THE REVIVAL OF CONFUCIAN TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY
CHINESE SOCIETY: A CASE STUDY OF MODERN
SISHU EDUCATION

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by
Lisha Zhu
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Tables</th>
<th>v</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

### I. Introduction

Background .......................................................... 1
Purpose of the Study ........................................... 3
Limitations of the Study .................................... 5
Structure of the Study ......................................... 6

### II. Literature Review

Debate on “The Invention of Tradition” ............. 12
The Revival of Confucianism ............................ 15

### III. Research Methods


### IV. Forming Huaxia Kids Community

Clarification of Modern Sishu Education .......... 26
Professor Wang Caigui and the Movement of Children
Reading Classics ............................................. 27
From a Website to a NGO: Facilitating Confucian
Texts with Personalized Way of Promotion ......... 30

### V. The Involvement of Diverse Parties

The Preliminary School ..................................... 38
Corporations .................................................. 40
The Social Communities ..................................... 42
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Local Government</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Governmental Organizations</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Volunteers’ Participation and Their Perception of Reading Classics and Traditional Chinese Culture</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Parent-Child Classics Reading Class</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties Met by HKC Volunteers Within Teaching and Managing Practices</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Cultural Activities and My Participation</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Parents’ Involvement and Their Understanding of Child Education</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Struggle Within the Current Situation of Child Education in China</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Classics at Home or in HKC: Classics Reading is Not Only about Reading</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Meaning of Reading Classics to Children, Parents, and Families</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Conclusion</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References Cited</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Interview Profile</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A Graph of the Distribution of Classics-Reading Organization in Mainland China in 2011</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Chinese Calligraphy Work Written by Lucy’s Daughter</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Chinese Painting and Calligraphy Work in Xie and Cao’s Home</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Huaxia Kids Community Wanke Class Site in Minhang District</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Huaxia Kids Community Xinfengcheng Class Site in Yangpu District</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A Public Lecture About Antithetical Couplet Held by Huaxia Kids Community and Jinan Book Club</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Chinese Martial Arts Training at Wanke Class Site</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Huaxia Kids Community Provided Activities for Children to Experience Chinese Opera</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Huaxia Kids Community’s Traditional Cultural Activity About Clay Sculpture</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Huaxia Kids Community’s Traditional Cultural Activity About Chinese Paper Cutting</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. A Picture of Bad Drawing That I Did Not Post on Huaxia Kids Community’s Website</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. A Picture of Good Drawing That I Posted on Huaxia Kids Community’s Website</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

THE REVIVAL OF CONFUCIAN TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY CHINESE SOCIETY: A CASE STUDY OF MODERN SISHU EDUCATION

by

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Master of Arts in Anthropology

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This thesis explores how Confucian tradition is reproduced and transformed through the classics-reading based modern Sishu education. The revival of Confucian tradition in contemporary Chinese society is far more complex than a rote repetition of historic Confucianism. In-depth interview and participant observation were conducted with Huaxia Kids Community, a non-governmental organization in Shanghai that promotes Confucian classics-reading and traditional Chinese culture. Through analyzing how modern Sishu education is promoted and how Confucian classics are perceived and represented, this research suggests that the historicity and authenticity of Confucian tradition lies in the current representation of the past. The symbolic risk of Confucian
tradition is situated in people’s dispositions that are mediated by the socio-cultural condition.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Since 2007, the worship of Confucius in China has been transformed from a provincial celebration to a national festival. This festival is officially sponsored by China’s Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and the Shandong government. With the broadcasting of this event, the value of Confucian classics has regained public attention nationwide. With Confucianism as its mainstay, a national learning craze (国学热) has swept China and has been considered as a reflection of Chinese modernization rather than Westernization (Zhao 2009:111). In the past 20 years, the term “national learning” has come to imply the learning of traditional Chinese culture which includes philosophy (e.g., Confucianism), literature (e.g., Chinese poetry), religion (e.g., Taoism and Buddhism), art (e.g., Chinese calligraphy and painting, traditional opera, and Chinese folk music), etiquette (e.g., rites performed in pre-Qin and early Han Dynasty), etc.

Educational institutions and mass media are the main agencies contributing to the popularity of national learning. Top universities provide traditional Chinese learning programs which attract people from the middle-class, including government administrators, state-company managers, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals. Confucian texts are increasingly introduced to classes in preliminary schools as well as in middle schools.
Cooperating with universities and scholars, a great number of non-profit organizations are attempting to spread traditional Chinese learning through free lectures and interest-based salons. The popular CCTV (China Central Television) program Lecture Room invites scholars who are experts in history and ancient classics to present their understandings of traditional culture. For example, on the seven-day special subject *Taste of the Analects*, Professor Yu Dan from Beijing Normal University interpreted Confucian classics by giving simple stories and relating their content to how to deal with everyday life issues. When the program was broadcast, Professor Yu Dan turned from a normal teacher to a famous star. Many scholars became popular by introducing traditional culture in Television programs and decoding the difficult and abstract texts into vivid descriptions. As old texts have stepped out of the ivory tower through the cooperation between the academy and the media, the public have realized that the ancient classics are not only approachable but even beatiful to lay people.

Among all these agents of the national learning craze, I am most interested in the private education organizations that are attempting to promote traditional Chinese culture. These organizations are referred to as *Classics-reading Class* (读经班), *Xuetang* (学堂) or *Sishu* (私塾) in official and popular discourse. The education conducted by them is known as *modern Sishu education* (现代私塾教育). However, these organizations are more like a modern invention than a reappearance of Sishu education from ancient China.

Emerging 2,000 years ago, Sishu is a traditional tutorial school with a tutor teaching students in a private schoolhouse. As an important carrier of Confucian culture,
Sishu is the way that Confucius imparted his ideas to his disciples. It was only in the late 19th century, when Western educational models and ideas came to China, that this ancient teaching method was gradually removed from classrooms across the country (Zhang 2005).

Under the influence of the national learning craze, children reading Confucian classics became a movement which spread from Taiwan to Mainland China. This cultural and educational movement was launched by Professor Wang Caigui1 from Taizhong Education University in Taiwan. His followers are establishing social organizations all around China for education in traditional Chinese culture. They are especially training kids to read and recite Confucian classics (see Figure 1).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my research is to explore how traditional Chinese culture, especially the Confucian tradition, is understood, utilized, reproduced, and reconstructed through modern Sishu education in Mainland China. My research considers the reinvention of Confucian tradition as a process that consists of social reproduction and cultural change, which is based on the interaction between human action and socio-cultural organization. In 1980s, anthropologists noted that social and cultural phenomena should not be explained by structural mechanisms alone (Ortner 1984:145). Without denying the shaping power of the cultural “system,” anthropologists began to explore how the cultural system is changed by the agency of actors. I will respond to this question by studying the confrontation and cooperation between modernity and tradition. The

1 Wang Caigui is disciple of Mou Zongsan, who is a Chinese New Confucian philosopher.
**FIGURE 1.** A graph of the distribution of classics-reading organization in Mainland China in 2011.

revival of tradition is facilitated by capital and technology of the modern world; while modern institutions treat tradition as a resource to justify their legitimacy and authority (Sahlins 2000:68). In the context of globalization, “the modernization of indigenousness goes hand in hand with the indigenization of modernity” (Sahlins 2000:16).

Limitations of the Study

From August 2011 to November 2011, I conducted my fieldwork with Huaxia Kids Community (HKC), a non-profit organization in Shanghai.² The HKC was established with the mission of nourishing the roots of Chinese children’s humanistic spirit. The activities held by this organization are integrated in a “3+2 model.” The “3” are three programs specially designed for children, consisting of parent-child classics reading, martial arts, and traditional cultural activities (e.g., the learning of Kunqu Opera).³ As a supplementary part, the “2” includes the Huaxia classics-reading club and public lectures talking about family and traditional Chinese culture.⁴ These two programs are prepared for parents and those who voluntarily teach in classics reading classes. The focus of my research is the “3,” however, as different programs in the model are promoting or competing with each other during the organizing and advertising process, it is necessary to situate the “3” within the whole model.

The main limitation of my study lies in the lack of previous studies on modern Sishu education. Although there have been many public discussions and debates on

² “Huaxia” is China’s ancient name.
³ Reading materials are Di Zi Gui (《弟子规》) and The Analects of Confucius (《论语》).
⁴ Reading materials are The Four Books including The Great Learning (《大学》), The Doctrine of the Mean (《中庸》), 《论语》The Analects of Confucius (《论语》), and Mencius (《孟子》).
reviving the Confucian teaching and learning style in preliminary education, only a few of them have been published in scholarly journals and books. Additionally, although most classics-reading organizations in China are following Professor Wang Caigui’s educational philosophy, they have developed various patterns. Some are free while others are pursuing profits; some are run by individuals while others are based on the cooperation with local communities; some are full-time tutorial schools while others offers only weekend classes. Without statistical data about the current development of classics-reading organizations, it is hard to define which pattern is the most representative. The reason for choosing HKC is that it has three characteristics through which I could observe how the tension among various stakeholders influences the development of modern Sishu education and the power relationships within the reconstruction of this tradition. First, the classics reading class is free and is driven by interest-based participation. Second, the “3+2 model” attracts a variety of people from different social classes. Third, its development involves multiple institutional forces including local communities, the government, non-profit organizations, media, and the mainstream school system.

Structure of the Study

In Chapter II, I will review literatures that discuss and debate on the concept of tradition and the revival of Confucianism. Chapter III addresses the anthropological methods that I applied in my fieldwork and data collection process, especially in-depth interview and participant observation.
Chapter IV introduces Professor Wang Caigui’s proposal for promoting children reading classics among Chinese and the establishment of Huaxia Kids Community (HKC). Professor Wang’s educational philosophy is considered to be the foundation of modern Sishu education in Mainland China. However, HKC’s founder Ms. Luo does not totally agree with Wang’s instruction to “just lead children to read texts without explanation.” This chapter explains how HKC incorporates and modifies Wang’s philosophy in its educational practice of classics-reading.

