the Law on Compulsory Education and the Law on the Protection of Minors must be strictly implemented everywhere to guarantee the rights of school-age children to receive compulsory education in practice. If children or adolescents are to be enrolled later or need to take a leave from school due to physical conditions, parents or other legal guardians must issue a request to the local county education administration department to prepare a record. Legal responsibilities concerning preventing children from dropping out of school and making sure they keep going to school have to be effectively implemented everywhere; a working platform to prevent children from dropping out of

school needs to be established according to legal regulations and the requirements of the nation state, to earnestly implement a working system to control and ensure, and to guarantee a good work on drop-out prevention and continued schooling. Unlawful education in societal organizations that take forms of “national study classes”, “classics reading classes” or “small-scale traditional private schools” and the like as a substitute for compulsory education need to be inspected effectively and handled earnestly everywhere. Parents or other legal guardians who do not send their school-age children to school to receive compulsory education or cause their dropping out of school without adequate reason, shall be held responsible according to the law when the circumstances are severe, or a crime has been constituted.<sup>615</sup>

This is the first time that educational practice in study halls and academies is brought together with the term “unlawful education”, and that parents are warned that choosing classics reading education over compulsory education can be actions against the law.

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## 7. OUTLOOK

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Even though many classics reading educators claim that locality is a crucial aspect in cultural revival (original and native culture can only be revived properly on the grounds of its origin), classics reading education reaches out beyond the boundaries of the Chinese nation state. Reading the classics abroad (*haiwai dujing* 海外读经) gains growing prominence in overseas Chinese communities, but it takes another form: classics reading education abroad mostly appears in the form of culture courses. The large vision of improving Chinese society shrinks when being drawn to places outside of China where the emphasis has rather been put on getting to know Chinese culture a bit better by reciting the classics now and then. The overseas relations of the Chinese classics reading world also extend to an Italian academy which revives Latin language and European classical culture. However, this academy focuses on appreciation of culture rather than on transforming society with a new classical education program, and it is a single case.

Similar to the classics reading movement, the Turkish Gülen movement is a prominent example of a social movement which aims at high social goals – the creation of a “Golden

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<sup>615</sup> “依法保障适龄儿童少年入学。各地要严格落实《义务教育法》《未成年人保护法》等法律规定，切实保障适龄儿童少年接受义务教育的权利。适龄儿童少年因身体状况需要延缓入学或者休学的，其父母或者其他法定监护人应当提出申请，报当地县级人民政府教育行政部门备案。各地要切实履行义务教育控辍保学法定职责，按照法律规定和国家有关要求，建立失学辍学适龄儿童工作台帐，认真落实联控联保工作机制，确保做好控辍保学工作。各地要认真排查并严厉查处社会培训机构以“国学班”“读经班”“私塾”等形式替代义务教育的非法办学行为。父母或者其他法定监护人无正当理由未送适龄儿童少年入学接受义务教育或造成辍学，情节严重或构成犯罪的，依法追究法律责任。” The Ministry of Education, in: “Notification for Good Work in Student Enrolment and Starting School in Regular Elementary and High-Schools in the Year 2019 by the General Office of the Ministry of Education” (*Jiaoyubu bangongting guanyu zuohao 2019 nian putong zhongxiaoxue zhaosheng ruxue gongzuo de tongzhi* 教育部办公厅关于做好 2019 年普通中小学招生入学工作的通知), published on March 21, 2019, Online: [http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A06/s3321/201903/t20190326\\_375446.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A06/s3321/201903/t20190326_375446.html) (last access: March 14, 2020).

Generation” equipped with morality and scientific knowledge through a self-created educational approach. In both cases, education is the means of choice to act upon people’s feeling of lack (or loss) when they are confronted with change in their worlds. Societies in both China and Turkey dealt with a modernization process which was combined with a Westernization process – and also came with unwanted results, especially in the cultural sector. An educational approach in the present which draws back on cultural resources of the past appears as counterproposal to a Westernized modernization – modern society is rooted in their own tradition and not in the West.

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### 7.1. CLASSICS READING EDUCATION BEYOND THE BORDERS OF CHINA

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As mentioned in the description of the research methods (chapter 2), the author has met a Chinese mother in North-Rhine Westphalia who was dedicated to teaching her children Chinese classics on weekends. Such weekend and after school reading classes outside of China are not rare. The most famous school in Germany is Zhiqian 致谦 Study Hall in Hamburg which used to be run by Yang Mei 杨梅. A report on the school published by the Goethe Institute in March 2015 sheds light on how Chinese immigrant children memorize Confucian classics in Sunday school. Having toured Germany with Wang Caigui in 2009, Yang Mei had gained reputation in Germany and started to welcome Chinese children from all over Germany to intensive courses in classics reading education four times a year. “Memorizing has a bad reputation in Western pedagogy, even though recent research shows that it can be quite an effective learning strategy. Yang is convinced that classical education is good training for the brain.”<sup>616</sup> Overseas Chinese brought their educational ideas into study halls in Europe (13), the US (3), Canada (3), Australia (1) and Asia (outside of China; not yet listed) – to list but under Wang Caigui’s wings. An English website has already been launched to promote and connect the “dujing schools around the world.”<sup>617</sup> While the overall number of such schools is still small, there are already a few in Europe. Most of them (6 out of 13) are located in Germany. To make sure that their children learn something about *their own* tradition, culture, and language, Chinese parents turn to classics reading education. As mentioned before, a mother who used to live in Northern Germany with her children even decided on a two years’ stay at Wang’s academy to make sure that her children learn something proper in their crucial years, i.e. in the time in which their memory worked best. In

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<sup>616</sup> Martina Bölck (translated by Eric Rosencrantz): “Confucius is Money in the Bank. *Goethe Institute*, Online: <https://www.goethe.de/ins/cn/en/kul/mag/20617444.html> (last access: November 1, 2018).

<sup>617</sup> Dujing Schools Around the World, Online: <http://iclassics.org/resource-library/dujing-schools/> (last access: November 1, 2018).

the course of this study, Yang Mei has left her life in Germany behind to work with Wang Caigui; she now runs an international school affiliated with his academy. One step further towards his ideal to educate international talents and global citizens based on tradition seems to be done.

A little excursus on the different (cultural) understanding of learning approaches sheds light on the point Yang Mei makes concerning memorization as learning technique: Educational psychologist Ference Marton and his colleagues Dall'Alba and Tse (1996: 70; 75-79) argue that there is a fundamental difference of the concepts of memorization, rote learning and understanding in Asian and Western educational worlds. Westerners believed that Asian learners were solely oriented towards rote learning as educational philosophy and practice in Asia was highly focused on memorization, while in Western countries, people believed that memorization did not enhance understanding. Apart from drawing the line between memorization and understanding, a study on Chinese concepts of learning reveals a difference between mechanical memorization (of simply grasping an object) and memorization intertwined with understanding, i.e. memorization of what has already been understood or understanding something through memorization. Understanding itself is also differentiated into (a) understanding a given object and (b) understanding that is dependent on time: if one does not get the meaning of something immediately, one can first proceed with other related content and then get back to the same point later after gaining additional knowledge; understanding comes with repetition over time. Understanding something through memorization in the sense of understanding something over a period of time is close to Wang Caigui's idea of life-long learning that derives from practice and is based on the accumulated wisdom of the classics. Furthermore, Marton et al. (1996: 80-82) point out that understanding deepens the memory: it is easier to memorize something that has already been understood. Vice versa, memorization could be of help within the process of understanding: if one did not understand a text properly, or if one wanted to deepen the previous understanding, one could repeat it over and over again. This way, difficulties can be overcome as with each repetition, it gets easier and one gets a (slightly) new idea of the text, which enhances the understanding. Such an almost hermeneutical circle of understanding through repeated memorization is differentiated from mechanical memorization.

On the backdrop of different understandings of memorization techniques, it would be very interesting to do further research on the emerging European, American, Canadian and Australian study halls and academies – as well as the Asian ones, once they are listed – to find out more about (1) concepts of and approaches to learning there and (2) specific motives that drive overseas Chinese parents (and educators?) to engage in classics reading education

abroad. For the cases in China, criticism on society, potential social dangers, and frustration with educational competition, performance pressure, materialism and capitalism have been identified as the main drivers which make people turn their backs on their previous ways of living. Additionally, memories of the own personal past as well as of historical wrongs and crisis also play an important part. Overseas Chinese live in a different society, and their positioning between past and future as well as their quest of identity within engagement with the past (if that applied to their cases) might look different from the cases analyzed in this study.