Chapter V discusses the cooperation between HKC and other social organizations, such as the local governments, school, corporations, non-government organizations, and social media. Some of them offered reading materials, classrooms, or money to facilitate the establishment of operation of HKC. Others used HKC’s human and cultural resources to produce cooperative events that enhanced the public recognition of HKC. The transformations among economic, social, and symbolic capital were embedded in the conflicts as well as reciprocity among these diverse parties. Although the socio-cultural condition sets limits for HKC’s expansion of influence, individuals are able to make changes to the system by taking advantage of the flexibility of Confucian tradition and the uncertainty of authority’s attitudes towards the promotion of Confucian tradition. During this process, Confucian tradition was selectively copied and modified, especially when it was promoted as a public event. The reproduction and transformation of Confucian tradition, as well as the power relation between HKC and its socio-cultural milieu, can be identified within the discourse transmitted by the social media.

Volunteers’ practice and their perception of children reading classics will be discussed in the Chapter VI. I will shed light on how Confucian tradition is appropriated
and over-defined in terms of the meaning of Confucian texts. I will also examine how Confucian tradition reproduces, adapts, and reinvents itself as a dynamic system of meanings. Classics-reading is transformed from an educational philosophy into a teaching method that can maintain children’s interest, satisfy parents’ needs for cultural consumption, and develop its market potential.

In Chapter VII, I will describe the struggles faced by parents in educating their children. Although parents’ beliefs and attitudes towards the value of reading classics vary, most parents consider reading classics as complementary education rather than a must. This is because parents’ decision-making is restricted by social norms of getting a degree and the importance of passing the university entrance exam, even if most of them are aware of the flaws of current mainstream school system. On the other hand, some parents dare to go beyond the restrictions placed on their thoughts and actions. They are willing to and even able to educate children according to Professor Wang Caigui’s proposal. Parents’ educational practice and experience in other fields of life may change their perceptions of Confucian texts and classics-reading. When children appropriate certain sayings in Confucian classics to argue against their parents, parents may relate those sayings with a pragmatic context and generate a new disposition based on their perception and social position.

My interviewees’ words are quoted to demonstrate my description and analysis in this thesis. Because all the interviews are conducted in Chinese, all the quotations are presented to readers with a Chinese transcript and an English translation.
Originating from the Latin term *traditio*, the word “tradition” originally referred to the action of handing over. In modern times, its meaning encompassed both the action of transmission and the content which is transmitted (Otto and Pedersen 2000:3). Over the past two centuries, the value of tradition has been debated within two intellectual trends. In Enlightenment philosophy, “tradition” suggests “the irrational constrains and obstructions that stand in the way of progress” (Otto and Pedersen 2000:4). In Kant’s essay, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*, enlightenment characterizes human’s maturity, which means that a person is able to move beyond the limitations set by dogmas and traditional social hierarchies in order to act according to his own understanding without relying on others’ authority. For Romantic thinkers, “tradition” refers to “time-honored customs and procedures or to the particular and valuable heritages of groups and nations” (Otto and Pedersen 2000:4). Herder’s nostalgia of “the Old” was not only restricted to valuing the tradition and identity of Germany. The German orientalists transferred this “longing for the past” into “longing for the East” (Pattberg 2011:92). When China and India became the places standing for ancientness, the separation of past and present has been replaced by the differentiation between the West and the “rest.”
Emphasizing the continuity with the past, the concept of tradition was popularized as the opposite concept of modernity in the beginning of the 20th century. In *Economy and Society*, Max Weber distinguished the ideal type of legal authority from traditional authority (Weber 1968:215). Legal authority is based on the belief in rationality and law, and the obedience is given to a set of principles which are used to produce an impersonal order, such as a bureaucracy (Weber 1968:215-217). This form of authority is commonly found in modern organizations. Traditional authority is built on the inherent power of traditional norms, and the obedience is owed “to the person who occupies a position of authority by tradition” (Weber 1968:227). Traditional authority usually implies that the right to rule is inherited. Therefore, it resisted social and political change.

Since anthropology is a product of imperialism, the opposition between modernity and tradition was soon adopted by anthropologists to create a contrast between the western and nonwestern societies (Wolf 1982:12). “Traditional” societies were characterized by isolation of social interaction, similarity of social ties, and inherited social roles. On the contrary, the modern world was defined by “high frequency of contact, coupled with heterogeneity or dissimilarity of social ties” (Wolf 1982:11), as well as the bureaucratic allocation of labor aiming at productivity. This contrast is based on the assumption that tradition is a static category associated with the non-western groups. Similar to the concept of culture, “tradition” was used as a tool for making otherness and denying the commonality and interconnection among human groups. Policy makers took the advantage of such division of tradition and modernity to justify the practice of colonization and capitalist expansion. As the modern theorists classified
the world into modern, transitional, and traditional societies, capitalist power was able to marginalize the “rest” in the global market by claiming that they were transforming the undeveloped traditional societies into the modern ones (Wolf 1982:13).

The binary opposition between tradition and modernity was widely challenged by postmodernists. With the publication of the academic volume *The Invention of Tradition*, the relationship between tradition, modernity, and modernization was reconsidered. According to Hobsbawm, many so-called traditional practices are marked by a fictitious continuity with the past (Hobsbawm 1983:2). They are only inventions introduced to serve social, economic, and political ends “in the context of industrialization, urbanization, and the emergence of new social classes” (Babadzan 2000:133). In the introduction of this book, Hobsbawm notes that,

> Invented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. [Hobsbawm 1983:1]

By avoiding imprisoning a society in a static category, either traditional or modern, the “invention of tradition” helps us to form a broader perspective when conceiving tradition. This perspective represents neither a darkness of constraints and oppression nor “a Golden Age of blind obedience to the unquestioned laws of a cultural collectivity represented as a natural community that is warm, protective and harmonious” (Babadzan 2000:145). It is useful to introduce “the invention of tradition,” because the concept liberates tradition from a fixed association with the past, the underdeveloped, and the old ways of living.
Debate on “The Invention of Tradition”

The most frequent critique of the idea of “the invention of tradition” is that all traditions are socially constructed or invented. The invention of tradition does not only occur in modern times but all through human history. However, each invention incorporates a unique system of meaning that is inherited in the relation between human practice and the cultural condition. According to Bourdieu (1977:95), as a durable system of generative principles and schemes, the *habitus* reproduces the condition of planning, constrains how we cognize the world, and sets limits for individual innovation. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the socio-cultural condition (the system mentioned by Bourdieu) of actors’ practice. Only if anthropologists understand the relation between human practice and the system, can we discover the meaning of invented tradition.

Another critique focuses on the functionalist answer to the question of why tradition is demanded by modernity (Chakrabarty 1998:287). Hobsbawm noted that the main functions of invented tradition include symbolizing social cohesion, legitimizing authority, and inculcating value systems (Hobsbawm 1983:9). This functionalist thinking only perceives the invented tradition as means to serve the interests of the dominant class but dismisses the agency of tradition itself and the meaning of human action (Li 2009:66-67). Because individual agents can generate strategic practices in response to the demands placed on them, it is valuable to explore how human practice reproduces or changes the socio-cultural condition (Bourdieu 1977:95; Ortner 1984:154).

In my study, the reinvented tradition of Confucian education is fundamentally different from the Confucian tradition in ancient Chinese society because it is closely
associated with the modernization of social, economic, and political relations. That is to say, the so-called revival of Confucianism actually represents another dynamic belief system rather than a rote repetition of historic Confucianism. The reinvented traditional Chinese culture itself is undergoing transformation, because the power relations, conflicts, reciprocity, and cooperation between actors have changed the socio-cultural condition of the “revival.”

As culture is a scheme of meaning, when a person uses a sign to refer to a thing, the meaning of the thing will be modified due to the variation of the person’s position (Sahlins 1985:ix). Such a change of meaning originates from the risked meaning of a sign or a symbol. Because the sign or the concept used to refer to the thing is much less complex than the thing itself, each expression could only comprehend part of its object. Therefore, it is hard to decide whether cultural continuity is called into being through the invention of tradition (Babadzan 2000:142). Some scholars insist that as long as old materials are used, continuity with the past exists even though the invented tradition is recent (Smith 1996). However, this “continuity” is too apparent and this argument overlooks the changed meaning of the traditional belief, practices, or symbols.

Sahlins (1985:xiv) introduced the “structure of conjuncture” as a concept to situate symbolic risks. The “structure of conjuncture” is “a set of historical relationships that at once reproduce the traditional cultural categories and give them new values out of the pragmatic context” (Sahlins 1985:125). That is to say, “tradition” is not merely associated with the past, because it can reproduce itself at present. It is going through countless ephemeral states, and the present turns into a historical moment constantly
Confucianism has such a rich content that it can be understood in a variety of ways. People involved in the current revival of Confucianism are in different positions and have different interests, so their perception of how to revive traditional Chinese culture varies. The current social environment in China gives people the freedom to adopt Confucian education in a selective way. Traditional Chinese culture is undergoing reproduction and transformation as it continuously incorporates new meanings through the risky representation by individuals and social media.

Although the binary opposition between modernity and tradition has been challenged by “the invention of tradition,” Hobsbawm and his collaborators did not escape the trap of functionalist thinking. They still presume the division between a traditional stage and the modern period when distinguishing the invention of tradition from genuine tradition.

Hobsbawm generated a distinction between the adaptation of past institutions and the invention of tradition. “Adaptation took place for old uses in new conditions and by using old models for new purposes” (Hobsbawm 1983:5). This describes the process of how old institutions try to survive. On the other hand, the invention of tradition is not only directed towards modern objectives, it also expresses modern relationships. This argument denies the possibility of interpenetration between these two processes. If we consider “tradition” as a dynamic process, both the adaptation and the invention are in essence a transformation of the tradition.
Hobsbawm insisted that there is no need to invent tradition if the genuine tradition is still alive. This idea shows an overly simplistic view of history and historicity, because it makes a fixed distinction between genuine tradition and invented tradition. No matter “genuine” tradition or “invented” tradition, they are both terms that belong to a historically situated theory. Any tradition can be defined as “genuine” or “invented” and it depends on the social context in which the tradition is produced. The historicity of “tradition” is based on the powerful construction of social and intellectual discourse (Wolf 1982:21).