In January 2018, Wenli Academy received international guests from Europe: representatives of the Accademia Vivarium Novum in Rome, the only college worldwide for learning and speaking ancient Latin and Greek, gave a two-day workshop on (their) classics. While the Italian academy focuses on male adult education (ages 16 to 25) only, it also aims at preserving ancient culture and with that, the true essence of humanity. The academy's mission reads as follows:

The students of the Academy Vivarium Novum are dedicated to the pursuit of a comprehensive grasp of the Latin and Ancient Greek languages. These languages are our second and third mother tongues. Only with this kind of comprehension are we able to enter the courts of the ancients. It is in this way that we are able to connect the particular with the universal. It is in this way that we are able to join the sublime utopia of the spirit with the honest skepticism of one who knows how difficult it is to unite words and deeds (*res et verba*). We firmly believe that the knowledge of literature (*scientia litterarum*) and experience of the world around us (*experientia rerum*) must never be out of joint. Every year our students analyze and discuss thousands of pages of Classical, Christian, Medieval and Renaissance literature. We confront the works of great authors in order to reflect profoundly upon the most serious troubles that beset humanity. Our students address the challenges of this world with a fuller knowledge of the past and great hope for our future.<sup>618</sup>

Similar to classics reading education, the academy in Italy grounds its education on a collection of canonical works which allegedly embody the essence of humanity; great works are supposed to be of assistance to the learner to understand the world, acquire a better outlook on it, and possibly improve it in the future. The author of this mission statement directly refers to the concept “utopia” that lies behind their vision. Such a utopia is reached by reviving a science of literature as it was common during the renaissance. Wang Caigui with his classics reading education approach is not the only visionary who believes in a classically inspired architecture for the establishment of a better tomorrow. His visitors from Italy have a

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<sup>618</sup> Accademia Vivarium Novum: Our mission. Online: <https://vivariumnovum.net/en/academy/mission> (last access: October 27, 2018).

Wenli Academy: “Genzhi jingdian huitong Zhongxi – Wenli Shuyuan fangxuetuan Ouzhou gudian wenhua zhi lu 根植经典会通中西——文礼书院访学团欧洲古典文化之旅（一）。” Online: <https://www.wenli.ac.cn/h-nd-168.html?id=168> (last access: January 4, 2019).

similar high ideal but are much smaller in scale and do not offer an all-encompassing educational approach from the cradle to adolescence.

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## 7.2. GÜLEN'S "GOLDEN GENERATION": SOCIAL HARMONY THROUGH EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

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As has been demonstrated above, the Chinese are not the only ones to aim at a better future by referring to their past. While the Italian academy in Rome focusses on a shiny Renaissance Era atmosphere via Latin language education, Gülen schools in Turkey aim at overcoming the barrier between science and religion by creating an education that would equip students with both excellent scientific skills and proper moral conduct. Very similar to Wang Caigui, Fethullah Gülen, the intellectual behind the Gülen movement, wants to revive the own tradition in a way that can be regarded as beneficial for the needs of today's society. Gülen wants to create a bridge between Islam and the West and demonstrate the positive ideas of Islam.

In order to regain a respectable role in the modern world, Mr. Gülen frequently reminds his followers of the Ottoman legacy in contemporary Turkey. He does not advocate a return of the caliphate but rather a focus on the major cultural values and practices of the Ottomans: (1) the spirit of dialog; (2) the fact that the Ottoman state was multilingual, multiethnic and multireligious; (3) respect for women; and (4) the intellectual and cultural rapprochement between Ottoman society and the West begun in the nineteenth century. Mr. Gülen advocates using the Ottoman model as a basis for returning the Muslim world to the center of world civilization and for creating productive ties with the West. (Ebaugh 2010: 33)

Wang Caigui similarly wants to bring back what he considers as the true Chinese civilization in terms of morality, social harmony, and adequate education; furthermore, he aims at bringing together Chinese and Western cultures by instrumentalizing the classics within classics reading education. Cultural understanding does, in his opinion, foot on reading each other's classics. The Gülen movement has a strong focus on education: Gülen wants quality education – not in terms of politics (i.e. forced from above) but in terms of enabling the society to reach its full potential. According to Gülen, the main task in life is to seek understanding. Understanding as a “requisite for social, economic and political modernization” (Ebaugh 2010: 34; see also Yavuz 2013: 94) can be strongly supported by adequate education. Thus, education can be a strategy to overcome grievances and shortcomings in social and economic aspects as well as to achieve social justice and peace, especially since Gülen holds the view that the latter can only be created by “intellectually enlightened people with strong moral values and a sense of altruism” (Ebaugh 2010: 34). While in the Western world science and technology were dominant, society lacked a focus on the human being and the spiritual. Gülen criticizes both traditional religious schools (*madrasas*) and traditional Islamic

institutions of education (*takyas*) for not being suitable for the modern world and secular schools for lacking ethics and spirituality; according to Gülen, a human being needs both (Ebaugh 2010: 33). This is the starting point for Gülen schools that combine both training in natural sciences and technology and religious values. These schools have been opened both inside and outside of Turkey as part of a revival of religious elements in a secularized Turkey starting in the 1980s (Cingilloğlu 2017: 4). Having been alienated from their own religion and heritage, the people were given an opportunity to reconnect with their past through proper education to help them overcome their crisis of identity. As crucial element within the alienation from one's own roots, Westernization in late Ottoman and early Republican period [at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century] is mentioned. The current Turkish educational system, which is based on secularism and Westernized reform under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the 1980s, is perceived as “impoverishment of the human spirit” (Yavuz 2013: 94) – another link to the Chinese case. China's public educational system today is also regarded as outcome of interference from Western thought, system and practice, at the cost of native Chinese education.

Cingilloğlu (2017: 2) examined the transformative character of adult education within the movement in her PhD thesis and found that 25,000 students in 200 high schools are involved in Gülen's education. Following Cohen's (1985; in Cingilloğlu 2017: 40) definition of new social movements, Cingilloğlu (2017: 40) considers the Gülen movements as a social movement that does not aim at overthrowing the government; instead, the political and economic framework is accepted while only civil society is addressed by the movement's intentions. Gülen does not want to meet modernity on terms of Westernization, but by taking economic, technological, and legal opportunities as basis for a social transformation on their own terms (Cingilloğlu 2017: 61). Education is, in this context, the proper tool to change the individual, which is supposed to induce social change in return. The creation of a better and more humane society comprised of individuals with a spiritual and intellectual consciousness stands at the end of the transformative process; the inner self is supposed to experience an empowerment that could later be transmitted into society (Cingilloğlu 2017: 6; 63).

Particularly, in the case of new social movements, the primary goal of education is shifted toward personal transformation rather than achieving social goals because it is expected that personal transformation will lead to changes in the social, cultural, and political life. (Cingilloğlu 2017: 76)

In this logic, Gülen's goal is to create a “Golden Generation”, an ideal social world created by individuals who merge science and religion (Cingilloğlu 2017: 63). An improved future society is also the goal of Wang Caigui's educative endeavors; parallels of the purpose of education within revival-of-tradition movements cannot be overlooked. In practice, the Gülen

movement also started in a way very similar to the classics reading education movement with summer camps, discussion groups, gatherings in student dormitories, and the like. From there, the educational and transformative practice expanded and found a place in private high schools and universities (Yavuz 2013: 93).

Traditionally inspired activists not only in China have tried to overcome frictions within their current condition by educational measurements which aim at reconnecting the self with its (perceived, idealized, imagined) cultural basis. In China as well as in Turkey, social and cultural changes in the course of modernization are perceived as being tied to a commitment to “the West”. Local people return to their localized systems or institutions and value their local(ly useful) knowledge. New Confucian philosophy as well as the academic subject of National Studies, both projects that value traditional knowledge (or wisdom), native history, traditional culture and institutions, have already been discussed as projects carried out for the sake of gaining cultural self-esteem and self-assertion (see chapter 1.4.1). While these two projects appear in context of cultural protection with a defensive character against others, the main focus of classics reading activities is on the individual and its personal development.<sup>619</sup> Education links the individual to culture as stable ground within a world full of different influences. Such a choice is more likely a response to uncertainty within the self than to possible endangerment from outside.

In the case of Turkey, Cingilloğlu (2017: 76) considers the educative Gülen movement as a new social movement; in the Chinese case, a grounded utopian movement approach has been chosen. GUM theory is based on (critique of) the new social movement theory; it exceeds the latter to the extent that it stresses the utopian imaginaries, which are tried to be implemented in present time, in present places and within present people (practices, rituals, identities, values etc.). As a response to frustration with current circumstances and happenings in the past, the two cases seem to be very similar; both also embody practice focused on a distant utopia, approached by current educative practice. Both movements shed light on results of disconnection with cultural tradition, uncertainty of life paths, and reactions upon change (especially within modern societies or within processes of modernization of societies) which cannot be processed by the people as fast as the processes themselves seem to tackle societies. Both movements show that one hundred years after Western influence, especially in the educational systems, society is still stirred up by the consequences of such external impact. Both movements cope with the cut from the cultural heritage with an over-emphasis on

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<sup>619</sup> This does not exclude the larger ambition to put the well-developed individual into the larger picture of an improved future society.



tradition.<sup>620</sup> A focus on tradition and a seemingly nativistic aspiration reveal the underlying dynamics of people's efforts to make sense of the historically grown the present world and to make them feel at home in it.

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<sup>620</sup> For Wang's classics reading education, the trade-offs and examples of negative practice have been pointed out in chapters 6.1. and 6.2. In a footnote in the outline of chapters, it has already been mentioned that this study cannot achieve an in-depth study of the diverse dimensions, directions, and practical implementations of Gülen's educational theory. However, referring again to the SWR report on the question whether or not Gülen schools in Germany had a sectarian tendency, it might be that the utopia of a "Golden Generation", when attempted to be drawn into practice, also involves sacrifice. (SWR report "Report Mainz," June 12, 2018. Online: <https://www.swr.de/report/guelen-in-deutschland-demokratischer-bildungsverein-oder-gefaehrliche-sekte/text-des-beitrags-guelen-in-deutschland/-/id=233454/did=21828424/mpdid=21867520/nid=233454/sxj5b5/index.html>, last access: November 1, 2018; "Gülen-Bewegung: Neue Vorwürfe gegen Bildungseinrichtungen". SWR report "die story," February 5, 2014. Online: <https://www.swr.de/report/guelen-bewegung/text-guelen-bewegung/-/id=233454/did=12774416/mpdid=12820218/nid=233454/1yqpnrs/index.html>; last access: October 28, 2018).

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## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions asked in the interviews were not always the same. The interview guideline has been slightly altered within the research process due to the turn of focus during field research (see also chapter 2). Additionally, every interviewee is different, and every interview also went differently. Some interviewees needed to be activated by asking questions and follow-up questions; some interviewees had their own flow of speech and questions were just needed to guide or flank the conversation. The following collection is the overall question pool used during the whole field research process, partly with a few follow-up questions, and partly with specifications of the main question in case the interviewee needed further explanations. Usually, the question in bold print was asked in the interview. The pool is divided according to the main target groups of research: headmasters, teachers, and parents. A few questions appear in each group; a few questions are only used for one or two of them.

## HEADMASTERS

	<b>Chinese (original)</b>	<b>English translation</b>
1.	您怎么与中国经典开始有接触？ 什么时候开始学经典呢？为什么？	<b>How did you get in contact with Chinese classics?</b> When did you start to learn the Chinese classics? Why?
2.	进入传统文化领域后，有没有发现自我观或自我感的改变？	<b>Did you notice any changes in your self-perception or self-assurance after you entered the field of traditional culture?</b>
3.	宗教信仰或者其它的个人信仰对您来说有什么意义？	<b>Which meaning does religious belief have for you personally?</b>
4.	您觉得经典对教育的贡献是什么？ 跟其它教材相比，经典有什么特点？	<b>What do you think which contribution the classics make to education?</b> Compared with other teaching materials: what is the special characteristic of the classics?
5.	我们今天应该如何使用中国经典？ 为什么需要这样做呢？	<b>How should we use the classics today?</b> Why do we need to do it that way?
6.	对您来说，教育领域里，最高的权威人士或著作是谁、是什么？ (为什么呢？) 中国圣贤的教育概念给现在中国教育提供一什么？	<b>From your point of view, who is the person or what is the work with the highest authority?</b> (Why?) <b>What is the contribution of the educational concept of the Chinese sages for today's education?</b>

7.	您认为教育的责任是谁的责任？ (父母、国家、民间机构？) 在最理想的条件下，谁办教育？ 谁要做关于孩子教育的选择呢？	<b>What do you think who is responsible for education?</b> <b>(Parents, state, people-run facilities?)</b> If you think of the most ideal circumstances, who would be in charge to carry out education? Who would make the choices for children's education?
8.	您建立这样的学堂/私塾/书院有什么原因或动机？ 您有没有个人原因或动机呢？	<b>What was the reason or motivation for you to establish this study hall/ traditional private school/ academy?</b> Did you have a personal reason or motivation?
9.	您为什么给学堂/私塾/书院起了这个名字？	<b>How did you choose the name for your study hall/traditional private school/ academy?</b>
10.	为什么选择这个地方办读经班/私塾/学堂/书院？ (省，城市，社区，具体地点，都可以)	<b>Why did you choose this place for running your study hall/traditional private school/ academy?</b> (province, city, community, or a specific site)
11.	您这里的教育目的是什么？ 您可以与其他学校做比较。 (比如与华德福学校相比；比如与国立学校相比；比如与其他教中国传统的学校相比)	<b>What is your educational goal?</b> You can make comparisons with other schools. (e.g. with Waldorf schools, state-run schools, other schools focused on Chinese tradition)
12.	这里的老师有什么资格、必须有经过什么样的培训？ 必须具有什么学历？ 必须具有任教或教传统思想的经历吗？	<b>What are the qualifications your teachers need to have, or which trainings do they have to complete?</b> Do they need to have a school record (school qualification)? Do they need to be experienced in teaching or teaching traditional thought?
13.	一般说来，谁或什么样的家庭把孩子送到这个学堂/私塾/书院来上课？ 他们大概属于哪个收入阶层，每个月的薪水大概多少？ 他们平常具有哪个层次的学历？他们平常受教育的年限是多少？ 家庭多大？	<b>Who or what kind of families usually send their children to your study hall/traditional private school/ academy?</b> Which income class do they belong to, or how much money do they usually make per month? Which level of education do they usually have? How many years of education did they complete? How big are the families?
14.	您认为父母所选择这个机构的原因是什么？ (您认为是什么吸引他们来学校报名？)	<b>What do you think why parents choose this institution?</b> (What do you think it is that attracts them to register their children here?)
15.	对比一下家庭教育和学校教育：家庭的责任是什么，学校的任务是什么？	If you take family and formal school education in comparison: what is the family's responsibility and what is the school's responsibility?
16.	您觉得像您这边这样的教育（读经教育）对社会的贡献是什么？ 这种教育有哪些局限性？	<b>Which impact do you think does the education in this institution (classics reading education) have on society?</b> Which limitations does this kind of education