In general, functionalists’ arguments about tradition and modernity have several arbitrary presumptions. They hypothesize that traditional societies are essentially different from modern ones and that elements of a “traditional” society can continued only if it can be used to construct modernity (Li 2009:62). Given that an invented tradition could function to “symbolize group membership and cohesion, legitimate authority, and inculcate beliefs and value systems” (Otto and Pedersen 2000:4), functionalist thinking only perceives “revival of tradition” as a modern reconstruction of social structure but it dismisses the reconfiguration of tradition itself and the meaning of human action (Li 2009:66-67).

The Revival of Confucianism

With the growth of China’s economic power after 2000, China’s modernization is increasingly associated with the indigenization of development rather than Westernization in the intellectual atmosphere. Many scholars approach the revival of
Confucianism as a response to globalization, which is directed towards reestablishing the cultural identity and value system for Chinese people.

According to Zhao, de-westernization occurred in Chinese society by virtue of two forces. First was the enhancement of China’s power in the international arena. Chinese people became more confident in their own culture, and this gave rise to the justification of cultural conservatism. Second, social ties became loose or even broken due to China’s modernization and the increasing mobility of its population (Zhao 2009:111). Many Chinese people refer to religions or other belief systems to retain a sense of belonging and identity.

The first force is characterized by de-westernization and nationalism. Wang (2010) argues that such a revival is an opposition to the Western influence as well as an increasing popularization of nationalism. According to Cha, the New Confucian movement is a response to the Chinese intellectuals’ demand to overcome the negative effects of globalization, “embodying the possibility of keeping one’s cultural identity while engaging in dialogue with other cultures” (Cha 2003:488). Chou proposes that the spreading of China’s New Confucianism embodies the quest for national identity, which represents resistance to Western cultural imperialism (Chou 2008:147).

The second force is associated with rebuilding a system of moral values. The destruction of traditional social relations implies that Confucian ethics have lost their institutional framework. Many scholars argue that China is undergoing a crisis of morality and it is the root of the increased crime and violence. “The problem in China today is that there is no consistent widely accepted set of moral values to define proper behavior” (Link 1993: 191). The central government responds to this problem mainly
through reforming the political and legal system, emphasizing administrative censoring and supervision. At the same time, the civil society has initiated the national learning craze. Children reading Confucian classics has become a popular approach for moral education and cultural heritage (Yu 2008:126, Billioud and Thoraval 2007:15). The revival of Confucianism gained official support when the Communist Party of China proposed “the construction of a harmonious society” in 2004. This indicated that the focus of China’s development began to change from economic growth to social harmony. This official discourse has been perceived as a returning to Confucian principles for national governance (Yang 2008).

However, the above theoretical arguments do not shed much light on the following questions. Why do Chinese people choose to engage in the current revival of Confucianism? In what way has the promotion of Confucian tradition become meaningful to them? How is Confucianism reproduced and transformed in this promotion? According to my case study, there is no evidence shows that HKC’s activities are directed towards an ideological de-westernization. Participants are willing to accept various educational ideas, no matter from East or West, as long as those ideas are considered to be good for the education of children. The inspiration of their sense of cultural identity stems from a situation in which teaching or learning traditional Chinese culture can satisfy their needs. It does not mean that they will reject international influences or firmly adhere to Confucian traditions.

The empirical studies of the invention of tradition in contemporary Chinese societies can be categorized into two types. One of them notes the politicization of culture. Pluralistic practice and the revival of indigenous tradition are surpressed by the
state or the dominant class, which does not only manipulate symbols systematically but also controls the channels by which traditional culture can be legitimately publicized (Yang 2011:327, Yu 2007:127). The other one emphasizes the autonomy and agency of individuals and grassroots organizations and how they attribute new meanings to certain traditions (Billioud 2011:286, Litzinger 1998:240, Tan and Ding 2010:139, Yang 2011:327). The reconstruction of tradition is perceived to neither reproduce nor resist the ideologies of state power. Actually, each case in those studies shows how these supposedly discrete types intertwine. The utilization of Confucianism or other traditions is marked by a coexistence of reciprocities and conflicts between the authorities and grassroot communities (Billioud and Thoraval 2009:82).

Based on my case study, I did not see an apparent politicalization of Confucian tradition. The operation of HKC is much more like an interest-based educational trial. The current social environment in China gives HKC some space to promote an educational mode that is claimed to be Confucian and traditional. In most situations, HKC tries to keep a distance from the government’s intervention, but there still exists a power relationship between HKC and the local government when they cooperate for public events.

Regarding the empirical studies that emphasize the agency of individuals or social groups in the revival of Confucianism, most of them put efforts towards describing the cultural phenomena and people’s action but do not shed light on the mechanism by which Confucian tradition is being reproduced or reinvented.

I prefer to define “tradition” as a mode of change and a multivalent cultural signifier to suggest a connection between past and present (Yang 2011:316, Vlastos
1998:6). In other words, tradition is a creative process within which various parties pursue their interests through the appropriation of cultural elements. The flexibility of tradition allows people to incorporate both old and new socio-cultural elements in their practice and to redefine “modernity” and “tradition” in their discourse (Schmidt 2007:112). Modern Sishu education facilitates the mutual interaction between modern institutions and Confucian classics teaching and it gives rise to the transformation of Confucian tradition (Ma 2002:90).

My purpose is not to distinguish which part in the revival is modern and which part is traditional, but to discover how the revival of Confucianism serves the interests of certain institutions, groups, and individuals. I will disentangle the power relationships involved in the transmission of Confucian teaching and the meanings associated with the readings of Confucian classics for urban Chinese residents. I do not want to deny the possibility of using Confucianism as a tool to satisfy the needs of the dominant class and to reconstruct an ideology for the nation, but it is not the focus of my study. In my fieldwork, the large picture mirrors the fact that individuals or social groups are seeking for an accumulation of symbolic capital in order to build a distinctive social image and cultural identity as well as to enhance their social status (Assmann 2008:360; Tan and Ding 2010:139).
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

In my fieldwork, I paid close attention to the interpenetration between tradition and modernity, especially how they are relocated in the local discourse by individuals and institutions. I also tried to investigate the indigenous notion of Confucian tradition and “national learning” as well as why particular innovations or replications of customs are important to the deeply involved participants. My anthropological objectives inspired me to start from children reading classics and see how this movement selectively reconfigures traditional Chinese culture by deeds and words.

In 2011 August, I first connected with Huaxia Kids Community (HKC) by joining its reading club. This club is opened for parents and white-collar workers who are interested in “national learning,” especially Confucian works. The organizer of the club, Peter Sun, is an alumnus of the university where I did my undergraduate study. As the reading club welcomed volunteers to contribute to its development, I became involved with the management team and attended their meetings regularly. Through Sun’s introduction, I got to know Ms. Luo, the person in charge of HKC. Ms. Luo was interested in my project and wanted to know more about HKC’s development from an outsider’s perspective. I went to HKC’s classics reading class every week, worked as a volunteer: taking pictures, writing a newsletter for HKC’s activities, and posting them in its on-line community to help disseminate their message.
During the three months in Shanghai, I conducted fieldwork using participant observation and in-depth interviews. My position as a female made it easy for me to get involved with HKC’s members as the most active participants are usually mothers or young ladies. Participant observation is the central method of my research since it can help me to understand the local discourse in an explicit and tacit way (Dewalt and DeWalt 2002:8). The combination of empathy and detachment in this method allowed me to reflect on the relationship between myself and my subjects from multiple perspectives. Not only did I take part in HKC’s regular activities, but I also observed HKC’s cooperation with other institutions in Shanghai through several events, such as charity auctions, non-government organization salons, and a “national learning” public class. I interacted with kids and their parents in and after the class, and they referred me as “teacher Zhu,” although my main task was taking photos instead of giving lectures. It reminded me to pay close attention to the context of people’s verbal expression.

During the last month of my fieldwork, I interviewed 5 parents and 5 team members (Table 1). Four of the interviews were conducted in the interviewees’ homes so I got a chance to see their living environment and how they interact with their children (Figures 1 and 2).

Not all the interviewees equally adhered to the Confucian learning style, and each of them had a particular understanding of reading Confucian classics. The in-depth interviews allowed me to understand some of the different meanings behind similar experiences. Although their attitudes towards sending children to take classics-reading class varied, their practices that promoted Confucian learning were driven by similar structural forces.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gao</td>
<td>HKC Teacher</td>
<td>State employee</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Oct. 8</td>
<td>Gao’s home</td>
<td>1h30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luo</td>
<td>HKC Founder</td>
<td>Elementary school teacher</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Oct. 15</td>
<td>Tai-Chi Club</td>
<td>1h48m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shen</td>
<td>HKC Teacher</td>
<td>College student</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Oct. 28</td>
<td>Shen’s university</td>
<td>1h13m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Oct. 29</td>
<td>Lucy’s home</td>
<td>2h3m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cao</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Nov.1</td>
<td>Cao’s home</td>
<td>2h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xie</td>
<td>Cao’s husband</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Nov.1</td>
<td>Cao’s home</td>
<td>1h1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lin</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Nov.2</td>
<td>Lin’s home</td>
<td>1h37m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jin</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Nov.11</td>
<td>Yangpu class site</td>
<td>57m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dong</td>
<td>HKC Teacher</td>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Nov.12</td>
<td>Yangpu park</td>
<td>1h34m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan</td>
<td>HKC volunteer</td>
<td>College teacher</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Nov.12</td>
<td>People park</td>
<td>50m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley</td>
<td>HKC volunteer</td>
<td>General manager assistant</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Nov.13</td>
<td>Minhang class site</td>
<td>36m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HKC’s on-line documents were another source for data collection. Those documents included flyers, newsletters, videos and pictures of previous activities, rules and regulations, meeting minutes, and financial statements.