	<p>如果今天没有这样的传统教育，如果没有现代的私塾、学堂和书院，您觉得是否对当今社会有影响？</p> <p><b>Variation:</b> 您认为您的学堂/私塾/书院对学生，对家庭，对周围的人有什么功能？</p>	<p>have?</p> <p>If today there were no traditional private schools, no study halls or academies: do you think it would affect society?</p> <p><b>Variation:</b> <b>What do you think, which function does the study hall/ traditional private school/ academy have for the students, for families, and for the people in the area?</b></p>
17.	<p>周围的居民和社区的政府机构对于本校的反应怎么样？</p>	<p><b>What is the reaction of the people in the area or of the local governmental institutions on your school?</b></p>
18.	<p>您认为学堂/书院的生活方式跟社会大众的生活方式有哪些共同点，哪些不同之处？</p>	<p><b>What do you think are the differences and similarities between life style in the study hall/ traditional private school/ academy and the larger society?</b></p>
19.	<p>一般说来，这里的学生毕业之后在教育和工作方面如何继续发展？进入社会后生活怎么样？</p>	<p><b>In which directions do graduates of this institution usually develop in terms of education or a profession? What about their development after entering into society?</b></p>
20.	<p>您觉得办学堂/私塾/书院最有价值的回报和最有困难的地方是什么？</p>	<p><b>What is your biggest reward and what is the largest difficulty in running this study hall/ traditional private school/ academy?</b></p>
21.	<p><i>Used in the initial stage of research only</i> (您这边的教育与在家上学的教育有共同点吗？有的话，有哪些？)</p>	<p><b>(Does your education have similarities with homeschooling? If so, what are they?)</b></p>
22.	<p>中国近几 10 到 15 年的教育改革政策有什么目标？您认为，这些政策对于这样的教育机构的发展会有怎样的影响呢？</p>	<p><b>What are the goals of educational policies in the last 10 to 15 years in China? Do you think that these policies have an impact on the development of educational facility?</b></p>
23.	<p>您如何理解“素质教育”这个概念？</p>	<p><b>How do you understand the term “quality education”?</b></p>
24.	<p>您觉得像您这样的教育机构在中国的教育界中占什么样的位置？</p>	<p><b>Which position does your educational facility have in the Chinese educational landscape?</b></p>
25.	<p><b>Variations of final questions:</b> 假如孔子看到中国今天的样子，今天的情况，您觉得他会说什么？您这里如此的学堂/学校/书院有没有有什么样板学堂或样板教育机构？（榜样） 假如您再次可以当学生，您最想受到怎样的教育？请您描述一下。</p>	<p><b>Variations of final questions:</b> <b>If Confucius would see China today – what would he say?</b> Do you have a model [ideal] educational facility? If you could be a student again, what would be the ideal education for you? Please describe.</p>

## TEACHERS

	Chinese (original)	English translation
1.	您怎么与中国经典开始有接触？ 什么时候开始学经典呢？为什么？	<b>How did you get in contact with Chinese classics?</b> When did you start to learn the Chinese classics? Why?
2.	进入传统文化的领域后，有没有发现自我观或自我感的改变？	<b>Did you notice any changes in your self-perception or self-assurance after you entered the field of traditional culture?</b>
3.	宗教信仰或者其它的个人信仰对您来说有什么意义？	<b>Which meaning does religious belief have for you personally?</b>
4.	您开始在这里工作的动机或原因是什么？	<b>For which reason or motivation did you start working here?</b>
5.	您刚开始在这里工作有什么要求和期望？现在符合您的期待吗？	<b>Which requirements and expectations did you have when you just started working here? Does the situation today suit your (former) expectations?</b>
6.	您如何准备在这里当老师/任教？ (比如，有没有经过特殊的培训？)	<b>How did you prepare for your teacher's position here?</b> (e.g. did you go through any special trainings?)
7.	您觉得这个学堂/私塾/书院与您所知道的其他教育机构有什么不同？ (您这边的教育目的是什么？)	<b>What do you think are the differences between study halls/ traditional private schools/ academies and other educational institutions?</b>
8.	您觉得经典对教育的贡献是什么？ 跟其它教材相比，经典有什么特点？	<b>What do you think which contribution the classics make to education?</b> Compared with other teaching materials: what is the special characteristic of the classics?
9.	<b>Variation:</b> 您这边的教育目的是什么？	<b>Variation:</b> What is your educational goal here?
10.	我们今天应该如何使用中国经典？ 为什么需要这样做呢？	<b>How should we use the classics today?</b> Why do we need to do it that way?
11.	您个人的教育理念是什么？ 跟中国传统文化有共同点吗？哪些？	<b>What is your personal educational concept? Does it have similarities with traditional culture? If so, which are they?</b>
12.	如果今天没有这样的传统教育，如果没有现代的私塾、学堂和书院，您觉得是否对当今社会有影响？	<b>If today there were no traditional private schools, no study halls or academies: do you think it would affect society?</b>
13.	<b>Only used in the initial stage of research:</b> (您这里教的课程是什么？ 这个课程对于孩子的教育有什么意义?)	<b>Only used in the initial stage of research:</b> (Which classes (subjects) do you teach here? Which meaning do these subjects have for the children's education?)

14.	您觉得孩子的教育中，最重要的是什么？ 需不需要培养某些特别的能力？ 课堂上重要的部分是什么？ 如何对待学生？ 您所用的教材或方法是什么？	<b>What do you think is most important in a child's education?</b> Any special abilities which needed to be trained? What is an important part of a class? How should interaction with the students be? What is your teaching material and method?
15.	对比一下家庭教育和学校教育：家庭的责任是什么，学校的任务是什么？	<b>If you take family and formal school education in comparison: what is the family's responsibility and what is the school's responsibility?</b>
16.	您觉得什么样的老师算是好的老师、什么样的老师算是不那么好的老师？ 如果对比一下：您觉得老师和父母对孩子有什么影响？	<b>What do you think makes a good teacher, and what makes a less good teacher?</b> <b>If you compare: which influence do teachers and which influence do parents have on children?</b>
17.	老师和学生，在课堂上谁比较重要？为什么？	<b>Who is more important in class – teachers or students? Why?</b>
18.	请您描述一下您所认为对您孩子比较适当的学习环境是什么样的。	<b>Please describe the educational environment which you consider as most suitable for your child.</b>
19.	您认为学堂/书院的生活方式跟社会大众的生活方式有哪些共同点，哪些不同之处？	<b>What do you think are the differences and similarities between life style in the study hall/traditional private school/ academy and the larger society?</b>
20.	您如何应对对课程没有兴趣或不愿意积极参加的学生？	<b>How do you deal with students who have no interest to participate or do not actively take part in class?</b>
21.	您如何与父母讨论学生课堂上的表现？ 比如怎样谈如何学习 比如怎样谈学习或行为上的问题 比如怎么样谈进步和发展	<b>How do you communicate the students' behavior in class with the students?</b> e.g. how the student studies e.g. how do you talk about issues concerning learning and behavior e.g. how do you talk about progress and development
22.	<i>If not already talked about in the course of the interview:</i> (请您描述在学校普通的一天。)	<i>If not already talked about in the course of the interview:</i> (Please describe a regular day at this school.)
23.	您如何测验学生的学习成果？	How do you measure the students' study results?
24.	周末和假期也有活动吗？哪些？	<b>Do you have activities during weekends and vacations? If so, which ones?</b>
25.	您觉得经过私塾教育的孩子的前途如何？ 进入社会后生活怎么样？	<b>What do you think how the future of a child who went through <i>sishu</i> education looks like?</b> <b>How would life be after entering into society?</b>

26.	您对于这样的教育机构的未来发展和前途有什么看法?	<b>What do you think about the future development and perspective of this educational facility?</b>
27.	<b><i>Variations of final questions:</i></b> 假如孔子看到中国今天的样子, 今天的情况, 您觉得他会说什么? 您这里如此的学堂/学校/书院有没有有什么样板学堂或样板教育机构? (榜样) 您如果想到您自己去上学的时候: 假如当时也有机会自己经过像这样的教育, 您今天会如何? 您现在的生活不同吗?	<b><i>Variations of final questions:</i></b> <b>If Confucius would see China today – what would he say?</b> Do you have a model [ideal] educational facility? If you look back to your time at school: if you could have gone through such an education at a facility like this, how would you be today? Would your life today be different?

## PARENTS

(\* Additional questions for teachers or headmasters who are also in the role of parents.

	<b>Chinese (original)</b>	<b>English translation</b>
1.	您如何注意到 (怎么知道) 这个学堂/私塾/书院?	<b>How did you take notice of this study hall/ traditional private school/ academy?</b>
2.	您为什么选择把您的孩子送到这个学堂/私塾/书院上课呢? (他们这边有什么特点、有什么是吸引您的?) 这样的教育会给孩子提供某些前所未有的机会吗? 您为什么没有把孩子送到国立学校读书呢? 您为什么没有选择其他民办或私办的学校?	<b>Why did you choose to send your child to this study hall/ traditional private school/ academy?</b> (Do they have any special characteristic or something that attracted you?) Does this education offer your child anything that if did get before/ otherwise? Why didn't you send your child to a state-run school? Why didn't you choose another people-run educational facility?
3.	您怎么与中国经典开始有接触? 什么时候开始学经典呢? 为什么?	<b>How did you get in contact with Chinese classics?</b> When did you start to learn the Chinese classics? Why?
4.	进入传统文化的领域后, 有没有发现自我观或自我感的改变?	<b>Did you notice any changes in your self-perception or self-assurance after you entered the field of traditional culture?</b>
5.	您认为教育的责任是谁的责任? (父母、国家、民间机构?) 在最理想的条件下, 谁办教育? 谁要做关于孩子教育的选择呢?	<b>What do you think who is responsible for education?</b> <b>(Parents, state, people-run facilities?)</b> If you think of the most ideal circumstances, who would be in charge to carry out education? Who would make the choices for children's education?
6.	对比一下家庭教育和学校教育: 家庭的责任是什么, 学校的任务是什	If you take family and formal school education in comparison: what is the family's responsibility and what is the school's responsibility?

	么?	
7.	您认为学堂/书院的生活方式跟社会大众的生活方式有哪些共同点, 哪些不同之处?	<b>What do you think are the differences and similarities between life style in the study hall/ traditional private school/ academy and the larger society?</b>
8.	您这里有没有权力参与您孩子的教育? 有的话, 您如何参与? 比如参与讨论学校所做的关于教育内容、活动或教材的计划?	<b>Do you have the power to partake in your child's education in this facility? If so, how do you partake?</b> E.g. participate in discussion on educational content, activities or teaching material in the school?
9.	<i>Only used in the initial stage of research:</i> 他们这里用什么教材和教学方法?	<i>Only used in the initial stage of research:</i> <b>Which teaching material and method do they use here?</b>
10.	您觉得经典对教育的贡献是什么? 跟其它教材相比, 经典有什么特点?	<b>What do you think which contribution the classics make to education?</b> Compared with other teaching materials: what is the special characteristic of the classics?
11.	孩子在这里吸取什么样的价值观? 这种价值观对孩子的发展有什么功能?	<b>Which value system do the children acquire here?</b> Which function does the value system have for the children's development?
12.	您认为孩子的教育中最重要的是什么? 比如感情方面的发展? 比如智能方面的发展? 比如个人的发展? 比如学习的内容的实用性? 比如未来的工作机会?	<b>What do you think is most important in child education?</b> e.g. concerning the emotional development e.g. concerning the development of intelligence e.g. concerning personal development e.g. concerning the practicability of the learning content e.g. concerning future job possibilities
13.	您觉得经典对您孩子的培养和教育的有什么影响/帮助? 跟其它教材相比, 经典有什么特点? (您为会信任经典吗? 为什么?)	<b>What do you think which impact/ support the classics have for your child's upbringing and education?</b> Compared with other teaching material, what is peculiar about the classics? (Do you have trust/ faith in the classics? Why?)
14.	请您描述一下您所认为对您孩子比较适当的学习环境是什么样的。	<b>Please describe the learning environment which you consider as adequate for your child.</b>
15.	您感觉到了孩子经过这里的教育有某些改变? 有的话, 哪些? 比如跟以前相比有没有差别? 比如跟您所认识的朋友或邻居的孩子相比有没有行为上的差别?	<b>Did you sense any changes in your child since it experienced this education? If so, which changes?</b> e.g. are there any differences to before e.g. are there any differences between your own child and the children of friends or neighbors

16.	您觉得这边的老师和普通学校的老师哪里不一样？ / 您觉得什么样的老师算是好的老师、什么样的老师算是不那么好的老师？ 您信任他们吗？ 老师和学生，在课堂上谁比较重要？为什么？	<b>What is the difference between teachers here and teachers in normal (public) schools? / What do you think makes a good teacher, and what makes a less good teacher?</b> Do you have trust in them? Who is more important in class – teachers or students? Why?
17.	如果对比一下：您觉得老师和父母对孩子有什么影响？	<b>If you compare: which influence do teachers and which influence do parents have on children?</b>
18.	您如果跟孩子谈学校的事情，孩子怎么讲？会说什么？	<b>When you talk with your child about school, what does it say?</b>
19.	请您想像一下：您认为您的孩子未来的生活会怎么样？ 进入社会后生活怎么样？	<b>If you imagine your child's future, what does it look like?</b> <b>What does it look like after entering society?</b>
20.	假如您的孩子没有经过这里的教育，他未来的生活会不一样吗？ 怎么说呢？	<b>If your child would not have gone through this education, would its future be different? In how far?</b>
21.	您如果想到中国特色的教育或中国传统的教育，您会联想到谁或什么？	<b>When you think of education with Chinese color or traditional education, whom or what would you think of?</b>
22.	（您对于过去 10 到 15 年的中国教育改革措施有什么看法？）	<b>What are the goals of educational policies in the last 10 to 15 years in China?</b>

## SHORT VERSION FOR PARENTS

The short version was useful when encountering parents who had time for a short conversation but did (want to) participate in a whole interview.

	<b>Chinese (original)</b>	<b>English translation</b>
1.	您如何注意到（怎么知道）这个学堂/私塾/书院？	<b>How did you take notice of this study hall/ traditional private school/ academy?</b>
2.	您为什么选择把您的孩子送到这个学堂/私塾/书院上课呢？	<b>Why did you choose to send your child to this study hall/ traditional private school/ academy?</b>
3.	您认为孩子的教育中最重要的是什么？	<b>What do you think is most important in child education?</b>
4.	对比一下家庭教育和学校教育：家庭的责任是什么，学校或者学堂的任务是什么？	<b>If you take family and formal school education in comparison: what is the family's responsibility and what is the school's responsibility?</b>
5.	假如您的孩子没有经过这里的教育，他未来的生活会不一样吗？怎么说呢？	<b>If your child would not have gone through this education, would its future be different? In how far?</b>
6.	您如果想到中国特色的教育或中国的传统教育，您会联想到谁或什么？	<b>When you think of education with Chinese color or traditional education, whom or what would you think of?</b>

## QUESTIONNAIRE – PERSONAL AND SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Each interviewee was asked about his or her personal background before the interview. All three target groups were asked the same questions; headmasters were asked additional questions on the background of their school. This document uses a slightly different terminology as it reflects terms used in the initial stage of research – when the researcher considered the classics reading facilities as school (*xuexiao* 学校) by means of a traditional private school (*sishu* 私塾). During field research, the Chinese version was used; the English translations were added afterwards.

学校: \_\_\_\_\_  
 School  
 目标群:  校长  老师  父亲  母亲  其他 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Target group headmaster teacher father mother other  
 被访者 (姓名): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewee's name  
 性别:  男  女  
 Gender male female  
 编号: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewee's code

### 校长、老师、父母

#### Headmasters, teachers, parents

##### 个人背景

##### Personal Background

您是中国哪里人? From where in China are you?	
您 (以前) 的工作是什么? What is your (former) occupation?	
您每个月的收入大概多少? What is your monthly income?	
母亲跟父亲两个都去工作吗? Are both parents working?	
您的学历是什么? (大学毕业: 什么专业?) What is your school qualification? (If graduated from university: which subject?)	
您家有几个孩子? How many children do you have?	
您有几个孩子来这里学习? 还有孩子去别的学校吗? Does your child also study here? Or does your child go to another school?	
以前谁来照顾孩子? 现在呢? Who took care of the children in the past? And now?	
您的孩子有没有学籍?	



有：学籍在哪里？ Does your child have a school registration? If so: where?	
为了孩子的教育，您每年愿意花多少钱？ How much money are you willing to spend for your child's education?	
孩子的国籍/户口是哪里的？ What is your child's nationality / where is your child's household registration?	
您休闲（业余时间）喜欢做什么？ What do you like to do in leisure (after work) time?	

## 校长

### Headmasters

#### 学校背景

#### School Background

本校是什么时候创办的？ When did the school open?	
这里有没有学费？多少？ Is there a school fee? How much is it?	
这里有多少个孩子？ How many children do you teach here?	
这里的孩子大概几岁？ How old are the children?	
这里有多少个老师？ How many teachers do you have?	
这里的老师每月的收入大概多少？ 算一般的吗？还是特别高/低？ How much is a teacher's monthly salary here? Does it count as average? Or high or low?	
孩子们和老师住在这里还是父母晚上来接他们回家？ Do children and teachers live here or do the parents take the children home in the evening? (有孩子住的话，是多少？) (If children live here: how many?)	
为了办学，需不需要特殊的许可证之类？ Do you need a special permission/ license to run a school?	
这个私塾如何获得资助？ How is this traditional private school financed?	
孩子在这边毕业可以拿到文凭吗？ Do children get a diploma with their graduation from this school?	