As I was one of the creators of those documents in the form of pictures and newsletters, it is necessary for me to analyze data in a reflexive way. Reviewing the
FIGURE 2. Chinese calligraphy work written by Lucy’s daughter.

history of Western thought, Foucault (2002) argues that social sciences are far from being objective, because the production of knowledge is rooted in colonialism and structured by the power of Western civilization. Therefore, social scientists must be consistently conscious of the effect of their own position and intellectual structure when conducting research (Bourdieu 2004). There was no doubt that HKC’s activities were presented in a selective way in its website, emphasizing the happiness and talents of kids. However, things that happened in the field occasionally told a different story. I needed to discover how and why people choose certain words and symbols rather than other types of narratives to describe themselves and how these representations influenced my understanding of what they are actually doing.
I returned to my field site in the summer of 2012 and attended a second communication meeting for volunteer teachers. I found that HKC had opened two more classes in Shanghai and recruited six more volunteer teachers. After the meeting, I contacted a volunteer, who strongly advocates children reading classics and has conflicts with his wife over the education of his daughter. As the previous interviewees were mostly women, the information he provided will make a contribution to the fathers’ perspective.

Overall, participation led me to new observations, and the new observations modified how I participated. My interview guide was constantly being updated as I found...
that some questions should be replaced. They were too abstract to address or lacked the value of uncovering personal experience. On the one hand, these methods have deepened my understanding of modern Sishu education and what contemporary Chinese one-child families are most concerned with. On the other hand, I realized that my research technique inevitably involved secrecy and dissimulation since they took the form of social interaction, which was accompanied by impression management (Berreman 2007:147). Therefore, I must be enough sensitive to distinguish “what do they want to do” “what do they say they are doing,” and “what are they actually doing.”
CHAPTER IV

FORMING HUAXIA KIDS COMMUNITY

Clarification of Modern Sishu Education

It is necessary to clarify the term modern Sishu education (现代私塾教育) before we start exploring the revival of Confucian tradition in contemporary Chinese society. Emerging 2,000 years ago, Sishu is a traditional tutorial school with a tutor teaching students in a private schoolhouse. However, many organizations conducting modern Sishu education are not run on a full-time school basis. These organizations are referred to as Classics-reading Classes (读经班), Xuetang(学堂) or Sishu(私塾), in official and popular discourse. Although their arrangement of classes varies, the reading of Chinese classics, such as The Analects of Confucius (《论语》), is the basic component of most organizations.

I use Sishu (私塾) to refer to this kind of education, because the materials used for reading and the educational philosophy of these organizations are claimed to have originated from ancient Sishu. What I must emphasize is that, due to the variation of their operation, these organizations cannot all be categorized as modern Sishu. In the context of my thesis, Sishu represents an educational philosophy rather than a kind of institution.
Although classics-reading is the most basic component in these organizations, it is inadequate to generate education provided by these organizations into “modern classics-reading education.” This is because other than classics-reading, most of these organizations also provide chances for children to know or learn traditional Chinese painting, Chinese calligraphy, Chinese musical instruments playing, and other programs that are said to be related with traditional Chinese culture.

Generally, even if *modern Sishu education* is not a perfect term, I try to use it to refer to the education promoted by modern organizations which operate on the basis of classics-reading classes.

**Professor Wang Caigui and the Movement of Children Reading Classics**

Wang Caigui is the name I often heard among parents and teachers who are advocators of children reading classics. Many parents got to know the value of classics reading from Wang Caigui’s lectures and found it to be a plausible method for child education.

My daughter’s kindergarten recommended a VCD to us, Wang Caigui classics-reading education. I was deeply touched after watching it and realized that his education philosophy and national learning are broad and profound. My daughter began to learn the Analects when she was in upper kindergarten. It was a little late for her to learn that.

—Lucy

When my husband watched Professor Wang Caigui’s video, he got a strong feeling of this kind of education. It was three years before I gave birth to my daughter. My husband bought a lot of reading materials suggested by Wang Caigui and gave those books to our friends who had children. He told them how good those books were and children should read them. He sent out more than ten sets of books, but none of our friends paid attention to it.
As a disciple of Mou Zongsan, Wang Caigui is a Taiwanese professor and educator who started promoting children reading classics in 1994 in Taiwan. Wang’s education philosophy is based on the division of four phases that compose the development of child. According to Wang, children have a very strong memory capacity while they are weak in comprehension in the second phase (3-13 years old). Therefore, parents should provide Chinese and English classics, such as Four Books and Five Classics (四书五经), Tang poems (唐诗), and Shakespeare’s sonnets, for children to read when they get three years old. It is important to make good use of these 10 years and let children memorize those valuable literatures. If children only read simple texts that are easy to understand before 13 years old, it will be a huge waste of their memory capacity. By reading and memorizing the humanistic knowledge contained in classics, children accumulate the wisdom of the sages in their mind, and that wisdom could “cultivate the rectitude of the heart/mind, of nature and of action” (Billioud and Thoraval 2007:15). When children’s comprehension begins to make big progress, “the classics become intelligible resources for these children, illuminating their daily lives, their acts, and their choices” (Billioud and Thoraval 2007:15).

In Wang’s discourse, reading classics is more advanced than Chinese classes provided by the mainstream school system in terms of moral education and the training of memory, literacy, and artistic ability. In this context, the former introduces a new...
educational model even if learning materials are ancient classics, while the latter implies a traditional and dominating educational pattern.

From the surface, it seems that Wang’s educational philosophy tries to promote a ancient learning style in terms of how to learn and what to learn. It emphasized memorizing rather than understanding. Materials for learning are classics that may not bring apparent practical benefits for children especially when their comprehension is underdeveloped. It sounds like a localized ideal of “returning to the ancient way” which is not compatible with globalization. However, it is much more complex than return to the ancients or reappearance of Confucianism. Although Wang uses many examples in the past to justify his educational proposal, the authenticity of Confucian tradition does not lie in our “fidelity to an alleged past” (Trouillot 1995:148). When looking into Wang’s proposal closely, I find that his educational philosophy is a product made in the context of globalization even if it appears to be based on locally originated Confucian tradition. One demonstration for this is that his classics reading plan includes reading English classics, which is believed to be the source of the wisdom in Western culture. In addition, Wang adopts psychology and child development theory to justify that his theory that 3-13 years old is the best time for children to memorize texts, and there is no need to explain what they are reading. In his discourse, reading classics is represented as a scientific learning style. The necessity of showing scientific proof implies that the revival of Confucian tradition should incorporate “Western” or dominating knowledge system so that it can make sense to people in contemporary society. Confucian tradition gains its authenticity in current representation of the past by narrators’ comments and actors’ practices.
The movement of teaching Confucian classics to children spread to Mainland China with more than 1000 public speeches having been given by Professor Wang in various parts of China. His speeches were so influential that a large number of social groups and individuals began to hold classics reading classes in their neighborhoods. Some of them developed into corporations or non-profit organizations and identified themselves as Sishu, Xuetang, or Shuyuan, which were common names of educational institutions in ancient China. Some institutions do not only emphasize reading but also bring the experience of ‘going back to the Confucian era.’ The decoration of the classroom is in the ancient style, and teachers and students may dress up with Han Chinese clothing before reading.

From a Website to a NGO: Facilitating Confucian Texts with Personalized Way of Promotion

The Huaxia Kids Community (HKC) is one of those of organizations dedicated to of teaching children to read Confucian classics. I got to know the founder, Ms. Luo, through attending the seminars of Huaxia classics-reading club, which was one of the programs operated by HKC. Ms. Luo is a preliminary school teacher as well as mother of a 7-year-old boy. Our interview was conducted in a small Tai-chi club which was run by her husband.

Reading classics will help children form a sense of national identity. When we established the website, we proposed a slogan: nourish the root of Chinese humanistic spirit for children… as a Chinese, if the child doesn’t know much about Chinese history, culture, and the meaning of traditional festivals, it is very sad as he has no root and no home. Although we are talking about globalization nowadays, it is bleak if a child knows nothing about his home. I hope children can know different aspects of traditional Chinese culture through reading Chinese classics.
（让孩子诵读经典是）为了让孩子们有民族认同感。我们建网站时提出口号：滋养孩子中华人文精神之根……作为中华民族的儿女，如果连自己的文化历史都不了解，连我们要过什么节都不清楚，节日本身有什么含义不知道，这样的孩子是很可怜的，就像没有根没有家。虽然现在我们说全球化、世界大团结，没家的孩子实际是很凄惶的。希望孩子通过国学经典诵读的主线，了解中国其他方面的传统文化。] —Luo

In 2004, Luo began to think about establishing a website for children, introducing China’s cultural geography and traditional Chinese culture in a way that would interest them. She started working on that website with several teachers, but her pregnancy prevented her from completing it. In 2008, Luo got involved in programs run by some non-profit organizations, such as Hong Kong Butterfly Ecological Foundation. However, she found that her own values conflicted with the cultures of those NPOs. After that, she decided to establish her own NPO and to restart work on the website. With her friends’ help, the website was facilitated with a Bulletin Board System and art design. Unfortunately, the workload, which included translating a great amount of Confucian texts into materials readable for children and uploading pictures and videos of all kinds of Chinese martial arts, was much heavier than her team could bear. It would be a very time-consuming process before they could get significant turnouts.

Therefore, Luo focused on building up off-line programs. She founded a non-governmental organization based on the 3+2 model, and turned the website into a medium for advertising HKC’s vision, its activities, and cooperation with other social organizations. The 3+2 model is consisted of three free programs for children (parent-child classics reading class, Chinese martial arts, and traditional cultural activities) and two programs for adults (Huaxia classics reading club and public lectures on traditional Chinese culture and family relations).
Luo told me that the programs for children are the core components of HKC. However, family education and the role of parents are keys to child rearing. It is almost impossible for children to form a habit of reading classics without parents’ support and coaching. Considering the importance of parents and family, HKC provided the classics-reading club for parents who are interested in learning Confucian classics and traditional Chinese culture.

The first parent-child classics reading class was opened in the beginning of 2010 in Yangpu District in Shanghai. Ms. Luo borrowed an activity room from the committee of Xinfengcheng social community which is a property owned by the government. She publicized the information on the Bulletin Board System of Xinfengcheng social community and the website of HKC. With the successful operation of the first classics-reading class, Ms. Luo began to recruit volunteer teachers and prepared for opening more classes in other parts of Shanghai. She communicated her idea with her colleagues in the preliminary school she worked in, but no one responded positively. She spread this message among her friends and succeeded in engaging some volunteers who were her acquaintances or friends’ friends. The parents, who came to HKC’s classroom with their children, became another source of volunteers who were more committed to teaching Confucian texts to children. In 2011, HKC established the second classics reading class in Minhang District, Shanghai. The place for holding the class kept moving before June 2011. It had been a small room without air-conditioning borrowed from the committee of Wanke social community. Then they moved to a kindergarten that was willing to offer a room but the offer did not last long. Finally, they were settled in a well-equipped classroom offered by the NGO HandsOn Shanghai. At
that moment, *HandsOn Shanghai* was seeking a cooperative program to foster community culture of the Wanke neighborhood, and the presence of HKC realized this goal (Figures 4 and 5).

![Huaxia Kids Community Wanke class site in Minhang District.](image)

**FIGURE 4.** *Huaxia Kids Community Wanke class site in Minhang District.*

The vision of HKC claimed by Luo included incorporating children’s reading classics as a routine activity of local social communities. She thought it would be easy to conduct, but that would take time to persuade the committee of social communities.

Many social communities are only concerned with completing the tasks given by their superior departments, such as organizing singing and dancing activities for retired people. However, community cultural services should have cared about the needs of various groups (not only retired people)... It is convenient for children to go to the classics-reading class located in their neighborhood. They can just come with the book after dinner and don’t need to go far from home. Then, reading classics can naturally become a part of their daily life.

---Luo
Establishing classics-reading class on the basis of social community allowed HKC to approach students, parents, and volunteers easily, because most participants were residents in the social community. The spatial proximity increases the sense of time efficiency as they do not need to spend much time on transportation. What is more, this arrangement integrated family life within social life. Not only because it shortens the physical distance between household and educational institutions, but it also brings parents to the classroom with children and provides a social space for the mutual influence between family and social education.

“The increased impersonal nature of life outside the household, the increased weight of institutions – indeed, the increasing need for institutionalized forms of organization” brings about the powerlessness of individuals (Trouillot 2003:62).
However, individuals can also take advantage of the authority and social capital to create new social spaces for the development of family life outside the household. The HKC created such social spaces in social communities, which are lead by neighborhood committee and under the control of government bureaucracies. It reflects how individual agency transcends limitations and empowers itself by taking advantage of the government’s efficient management of residents. In Chapter V, I will address the power relation between HKC and social communities and the symbolic value of Confucian tradition in this relation.

Ms. Luo does not totally agree with Wang’s instruction that “just lead children to read texts without explanation.” She demonstrated her disagreement by referring to her experience brought his son to classes provided by another classics-reading organization, Jixiang Humble Cottage:

The class is held by a Buddhist group in a vegetarian restaurant. Parents are learning Buddhist classics and Di Zi Gui (Standards for being a Good Pupil and Child) in rooms while children are seated around a table and reading Di Zi Gui at the hall. They only read without explanation. This method is recommended by Wang Caigui. However, their pronunciation and intonation lack rhythmic beauty, and most children cannot concentrate on the reading. Reading only cannot enrich children’s knowledge, even if children can recite it fluently. This simplistic teaching method is not good for children. I can hardly agree with Professor Wang Caigui’s teaching method.

[吉祥草堂是佛教团体在素食餐厅办的,大人和小孩分开。大人在里面,老师给他们讲授佛教相关内容和弟子规,小孩子在外面,有二三十个,围成一桌。一味诵读,这是发起全球读经教育的王财贵推崇的。但是他们读的方法,语音语调绝对没有美感。孩子也表情各异……单纯的诵读,对小孩知识面的拓展没有作用。尽管孩子可以背得很熟,但是这种单一的教学手段对孩子不好。我始终不能接受王财贵教授的这一套做法。]—Luo

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1 Li Yu Xiu wrote this book in Qing Dynasty. The content is based on the teaching of Confucius, addressing the basic requirements of behavior manner for being a good person.
In HKC’s class, teachers will introduce some basic knowledge, such as where Confucius was born and the names of the Five Mountains in China. When reading Di Zi Gui, teachers will explain what is the proper behavior in daily life and invite children to demonstrate it in front of the class physically.

Wang Caigui’s tradition of ‘reading without explanation’ was modified in HKC’s teaching practice. Confucian texts were explained selectively, and the explanation was not only made for children but also for parents. Some parts about political ideas of the Analects will never be read, because HKC teachers thought that they were far from our daily life and not applicable to contemporary society. It transcends Professor Wang’s tradition in terms of how to teach, although most of the class time was still spent in reading and reciting. It uses Confucian classics as the reading material but adopts modern teaching methods—trying to make reading attractive and interesting to children—that are totally different from that of ancient Sishu, where children would be punished if they do not concentrate on reading.

Can we beat pupils with a ruler if they cannot recite the text, just as ancient Sishu? No teachers would dare to do that. Nowadays, students are supposed to be customers. They are no longer asking the teacher for knowledge, but it is the teacher that should provide service for students.

In HKC, Confucian tradition is redefined in a modern setting as it is facilitated with new teaching methods which are developed according to what are taught and who are the audience. From Wang’s educational philosophy to Ms. Luo’s practice, Confucian tradition is transformed by public discourse, the symbolic risk of words, and the modernization of teaching methods. In Professor Wang Caigui’s discourse, nationwide
classics reading can be realized through the institutionalization of modern Sishu education. He explained that “Sishu (私塾)” is just the place where private education is conducted. However, “Sishu (私塾)” has a negative stereotype that it is a place where students are harshly punished by teachers if they cannot meet requirements. In addition, “Sishu” is arbitrarily articulated with Confucian tradition which emphasizes obedience and the hierarchy between students and teachers. Therefore, although Wang Caigui promoted Confucian teaching as a scientific educational model, the wording and materials used for describing this model implies that it is somehow similar to ancient Sishu. However, when HKC put Wang’s ideal into practice, the representation of Confucian tradition changed through Ms. Luo’s disagreement with Wang’s methods and her new standards for classics teaching. Parents got a new understanding of Confucian tradition. It is not as serious as they had imagined and can be learnt through a game. Students’ needs are fully taken care of because teachers become service provide in current context.
CHAPTER V

THE INVOLVEMENT OF DIVERSE PARTIES

The Preliminary School

Ms. Luo is a Chinese teacher working in a preliminary school in Shanghai. With her enthusiasm of promoting traditional Chinese culture, she had taught the Analects and Di Zi Gui in her class before HKC was established. It had been her personal choice rather than the school’s requirement or recommendation.

Most parents spoke highly of Ms. Luo’s practices, because they thought that learning Di Zi Gui was good for their children. Other Chinese teachers in that school began to learn from Ms. Luo and taught the Analects and Di Zi Gui in their own classes. In the beginning, that practice was neither supported nor opposed by the school officials. However, the school found out that the reading materials used for Di Zi Gui learning were published by a Buddhist group. The school thought it might bring troubles, because those Chinese teachers’ activities could be suspected to be transmission of religion in school, which is forbidden by the Chinese government.

Some parents actively supported this kind of teaching. They gave those teachers some reading materials published by a Buddhist association. Those books did not only contain Di Zi Gui but also Buddhist texts. Then a vice president got to know this situation. He talked to Ms. Luo and forbade her from teaching this kind of stuff at school. He said those things were just a legacy of the bad old days. He thought the Buddhist version was not good and worried that the school may be suspected of.
doing missionary work. Mainland China has very strict thought control policies. You cannot teach religious stuff at school.

[有些家长很起劲，送了老师一些教材，是佛教协会的，上面印有佛教的东西，被一个管教育的校长知道以后就跟罗老师谈话，不允许她再教这些东西，说这是糟粕，觉得佛教版本的不太好，担心有传教的嫌疑。中国大陆的思想控制很紧，你不能在学校教宗教的东西。]—Jin

In her first trial of teaching children Confucian classics, Ms. Luo took advantage of the ambiguity of the schools regulations and her own position as a school teacher. Ms. Luo and other teachers’ actions did make some changes to the mainstream educational system. However, the power of the system limited the promotion of classics reading when its symbolic representation violated the school’s authorized position. However, this does not mean that teaching Confucian classics at school is generally impossible. On the contrary, many schools around China opened Confucian learning classes as an optional or even required part of the curriculum. “Some school presidents consider reading Confucian classics as an important part of preliminary school education. They will flexibly promote it within the government rules” Ms. Luo said. The failure experienced by Ms. Luo was mainly due to several accidents: that they used reading materials with religious implications and that the vice president did not consider Confucian classics to be valuable.

The meaning system of Confucian tradition is not only reflected through the content of Confucian classics. The meaning of Confucian tradition can be changed by the source of materials and which agents are engaged in the representation and promotion of those classics. Even if Confucianism is not a religion by itself, it may be perceived to incorporate religious properties when texts are published by Buddhist groups. In the context of public school education, such an association with religion stigmatized reading
Confucian classics as a deviant behavior. When individuals touch the limitation set by social condition, the promotion of Confucian tradition may be interpreted in an alternative way, and the direction of its development may be changed by social and official discourse.