TABLE 13: BASIC INFORMATION OF RESEARCH SITES (PRIVATE STUDY HALLS AND ACADEMIES)

City	Province	Code for the Facility	Opened in	No. of students	Student age	No. of teachers	No. of head-masters	Teacher's monthly salary in RMB	Study fee per year in RMB	Boarding school?
Beijing		Beijing Academy A	2006	169	4-18	100	1	3,000-4,000	59,000	yes
		Beijing Academy B	2013	100	4-21	18	1	1,800-3,600	40,000	yes
		Beijing Study Hall	2012	26	5-13	7	1	>3,000	40,000	yes
Chengdu	Sichuan	Chengdu Study Hall	2010	44-45	3-16	8	1	3,000-4,000	30,000	no
Fuzhou	Fujian	Fujian Study Hall	2003	30	6-17	8	2	not fix	60,000	yes
Guangzhou	Guangdong	Guangzhou Study Hall	2009	250	3-20	>40	1	4,000-5,000	20,000-40,000*	yes
Qufu	Shandong	Qufu Academy	2001/2009	120	6-18	24-25	1	3,000-15,000	30,000	yes
Shanghai		Shanghai Study Hall	1998/2005	70	4-16	13	1	(Shanghai average)	52,000	yes
Shenzhen	Guangdong	Shenzhen Study Hall A	2004	65-70	3-17	20	2	2,000-4,500	50,000	yes
		Shenzhen Study Hall B	2004	8	2-18	4	1	2,000-2,400	30,000-60,000**	(possible)
		Shenzhen Study Hall C	2009	18	3-15	10	1	3,000	39,000	yes
		Shenzhen Study Hall D	2011	20	3-13	5	1	4,000	36,000-42,000	(possible)
		Shenzhen Study Hall E	2000	<30	?	?	1	?	?	yes
Suzhou	Jiangsu	Suzhou Study Hall A	2013	40-50	5-15	8	1	2,000-6,000	60,000	yes
		Suzhou Study Hall B	2015	5	5-13	2		2,500	30,000	
		Suzhou Academy	2005/2014	7-8	10-23	>10		5,000	70,000	yes
Taishun	Zhejiang	Wenli Academy (Wenli Shuyuan 文礼书院)	2012/2015	27	13-24	1 (Wang) 1 assistant		4,000	30,000	
		Wenli Study Hall (Wen-li Xuetang 文礼学堂)	2015	21	3-14	6	1	3,000	15,000***	yes
Xiamen	Fujian	Xiamen Study Hall A	2009	14	3-10	4	1	3,000-3,500	30,000- 42,000 ****	(possible)
		Xiamen Study Hall B	2007	18	3-7	5	1	1,000-3,000	36,000	no
		Xiamen Academy	2014	8	6-14	4	1	2,500-4,000	40,000	no

\* Reductions are possible: the regular fee is 40,000 RMB; families with a financially weak background can ask for reductions to 20,000 or 30,000.

\*\* Fees depend on housing and age: Students <6 who live in the study hall pay 36,000 (30,000 when living at home), students age 6-13 pay 48,000, students >13 pay 60,000.

\*\*\* Low fee relates to employment. The study hall is open for children of the academy's employees.

\*\*\*\* Fees depend on housing: students who live at home pay 30,000; those who live in the study hall pay 42,000.

TABLE 14: INTERVIEWEES

No	Interviewee Code	Date of the Interview	Facility	In the role(s) of	m/f	Born in	Level of Education	Subject	Monthly Salary (RMB)	Partner's Occupation		Child (ren)	Child is educated in	
										works	in the same study hall or academy		study hall or academy	Where parents work
1.	CD16001	April 24, 2016	Chengdu Study Hall	Headmaster, father	m	1970	BA	Education	Instable	x	x	2	x	x
2.	FZ16001	March 20, 2016	Fuzhou Study Hall	Headmaster, mother, teacher	f	1968	BA	English	0	x	x	1	x	x
3.	GZ16001	May 5, 2016	Guangzhou Study Hall	Headmaster, father	m	1973	BA	English	Instable	x	x	1	x	x (?)
4.	PK16001	January 20, 2016	Beijing Academy A	Headmaster, father	m	1971	Secondary School		n/i	x	x	2	x	x
5.	PK16002	January 21, 2016	Beijing Academy B	Headmaster, father	m	1973	MA	Education	n/i	x	x	2	x	x
6.	PK16003	January 21, 2016		Mother	f	1970s	MA	Quantitative Economics	0	x		2	x	x
7.	PK16004	January 23, 2016	Beijing Study Hall	Headmaster, father	m	1984	BA	English	6,000	x	x	1	<i>(too small for formal education)</i>	
8.	PK16005	January 18, 2016	Beijing Academy A	Teacher	m	1971	PhD	Philosophy	10,000			0		
9.	PK16006	January 19, 2016		Teacher, father	m	1979	Secondary School		Instable	no		3	<i>(too small for formal education)</i>	
10.	QF16001	July 8, 2016	Qufu Academy	Headmaster, mother	f	1966	BA	Philosophy	10,000	x		1	<i>(in university already)</i>	
11.	SH16001	June 17, 2016	Shanghai Study Hall	Headmaster, teacher, father	m	1967	BA	Plant genetics	n/i	x	x	1	x	x
12.	WTS15001	December 29, 2015	Shenzhen Study Hall A	Headmaster, father	m	1974	Vocational School	Food Storage	n/i	x	x	2	x (1)	x (1 of 2)

No	Interviewee Code	Date of the Interview	Facility	In the role(s) of	m/f	Born in	Level of Education	Subject	Monthly Salary (RMB)	Partner's Occupation		Child (ren)	Child is educated in	
										works	in the same study hall or academy		study hall or academy	Where parents work
13.	WTS16001	March 9, 2016	Shenzhen Study Hall A	Teacher, father	m	1986	BA	Veterinary medicine	2,800	x	x	1	<i>(too young for formal education)</i>	
14.	WTS16002	March 10, 2016		Teacher (management), mother	f	1976	BA	Finances	5,000	x	x	1	x	x
15.	WTS16003	March 10, 2016		employee ( <i>Dujing Baby</i> )	m	1989	BA	Material Chemistry	5,000	x	<i>(same company)</i>	almost 1		
16.	WTS16004a	March 14, 2016		Mother	f	1977	Secondary School		20,000	x		2	x	x
17.	WTS16004b	March 14, 2016		Father	m	1969	BA	Fine Arts		x				
18.	WTS16005	March 13, 2016	Shenzhen Study Hall C	Headmaster, father	m	1971	BA	Tourism Economics	n/i	x	x	2	x (1)	x (1 of 2)
19.	WTS16006	March 15, 2016	Shenzhen Study Hall A	Headmaster, mother	f	1970	None		0	x	x	2	x (1)	x (1 of 2)
20.	WTS16007	March 17, 2016	Shenzhen Study Hall D	Headmaster, teacher, father	m	1971	BA	IT	n/i	x	x	1	<i>(formerly; now in public secondary school)</i>	
21.	SZ15001	November 9, 2015	Suzhou Study Hall A	Mother	f	n/i	Secondary School (Jr.)		20,000-30,000	x		2	x (1)	
22.	SZ15002	November 9, 2015		Mother	f	n/i	Secondary School (Jr.)		10,000	x		1	x	
23.	SZ15003	November 9, 2015		Mother	f	n/i	BA	English	10,000	x		2	x (1)	
24.	SZ15004	November 9, 2015		Headmaster, mother	f	1981	PhD	Philosophy	4,000-5,000	x	x	1	<i>(too young for formal education)</i>	
25.	SZ15005	November 10, 2015	Suzhou Academy	Teacher	m	1990	BA	Publishing	10,000			0		