Corporations

Ms. Luo told me that an owner of a local company provided HKC 60 sets of books, which became the reading materials for the first parent-children classics reading class. Giving out these free gifts increased the symbolic capital of his company, as he earned a means by which his company could build a positive public image.

Similarly, at a charity auction held by a union of NGOs in Shanghai, Sinochem Group, a state-owned enterprise paid 4000 RMB for a picture donated by one of HKC’s members. The 4000RMB (638 USD, October 15, 2012) became a considerable component of HKC’s financial resources.

However, this kind of exchange may not operate smoothly in certain situations. When Ms. Luo tried to bring a proposal for a classics reading class to the volunteer committee of IBM China, she encountered several difficulties and gave up this idea.

I have planned to introduce parent-children classics reading class into corporations. I began to consider IBM but found that they are located in Zhangjiang (it is far from downtown Shanghai and the transportation is not convenient) and would be closed during weekends. Although they had a big room, it would not work out. They also had available rooms in downtown, but it was too small. The volunteer committee in the corporation has leadership transition every year. The leader of each committee wants to hold some vigorous events with significant influences, but those events or activities lack heritage and continuity. Our classics reading class should be done in a continuous manner. So our intentions and operational manners are different. I just put this idea aside.
[我想把亲子诵读班推广到企业里去，之前想推广到IBM，但是发现他们在张江(离市区很远，交通不便)到了双休日都关门了，虽然场地大，但是做不了，他们在市区也有场地，但是很小。企业里面的志愿者协会是一年一届的，他希望在自己任期内有很多轰轰烈烈的活动做出来，没有什么延续性，我们的亲子活动是希望一直延续下去。所以我们的出发点和做法不一样，就放在一边。]—Luo

It is clear that the values of HKC cannot fit into the norms of that committee’s operations. The working logic of the commercial organization hinges on efficiency and short-term outcome. The commercial organization expects that the event they held can have displayable effects and significant social influences. However, what can be offered by HKC is a routinely operated classics-reading class with limited number of participants.

The institutionalization of the emphasis on efficiency, quick success, and short-term outcome has grown into a dominant ideology in metropolises like Shanghai. It may “veil our understanding of the present, including their own conditions of possibility” (Trouillot 2003:49). This ideology is open, because it can go hand in hand with consumer culture and transform educational programs into cultural goods (e.g., corporations that sell classes of Chinese cultural education as training programs). This ideology is exclusive, because it naturally filters out slowly growing markets and cooperators who do not has the potential of achieve quick success. It may silence the history of developing paths of Confucian tradition that are walked by people who are operating classics-reading on the basis of volunteering contribution and participation.
As Ms. Luo failed to continue teaching Di Zi Gui at school, she tried to approach children in social communities and positioned HKC’s programs as afterschool activities which would be complementary to school education.

Ms. Luo decided to locate her first class in Xinfengcheng Social Community because it was near the preliminary school she worked in. Some of her students and their parents, who lived in or near this neighborhood, would be the first participants of HKC’s program. Then the reputation of HKC could thus be transmitted through the word-of-mouth.

Ms. Luo got a chance to get an activity room from the neighborhood committee in Xinfengcheng community very quickly. This was because a parent of one of her students took charge of managing neighborhood committee’s properties. After hearing of Ms. Luo’s plan to open a classics-reading class for children in social communities, the parent supported HKC by providing the activity room as the first classroom for HKC. Ms. Luo took advantage of her social capital which was gained through her position as a teacher authorized by the mainstream school system. Personal networks provide the possibility for actors to transcend limitations set by the social condition. For many NGOs in Shanghai, money is the most urgent issue as they rely almost exclusively on donations. Ms Luo never thought HKC’s money was in short as she got all of the facilities and materials for free by social networking. In other words, she broke the stereotype of ‘money talks’ by transforming her social capital into economic capital. In addition, as the classics-reading class gradually gained a good reputation in Xinfengcheng Social Community, the successful partnership added to Ms. Luo’s social
capital so that she gained more power when seeking for new partnerships and enhanced HKC’s position in the current education system.

The second classics-reading class was established in Wanke Social Community in 2011. Shirley, one of the volunteers of HKC, is a resident of this community. She advertised HKC’s classics reading class in the Bulletin Board System (BBS) of Wanke and helped Ms. Luo borrow a small room with very basic conditions.

When the NGO, HandsOn Shanghai was seeking for a joint program with Wanke social community, Wanke introduced HandsOn Shanghai and HKC to each other, and HKC’s children got the chance to study in a big and bright classroom provided by HandsOn Shanghai.

Our community has a very good BBS. Because our community is very large, there are about 1000-2000 people on the BBS every day. The neighborhood committee provided us a resident room for free, but it is very small. It was summer, and we felt very hot in that room. The environment was too bad. There was no space for children to practice martial arts. So we needed to go outside and find an open space. However, it was not convenient in a rainy day. Sometimes, I felt a little guilty as I cannot give children and parents a nice classroom. They arrived here and were sweating. We switched on the fan in the room, the front felt cold while the back felt hot. Then HandsOn Shanghai came in and cooperated with our community. As long as we persist, there will be a way out.

[我们小区有一个非常好的论坛，每天在线一两千人，因为我们这个社区很大……我们就是到了一个很小，居民区的一个小居民房里，居委会免费提供的。那时候是夏天，特别热，环境特别差……少儿武术都没地方练，每次都在小区里面找空地，下雨天又不方便。我有时候觉得这个场地不好挺内疚的，挺对不起孩子和家长的。他们赶过来汗流浃背，开电风扇前面感觉很冷，后面感觉很热。后来正好牵手上海进来了，跟我们小区有一个合作关系的，所以我觉得要坚持，就一定会有出路的。]—Shirley

By virtue of the cooperation between HKC, Wanke neighborhood committee, and HandsOn Shanghai, Confucian tradition was able to be promoted within the social space created by the exchange of symbolic capital, social capital, and economic capital.
As an institution that represents the authority of the government, Wanke neighborhood committee intended to accumulate its symbolic capital through educational activities so that it can enhance its position among social communities in Shanghai. This is because achievements of each neighborhood committee will be evaluated by the superior department every year, and the result of evaluation will influence its public reputation, social recognition and the welfare of committee members. The HKC was able to provide this symbolic capital through cooperation, but the economic capital (the small classroom) provided by Wanke could not satisfy HKC’s needs. Later, Wanke used its social capital and worked as an authorized agent to coordinate the exchange of HKC’s symbolic capital and HandsOn Shanghai’s economic capital.

By increasing the chance of partnership with local social communities, HKC accumulated its social capital and expanded its influence. In Chapter VI, I will address how HKC teachers adjusted reading materials and teaching styles according the specific condition (e.g., students’ age and the amount of students) of each class site. Those adjustments improved the approachability of classics-reading and even attracted some families with high social status. In Shanghai, parents who have received or had considerable family income would like to send their children to NGOs or profit-making institutions that provide classics-reading classes, because they hope their children can receive a distinctive education. When classics-reading is associated with groups with high social status, its symbolic capital grows with the increasing prestige.

Although the current accumulation of social and symbolic capital may be too subtle to change the structure of power, the social condition is changing in terms of the recognition and acceptance of Confucian tradition and classics-reading. In HKC’s case,
this kind of change is reflected by the fact that it succeeded in cooperating with local
government even as an unregistered NGO.

The Local Government

Jin’an Book Club It is a cultural program run by Jin’an district government
that has a considerable social influence in Shanghai. It is willing to cooperate with NGOs,
universities and professional groups, providing places for public lectures and seminars on
a variety of topics. After Ms. Luo got to connect with Jin’an Book Club through her
friend who worked in another NGO, HKC’s public lectures came to be held there on a
monthly basis. During the period of my fieldwork, I attended two lectures on topics of the
Satir model for family therapy and Chinese couplets. Each lecture attracted 20 to 40
people, and no more than 10 of them were participants of HKC’s programs.

Ms. Luo felt very excited when she found out that HKC could have a long-
term partnership with Jin’an Book Club. As HKC was not an officially registered NGO,
Ms. Luo often feared that the unauthorized status would become a barrier to its
development. However, its cooperation with the government’s book club symbolically
represented that HKC’s programs were admitted by an official institution (Figure 6).

However, the government’s prestige and symbolic capital were perceived as
not only positive but also negative for HKC’s development. After HKC successfully
cooperated with the government through HKC’s public lecture program, Ms. Luo started
to think about place another program – Huaxia classics-reading club – into Jin’an Book
Club. She talked to Peter who took charge of Huaxia classics-reading club. She suggested
seizing this cooperation opportunity for cooperation. However, Peter strongly opposed
Ms. Luo’s proposal. He was afraid that Huaxia classics-reading club may lose its independence and freedom if it became part of Jin’an Book Club’s program. “The discussion of classics would be placed under the government’s control and inspection” Peter said.

At last, this cooperation did not happen. HKC’s exchange with local government incorporated power relations, and HKC may take the risk of sacrificing its freedom or changing its developing direction. Therefore, the transmission of traditional Chinese culture is both empowered by the accumulation of HKC’s capital and restricted by structure of power embedded in the exchange of capital.
Non-Governmental Organizations

Huaxia Kids Community continuously participated in events with the involvement of many non-governmental organizations. In August 2011, I attended an event called Public Dream Garden, which was organized by Cihuai Group with the cooperation of seven NGOs in Shanghai.

The vision of Cihuai Group was to provide a platform to facilitate the exchange of public welfare resources between corporations, NGOs, and individuals. Public Dream Garden is usually held twice a year. The event lasts two days and consists of charity sales, a charity auction, and presentations given by involved NGOs.

The charity sales generally looked like a flea market. Each NGO had an area to sell new or pre-owned items donated by their members. Volunteers passed out advertising pamphlets to buyers and briefly introduced basic information of their organizations.

In the afternoon of the first day, each NGO gave a 10-minute presentation to introduce their vision and programs. This section was considered to be a window for the public to learn more about resources and opportunities offered by each NGO.

Many involved NGOs are not authorized by the government, but they can still exist as long as they do not violate the interests of the authority. When they advertised their events in Weibo (a social networking service that works just like Twitter), they were concerned about the speed of information flow. They didn’t want to reach the situation that the government would suspect their action to be an over-growth of civil power and force social media services to block those messages.
It is true that the government intends to prevent NGOs and the civil society from growing powerful, but it also needs to mobilize NGOs’ agency to solve social problems and take care of disadvantaged groups, such as disabled people. Non-governmental organizations’ programs provide a social space to digest social sufferings and complaints. Regarding HKC, it created a buffer zone for parents who are not satisfied with the lack of moral and humanistic education within the mainstream school system. When placing the development of HKC within the NGO industry in Shanghai, the transformation of Confucian tradition’s status did not only lie in the cooperation between HKC and local government but was affected by the coexistence of reciprocity and conflicts between the authority and the grass-root.

A portal website, NGOCN, aims at facilitating the development of grassroots social services in Shanghai. It holds off-line salons on a monthly basis for non-governmental and non-commercial organizations to share ideas and experience. In October 2011, it held the 14th salon for 10 NGOs to “sell” their programs to eight judges. The salon was operated as a game. In the first section, each NGO gave a 10-min presentation on one of its program. Judges from social media, corporations, universities, and charity foundation organizations evaluated each program based on their expertise. In the second section, NGOs responded to questions asked by judges and the audience and discussed difficulties and concerns regarding their own development. Finally, the judges voted for three programs that were supposed to have the greatest potential in future development.

Huaxia Kids Community’s presentation was considered by judges as having the clearest vision and mode of operation. However, the parent-child classics reading did
not generate much interest among judges. Most judges were interested in programs that aimed to rely on earning their own money rather than donation. For example, the NGO, World of Art Brut Culture (WABC) tried to provide a stage for special needs people to present their talents in arts and explored how to care for these people through art therapy. They would auction the paintings made by special needs people, and the money would be used for the development of WABC. On the contrary, HKC’s operation was mostly relied on donation and free resources. It focused on building small (10 to 13 families in each class) and reputable parent-children classics reading classes. Under current operation model, HKC was not expected to grow large very quickly.

Huaxia Kids Community formed a unique developing path that was somehow downplayed by the cultural norms of current NGO profession in Shanghai. In NGOCN’s salon, most judges were interested in programs with considerable market potential. Therefore, HKC’s voice was easily silenced by the dominant ideology of maximizing the market, which is “the new master narrative of Western modernity” (Trouillot 2003:49). At the same time, such an ignorance of minority was empowered by the salon’s bureaucratic arrangement. The time-restricted presentation and voting process emphasized fairness and efficiency, and then diversity may be sacrificed by the limitation set by rules.

One of the judges, a manager of Shanghai United Foundation, pointed out that the operation model of HKC’s program will shed light on an alternative developing path for NGOs. After the salon, he told Ms. Luo that the foundation would like to support HKC financially. They agreed that it was not necessary for HKC to grow quickly into a
large organization with programs that have business value. It can stay small and delicate, grow slowly, and focus on enhancing its reputation.

However, it seemed that Ms. Luo might not stick to HKC’s current model of development. In Chapter VI, I will discuss Ms. Luo’s plan of developing profitable tea arts and martial arts programs to support the operation of parent-child classics-reading classes. Will HKC’s promotion of Confucian tradition expand through the manipulation of capital and the invention of cultural goods? This question remains to be answered.

Social Media

Southern Weekend is a weekly publication considered to be Mainland China’s most influential liberal newspaper. It cooperated with Fotile Corporation and started *Green Bamboo Slip National Learning Plan* (FGBS) in 2010. A manager of the Southern Weekend marketing department got to know Ms. Luo through her friend, who was the founder of an institution that promotes national learning and reading classics among white-collar and middle class communities. The manager watched a classics-reading class taught by Ms. Luo and invited her to participate in 2011 FGBS. She also invited her to teach the Analects in the event called “Reading Classics with My Children.” The manager also agreed to mention the name of Huaxia Kids Community in the news report of this event.

The event was held at *Tian Yi Ge* (天一阁), one of the most ancient private libraries in the world, which is located in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province. Volunteer families were recruited by on-line advertisement. Southern Weekly invited another teacher from an authorized classics reading institution, Qinhan Hutong (秦汉胡同), to teach Di Zi Gui.
Finally she invited the founder of an organization that promotes the culture of the Han dynasty, Han Wei Yang (汉未央), to provide Han costumes for teachers and children and to teach the etiquette of the Han dynasty.

In this event, various parties pursued their own interests through the appropriation of traditional Chinese culture. It is easy to identify transformations between economic, social, and symbolic capital through my observation of the following scenes.

Southern Weekend reminded Ms. Luo to pick the Fotile general manager’s four-year-old daughter to answer questions in the Analects class so that photographers can take good photos of the girl. Her image would be published in the news report and Fotile’s manager would be happy to see that. By providing economic capital to hold the event, the general manager of Fotile Corporation had the power to manipulate the agency of other capital carriers. In other words, Fotile Corporation purchased the social capital of Southern Weekend, the symbolic capital of Tian Yi Ge Museum, and the intellectual capital of teachers in HKC, Qinhan Hutong, and Han Wei Yang. The event “Reading Classics with My Children” was produced as a cultural good. The information of this product was transmitted through social media, especially Southern Weekend, and Guoxue (national learning). Traditional Chinese culture is simplified into reading Confucian classics and learning the etiquette of the Han dynasty within the narratives of the news. The “Confucian tradition” displayed in this event has been manufactured through multiple agencies and its authenticity was determined by positions and interests of those agencies.

The planner of this event pieced together Han costume, ancient building, and classics reading together, trying to reproduce the scene of reading classics in Confucian
era. It would easily remind audience the old days even if parents would never have sat by their children in the classroom in ancient times. The historicity of Confucian tradition lied in this symbolic representation that facilitates the transformation of Confucianism.

Reading classics was no longer practiced in private tutorial schools or considered to be an ordinary phenomenon as it had been in Confucian era. In contemporary Chinese society, reading classics has become a novel and rare practice which may bring about unique learning experience that is newsworthy. However, when social media tries to highlight the uniqueness of classics-reading as well as to attribute Confucian characteristics to classics-reading, “symbolic restrictions” are imposed on the New Confucianism (Trouillot 2003:75). Publicizing the event as a recreation of the education of ancient times masks the engagement of modern institutions. It does not only alienate the past from the present, but also restricts the territory between tradition and modernity.
CHAPTER VI

VOLUNTEERS’ PARTICIPATION AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF READING CLASSICS AND TRADITIONAL CHINESE CULTURE

The Parent-Child Classics Reading Class

I attended six classics-reading classes in Wanke social community and one class in Xinfengcheng social community. Children in the Wanke class were mostly younger than 6 years old. The Analects and Di Zi Gui were the main reading materials used in that class site. Children in the Xinfengcheng class were preliminary school students, and most of them came to the class without the company of their parents. Besides the Analects and Di Zi Gui, they also learnt Chang Li Ju Yao (常礼举要),1 an instruction book of daily etiquette and appropriate behavioral manners when interacting with others.

The Wanke class was held every Sunday, from 9:30am to 11:00am. The first 30 minutes would be given to reading the Analects. Then reading Di Zi Gui would be conducted in the next 30 minutes. Ms Luo told me that she had been putting the learning of Di Zi Gui before that of the Analects, but then they found that children’s attentions

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1 The literal translation of the title is Highlights of Regular Etiquette. The book was written by Li Bingnan, a famous Lay Buddhist in Taiwan.
were easily distracted in the second 30 minutes, so they decided to change the order and let children read the Analects at the beginning of the class. This was because the Analects were considered to be harder to read and learn than Di Zi Gui. The latter was written in three-character verses, so the specific reading rhythm could help children to remember and recite. In the last 30 minutes, children would follow the physical and verbal instruction given by a martial arts teacher and learn basic movements of Chinese martial arts. Once a month, the time for martial arts would be used for conducting activities of traditional Chinese culture. Children got the chance to experience Chinese paper cutting, Chinese painting, clay sculpture molding, and the face painting of Chinese opera. Ms Luo thought that children would have fun in those activities and find traditional Chinese culture to be approachable and interesting (Figures 7 and 8).

**FIGURE 7.** Chinese martial arts training at Wanke class site.
FIGURE 8. Huaxia Kids Community provided activities for children to experience Chinese opera.

(I hope that) children feel traditional Chinese culture contains a lot of interesting things. Children feel happy and like (these things). They feel interesting and proud to be a Chinese. I would like to have traditional Chinese culture enter children’s life in an approachable way.
[（我希望）让孩子觉得传统文化中的很多东西很好玩，他觉得开心、喜欢(这些东西)，做中国人有意思、挺自豪的。让传统文化以最亲近的姿态进入孩子生活当中。]—Luo

According to my observation, traditional Chinese cultural activities allowed children to play an active role within their learning experience. Children did not get a chance to engage in a creative process as they mainly followed the teachers’ instructions while reading classics. However, drawing, paper cutting, and sculpture making gave them much more freedom to do it in their own way. They can choose any color or size of their work according to their own preference. Even though Ms. Luo considered reading classics to be the main program she would like to promote in HKC, obedience to
teachers’ instructions has not become a norm in HKC’s classes. There are no strict requirements about behaviors and achievements in the class, and how to attain children’s interest is always put into consideration. The HKC’s class appropriated certain aspects of ancient Sishu education, family education, and extracurricular activities. Therefore, HKC’s program design belonged to an unmarked educational category with variable rules. It did not only have the power to define itself, especially define the Confucian tradition it was promoting, but also left itself space for future change (Trouillot 2003:73).