No	Interviewee Code	Date of the Interview	Facility	In the role(s) of	m/f	Born in	Level of Education	Subject	Monthly Salary (RMB)	Partner's Occupation		Child (ren)	Child is educated in	
										works	in the same study hall or academy		study hall or academy	Where parents work
26.	SZ15006	November 16, 2015	( <i>sishu</i> , weekend classes)	Headmaster, teacher	m	1973	BA	Trade	instable			0		
27.	SZ15007	November 17, 2015	Suzhou Study Hall B	Headmaster, teacher	f	1977	BA	International Trade	2,800	x	x	1	(public secondary school)	
28.	TS15001 / Wang Caigui	December 8, 2015	Wenli Academy	Headmaster	m	1949	PhD	Philosophy	n/i	n/i	n/i	4	(children are not at school anymore)	
29.	TS15002	December 10, 2015	Wenli Study Hall	Mother, teacher	f	n/i	MA	English	None	x		2	x	x
30.	TS15003	December 10, 2015	Wenli Study Hall	Headmaster, mother	f	1978	BA	Market Sales	5,000	x	x	3	x	x
31.	XM16001	February 29, 2015	Xiamen Academy	Headmaster, teacher, father	m	1982	BA	Education	10,000	x	x	2	x	x
32.	XM15001	October 13, 2015	Xiamen Study Hall A	Teacher	f	1967	BA	Education	3,000	x		1	(Public High School)	
33.	XM15002	October 13, 2015		Headmaster, mother	f	1973	College		instable	x		2	x	
34.	XM15005	October 26, 2015	Xiamen Study Hall B	Teacher, mother	f	1980s	BA	Chinese Secretary	3,000-3,500	x		1	x	x
35.	XM15003	October 24, 2015	State-run Xiamen Academy	Headmaster	m	n/i	BA & MBA	Education				2	(Public secondary school and university)	
36.	XM15004	October 25, 2015		Teacher, mother	f	n/i	BA	City Planning	none	x		1	(Public secondary school)	

Marked interviews: SZ15006: headmaster of a private traditional school (*sishu*) who offers weekend courses only; XM15003 and XM15004: headmaster and mother (volunteer teacher) at a state-run academy in Xiamen. Usage of data from interviews with stakeholders who do not fit into the category of headmaster, teacher, and/or parent at a private study hall or academy is explained in chapter 2.

### IMAGES CHAPTER 3



IMG. 2: Name of Shenzhen Study Hall C written in Wang Caigui's calligraphy

Photographs of signs which are placed either inside of the study hall or over the front door; calligraphy by Wang Caigui.  
© Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 3: Name of Suzhou Study Hall B written in Wang Caigui's calligraphy

For reasons of data protection, the respective first characters in the names are not shown.

### IMAGES CHAPTER 4



IMG. 4: Xiamen Study Hall A

Photograph of the building in which Xiamen Study Hall A is located.  
© Sandra Gilgan



Photograph of the building in which Suzhou Study Hall B is located.  
© Sandra Gilgan

IMG. 5: Suzhou Study Hall B



IMG. 6: Suzhou Study Hall B, classroom

Photographs of the interior of Suzhou Study Hall B. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 7: Suzhou Study Hall B, hallway

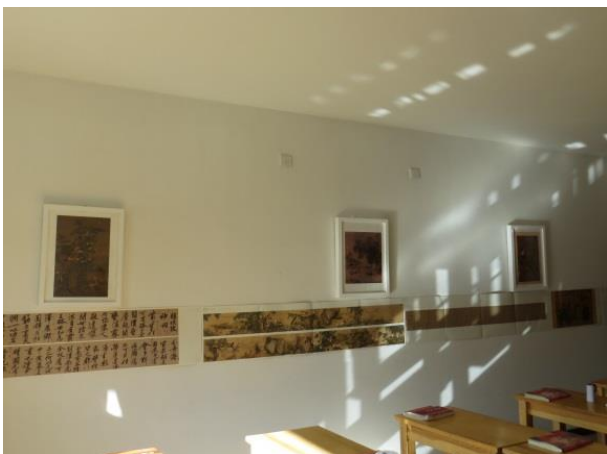


IMG. 8: Wenli Study Hall, classroom, scrolls of landscape paintings at the wall

Photographs of the interior of Wenli Study Hall B. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 9: Wenli Study Hall, hallway, pictures of birds and flowers at the wall



IMG. 10: Beijing Study Hall, classroom, pictures of calligraphy, landscape painting, and bird and flower paintings at the wall

Photograph of the interior of Beijing Study Hall B. © Sandra Gilgan





IMG. 11: Chengdu Study Hall, loudspeaker in the hallway

Photographs of the interior of Chengdu Study Hall B. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 12: Chengdu Study Hall, “reading” classical pictures in class



IMG. 13: Shenzhen Study Hall A, *dujing* player

Photograph taken in the classroom of Shenzhen Study Hall A; the wooden desk is placed in the front of the classroom behind the teacher’s chair. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 14: Suzhou Study Hall A, outside

Photographs taken on the premises of Suzhou Study Hall A; img. 14 shows the front as seen from the street and img. 15 which is taken from the second floor shows the courtyard of the study hall with a small pond at the center and the mountains in the background. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 15: Suzhou Study Hall, inside



IMG. 16: Zhuli village, view from the river

Photograph taken at the riverside of Zhuli.  
© Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 17: Zhuli village, view on the mountains

Photograph taken from a hill at the end of the village Zhuli. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 18: signpost in the streets of Zhuli

Photograph of signposts placed by the government showing slogans for a harmonious society. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 19: Wang Caigui's Wenli Academy

Photograph of Zhuli's culture center in which Wenli Academy is hosted. On the ground floor, left side: entrance to the public library; right side: entrance to the academy. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 20: mountain plateau for Wang Caigui's ideal academy

Photograph taken from the mountain plateau close to Zhuli where Wang Caigui plans to build the academy of his dreams.  
© Sandra Gilgan

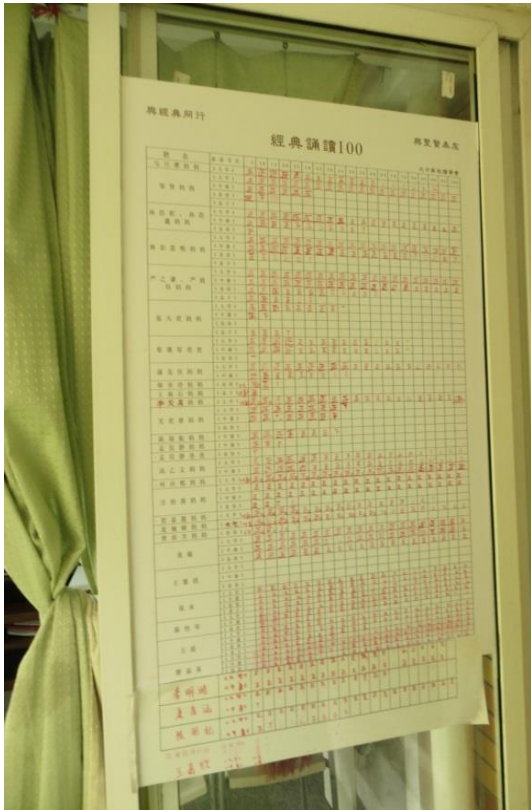


IMG. 21: Fuzhou Study Hall, view from the front

Photographs of the outside of Fuzhou Study Hall. The study hall is located in the mountains and next to a river.  
© Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 22: Fuzhou Study Hall, view from the side



Photograph taken in the garden of Chengdu Study Hall; the table is placed on the window of a classroom. © Sandra Gilgan

IMG. 23: Chengdu Study Hall, table of parents' record of studying the classics

### IMAGES CHAPTER 5



Photograph of the empty classroom of Suzhou Study Hall B. © Sandra Gilgan

IMG. 24: Suzhou Study Hall B, classroom



IMG. 25: Beijing Academy B, classroom

Photograph taken inside of a classroom for small children in Beijing Academy B during class. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 26: Shenzhen Study Hall B, classroom

Photograph taken inside of a classroom for the group of the oldest students in Shenzhen Study Hall B during class.  
© Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 27: Xiamen Academy, classroom

Photograph taken inside of the classroom of Xiamen Academy when class was about to start. © Sandra Gilgan



Photograph taken inside of the classroom of Shanghai Study Hall during class.  
© Sandra Gilgan

IMG. 28: Shanghai Study Hall, classroom



Photographs taken inside of Xiamen Study Hall B showing the area where the weekly Confucius ceremony takes place (img. 29) as well as the ceremony itself (img. 30).  
© Sandra Gilgan

IMG. 29: Xiamen Study Hall B, Confucius image in the hallway



IMG. 30: Xiamen Study Hall B, Confucius ceremony



IMG. 31: Beijing Academy B, reading

Photograph taken inside of the classroom of Beijing Academy during class. The student points to the characters of the text while reciting it. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 32: Suzhou Study Hall A, teacher leading the recitation of *Mencius*

Photograph taken inside of the classroom of Suzhou Study Hall A during class; the teacher in front is reading and the children are jointly reciting. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 33: Shenzhen Study Hall A, student leading the recitation of *Mencius*

Photograph taken inside of the classroom of Shenzhen Study Hall A during class. A student is reading the text out loud and the classmates recite; the teacher is standing and reciting with the children. © Sandra Gilgan





IMG. 34: Shenzhen Study Hall A, self-study of the Bible in English

Photograph taken inside of the classroom of Shenzhen Study Hall A during English class. Children sit in front of their books, listen to pre-recorded readings of native speakers and recite what they hear.

© Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 35: Shenzhen Study Hall B, self-study class

Photograph taken inside of the classroom of Shenzhen Study Hall A during a self-study session. The students recite and memorize in their own pace. One student is standing in front of the class, reciting a part of a classic which he knows by heart already.

© Sandra Gilgan



Photograph taken inside of the classroom of Shanghai Study Hall during class.  
© Sandra Gilgan

IMG. 36: Shanghai Study Hall, reciting Shakespeare with a language CD



Photograph of the room in which students' recitations are video recorded. After having memorized a larger part or a whole classic, the student recites that in front of the camera to fix the result. © Sandra Gilgan

IMG. 37: Beijing Study Hall, video room



Photograph taken inside of Xiamen Study Hall A.  
© Sandra Gilgan

IMG. 38: teacher's bamboo stick *jiechi*, Xiamen Study Hall A



IMG. 39: Beijing Academy A, final exam

Photograph taken inside of Beijing Academy A when the final exam took place. Every student would recite what they had memorized in the semester.

© Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 40: Xiamen Study Hall A, Confucius ceremony

Photograph taken inside of Xiamen Study Hall A during the Confucius ceremony.

© Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 41: Xiamen Study Hall A, recitation of study hall rules after Confucius ceremony

Photograph taken inside of Xiamen Study Hall A after the Confucius ceremony during the revision of the study hall's rules.

© Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 42: Qufu academy, class room buildings on campus.

Photographs are taken on the premises of Qufu Academy. The buildings have signs with rules of conduct on their outsides (img. 42); one sign (img. 43) serves as example in the discussion.

© Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 43: Qufu Academy, sign with rules of speech



Photograph taken inside of Shenzhen Study Hall B in the break. © Sandra Gilgan

IMG. 44: Shenzhen Study Hall A, student sitting in lotus position



Photograph taken outside of Suzhou Study Hall A. © Sandra Gilgan

IMG. 45: Suzhou Study Hall A, martial arts in the parking lot



Photograph taken inside of Beijing Study Hall. © Sandra Gilgan

IMG. 46: Beijing Study Hall, children's dormitory



IMG. 47: Wenli Study Hall, children's dormitory

Photograph taken inside of Wenli Study Hall. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 48: Guangzhou Study Hall, children's dormitory

Photograph taken inside of Guangzhou Study Hall. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 49: Beijing Academy A, Confucius ceremony I

Photograph taken inside of Beijing Academy A during the Confucius ceremony before breakfast. Teachers and students on stage and in the audience bow to Confucius. © Sandra Gilgan



IMG. 50: Beijing Academy A, Confucius ceremony II

Photograph taken inside of Beijing Academy A during the Confucius ceremony before breakfast. A student recites “words of gratitude” on stage.

© Sandra Gilgan

### PLAYLIST OF THE DUJING PLAYER

The classics reading music player comes with a fix selection of readings and music which is further explained on the accompanying “Item List of Classical Music Pieces and Readings (*Jingdian Songdu Qumu Bianma* 经典诵读曲目编码)”. It starts with a “Chinese cycle” (*Zhongwen xunhuan* 中文循环) of selected readings of the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大学), *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 论语), *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易经) and small parts of the *Changes of Zhou* (*Zhou Yi* 周易)<sup>621</sup>, the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 诗经), *Book Laozi* (老子) and *Book Zhuangzi* (庄子). These selections mirror the readings that the learner is confronted with in class; playing these recorded readings can serve as support of the actual readings in class or as supplementary listening comprehension. Selections of *the Book of Odes* and Tang poems are read out (or sung) in the manner of “poetry reading” (*yinsong* 吟诵); the rhythm of recitation is a mixture of melodic recitation and singing and is basically oriented towards understanding the underlying emotions of the poetry.<sup>622</sup>

The “Western cycle” (*Xiwen Xunhuan* 西文循环) starts with readings of the *Matthew Gospel* (*Matai Fuyin* 马太福音) in Chinese, French, German, Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, each reading being an hour long. *The Bodhicaryavatara* (*Ru Puti Xinglun* 入菩提行论) in Sanskrit is also read for an hour. Further Western classics are *Amoretti* (*Xiao'ai Shen* 小爱神) by the English poet Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) who was a contemporary of and example to William Shakespeare (1564-1616), Shakespeare’s *The Midsummer Night’s Dream*

<sup>621</sup> The *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*) is part of the *Changes of Zhou* (*Zhouyi*) which encompass the *Yijing* and the *Tradition of or Explanations on the Changes* (*Yizhuan* 易传).

<sup>622</sup> Li 2017: 2, 9-11.

(*Zhongxiaye zhi meng* 仲夏夜之梦), and selections of English texts without further specification. The musical part starts with pieces that are played with the Chinese traditional instruments Qin 琴 (similar to a zither) and Xiao 箫 (a vertical bamboo flute). This is followed by the “Essence of Chinese Music” (*Zhongyue Jingcui* 中乐精粹), a compilation of songs (*ge* 歌) and musical pieces (*qu* 曲)<sup>623</sup> played in further traditional Chinese instruments, such as the Dizi 笛子 (a bamboo flute), the Pipa 琵琶 (a plucked string instrument), the Guzheng 古筝 (also a plucked string instrument similar to a zither), the Erhu 二胡 (a two-stringed bowed instrument), and a combination of string and wind instruments (*si zhu* 丝竹). Western music starts with chants or church hymns (*shengyong* 圣咏) – the *Ave Maria* comes in four versions composed by Bach, Mozart, Schubert, and Bruckner. Händel’s oratorio on texts of the Bible, *Messiah*, is also represented with four pieces. Henry Purcell (English composer, 1659-1695) wrote the famous opera *King Arthur* (in Chinese: *Quansheng zhi ai* 全胜之爱) of which another three pieces are added to the selection of church hymns. The next “Western” music category is a wide selection of Baroque composers, such as Dieterich Buxtehude (1637-1707, German composer and organist who immigrated to Denmark); Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741, with his famous *Four Seasons*); Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767, German composer), and Giuseppe Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757, a composer and cembalo player of the South-Italian Kingdom of Neaples). Bach (1685-1750), Mozart (1756-1791), and Beethoven (1770-1827) are represented with a couple of their pieces. The next category is sorted by instruments again and contains selected piano pieces (for example from Liszt (1811-1886) and Chopin (1810-1849)), and violin pieces (for example from the Polish composer and pianist Henryk Wieniawski (1835-1880) and Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)). The last category is comprised of selected pieces for harp, cross flute and guitar from Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn (1809-1847), Chopin, Gounod (1818-1893), Schumann (1810-1856), Brahms (1833-1897) and the French composer Georges Bizet (1838-1875).

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<sup>623</sup> For example: the folk orchestra version of “A Moonlight on the Spring River” (*minyue hezou* 民乐合奏 · *chun jiang hua yue ye* 春江花月夜) by the Tang dynasty poet Zhang Ruoxu 张若虚 (647-730) with a musical lead of the contemporary famous Pipa player Liu Dehai 刘德海; “The Lotus Flower Emerging from the Water” (*chu shui lian* 出水莲) by Rao Ningxin 饶宁新 on the Guzheng (as one of China’s ten most famous solo pieces for the Guzheng); “Bird Chirping in the Wide Mountains” (*kong shan niao yu* 空山鸟语) on the Erhu; and “Three Variations of Yangguan” (*Yangguan san die* 阳关三叠) by Jin Wei 金蔚 on the Qin. (Taken from material accessed in field observation, Shenzhen Study Hall A, March 11, 2016.)