In the very beginning of each class, the teacher says “class begins,” and then a temporary class president says “stand up.” Students bow to the teacher and say “morning, teacher.” The teacher bows to students and says “good morning students, please sit down.” After that, the teacher will lead students to review what has been learned last time. Sometimes, teachers are busy preparing their courseware (loading PowerPoint files) before class while some families had already arrived. A parent would lead everyone in reading chapters from the Analects that were learned the week before. Then, the teacher would choose two or three chapters and lead students in reading it aloud in various formats. First, the teacher reads one sentence or phrase, and students follow it until they finish a chapter. Second, the teacher read two sentences or phrases and students will follow. They repeat this step several times, and the teacher will ask children to turn to their parents and read to them. Third, all the students read the whole chapter together for three times. Then the teacher may ask boys to read together, girls to read together, left and right groups to take turns to read. They may also play games such as “driving a train” and “wind is blowing.” When playing “driving the train,” the teacher will walk by each student and give him microphone. The first student read the first phrase, and the second
student read the second one . . . it keeps going until they finish the whole chapter. In “wind is blowing,” the teacher invites a kid to stand in front of the class and play the role of Granny Wind, Granny Wind says “wind is blowing,” then the audience say “what do you want to blow,” Granny Wind says “blow all the parents with glasses” or “blow all the girls in red” or “blow all of mothers who wear dresses.” Then people who fit with specific criteria come to the front and read what has been taught together. At the end, the teacher will invite several students to come to the front and recite texts. Sometimes, the teacher will introduce some basic knowledge point, for example, that Confucius is from the State of Lu:

Last time, Teacher Gao pointed out the location of the State of Lu in China’s map. Children will have a perceptual knowledge by learning that. They will know the location of Lu in China nowadays. I think it is beneficial for children. Of course, we need to have more exploration in this part of education. It can be deeply explored.

I will address knowledge points, including characters, phrases, and general knowledge. For example, I will introduce Four Books and Five Classics and the location of the State of Lu. I will not address the part of political philosophy in the Analects as children are not able to understand it. Introducing basic knowledge is to make sure children to have a complete knowledge system. Those knowledge points that children learned from parent-child classics reading class will accumulate to form the basis for their aesthetic ability.

When teaching Di Zi Gui, the teacher will not only focus on reading but spend considerable time explaining texts. This is because the content of Di Zi Gui is close to children’s daily life and much easier to understand. The explanation may be assisted by
playing a cartoon film which tells stories based on Di Zi Gui teaching. After reading and explaining, the teacher will also give the children the chance to demonstrate certain behaviors. For example, while reading Chapter Three, Be Cautious (or Reverent) in My Daily Life (《谨》), the teacher first explained “Open curtains slowly, without noise. Make turns widely, without hitting the corners”
缓揭帘，缓揭帘，勿有声；宽转弯，勿触棱), then she invited one child to demonstrate the right behavior in the classroom.

Ms. Luo told me that she developed the teaching method above based on her experience as a preliminary school teacher. As I have mentioned in Chapter IV, she selectively adopted Wang Caigui’s proposal in terms of how to teach Confucian classics to children. To maintain children’s attention in reading, Ms. Luo introduced various formats of reading suggested by Wang Caigui to HKC’s classes. On the other hand, she integrated new components into classics-reading, such as introducing basic knowledge points of Chinese history and explaining the content of Di Zi Gui through cartoon film and physical demonstration. Although HKC’s class was called as “classics-reading class,” reading was only one of the approaches adopted in teaching and learning practices. The authenticity of “classics-reading” does not only exist as an educational philosophy proposed by Wang Caigui is but also renewed by the constructive power of practitioners. The teachers of classics-reading may develop distinctive teaching methods according to their own and beliefs as well as the environment’s characteristics (classroom facilities, children’s reactions, etc.). The “classics-reading” category keeps reproducing and transforming itself through engaging massive empirical content.
Most HKC teachers had not had any experience of teaching children before they came to HKC. In the beginning, they usually spent most class time explaining texts rather than leading students to read. Gradually, they realized that children may not be able to understand their explanations and were easily distracted when they explain. Ms. Luo suggested them observe her classes and adopt her teaching method. Currently, most HKC teachers have been persuaded to consider reading as the most important part in their own teaching practice.

You will have keen understanding of the book after reading it hundreds of times. It is the same the education in ancient China. Just read it. Children at this age period (under six years old) may not understand your explanation. Just let them have a deep impression of these texts. After they can recite these, they will understand them in daily life gradually.

[书读百遍，其义自见，以前古代的教育也是这样的。就是读，因为孩子在这个阶段(六岁以下)，你跟他解释，他不一定能接受。可能就是这个阶段让他对这些东西印象很深，背会了以后，他自己在生活中就会慢慢理解，慢慢悟到。]—Shirley

When I began to teach, I focused on explaining. You see, we only teach several sentences each time. Children can recite those texts very quickly. Then I thought what I should do for the rest of the class. Ok, I’ll explain those texts. When I explained, I found that the children don’t listen to me. Maybe what I explained is too deep for children to understand. I learned from experience gradually. We would better focus on reading when teaching children who are under elementary school second grade. When teaching children who are above second grade, we can spend half of the time on explanation. This is because they can remember the texts very fast. Sometimes, just after they read it over, they tell the teacher they can recite. We can tell some classic stories that are close to children’s life…I explained every sentence in the beginning, but I found the time was not enough. You need to find the key point and emphasize on explaining one sentence. Then children will have a deep impression of this sentence. They cannot remember anything if you try to explain everything…The second shortcoming of Xinfengcheng class is that we do not have an adequate communication with parents. 50% parents sent children to HKC and just left, or they just play with their cellphone in the classroom. It is difficult to lead new students to read the Analects without parents’ cooperation. Children just keep silent or read in disorder. It is necessary to communicate with parents for five minutes in each class, teach them Confucian texts that we haven’t
explained to the children. It will be useful when parents lead children to read at home.

I explained the texts when I began to teach in HKC, because I didn’t believe children can understand the texts only by reading. But now I believe it, because I saw it from my daughter. Several days ago, it was my birthday. My daughter asked me to make phone call to my mother, her grandma. I asked her why. She said, “After reading Di Zi Gui, I knew parents endured a lot of hardship, and the greatest hardship came from the day mother gave birth to her child. So you need to thank grandma on your birthday. I will send a card to you on my birthday.” Before she read Di Zi Gui, she thought everyone should spoil her on her birthday, now she wants to say thank you to Mom.

Most children in Wanke class are very young. Therefore, we seldom explain texts in class. However, some explanations could be given to children as old as my son (11 years old). He needs to understand the meaning of some texts.

HKC’s teachers kept adjusting their teaching method based on children’s interest, abilities, and needs at different age stages. They have realized that reading would
establish a basis for children in the beginning of classics learning, but for children older than seven years old, their interest may not be maintained only by reading. Therefore, according to Dong, it would be better to select one or two points and illustrate them through examples or stories related to daily life experience. In the volunteer communication meeting, many teachers expressed their own confusions and suggestions on classics-reading class. The focus of their discussion was about how to maintain children’s attentions and interest.

In addition, unlike ancient Sishu, HKC’s class also needed to consider parents’ interest and benefits. Especially in Wanke class, parents consisted of half of the audience. In 2012, HKC opened a class for parents. When children were reading in one classroom, their parents were learning the Analects in another classroom. This format was suggested and conducted by Mr. Hong. He took his 4-year-old daughter to Wanke class and began teaching the Analects to parents in 2012.

Generally, HKC teachers selectively adopted Ms. Luo’s teaching method and developed their own ideas about how to engage children and their parents. The focus of HKC’s classes gradually changed from classics-reading to satisfying students’ needs.

I remember that in one of the classes, a child kept crying and refused to read during the whole class. His father had to take him home, and they never came back to HKC’s classroom. Because all the parents who brought their children to classics-reading class are interested in traditional Chinese culture, as long as children do not refuse or are happy to come, HKC can keep a certain amount of students. Therefore, in practice, the relationship between teacher and student in HKC’s class reverses the power relationship
between student and teacher advocated by Confucianism. They may pay close attention to children’s emotions:

If the child likes reading classics, he will smile while reading. Some children will smile happily when we finished reading, say goodbye to teachers, and play with parents happily. However, some children may cry in the class. They are very young, so we can tell if they like reading according to their facial expressions. If he comes here every time, it means he likes the class. If he does not like it, he will refuse to come and will not show up after one or two times.

[如果这孩子喜欢读经典，他读的时候就会笑啊，有的孩子读完以后就会笑得很开心，然后跟老师说再见，跟爸妈也很开心的玩。但是有的小孩上着上着就哭了嘛，他们也很小，看表情就知道他喜不喜欢。他以后每次都来，说明他喜欢。如果他不喜欢，也会跟家长闹不想去，那种来了一两次就不来的。]
—Shen

As the promotion of traditional Chinese culture was based on the continuous participation of families, HKC kept exploring a better way to reattain current participants and to attract newcomers. They can use Confucian classics as materials for reading, but they cannot fully adhere to a Confucian hierarchy between teacher and students or a rigid way of teaching without considering students’ emotional benefits. Therefore, HKC teachers treated their students as customers and were developing cultural goods – the classics-reading class, martial arts training, and traditional Chinese cultural activities – to satisfy children’s emotional needs and parents’ intellectual needs.

When the focus HKC has been changed into maintain and increase the amount of the participating families, it may result in the change of HKC’s program structure and the manipulation of customers’ needs. By providing new consumption benefits, HKC could expand its market and increase its social influence and symbolic capital.
As a volunteer and a parent, Hong noted that HKC’s promotion of Confucian classics can be more effective if it has senior teachers who are quite familiar with the content of Confucian classics.

Huaxia Kids Community’s teachers’ expertise is not strong. We don’t have senior teachers. Most teachers are amateurs of traditional Chinese culture or advocates of Confucian education, including me. This is a weakness of HKC. [华夏目前的师资还比较薄弱，没有资深的国学教师，大部分还只是国学爱好者或者是国学教育的拥护者。包括我在内也是这个水平。这也是华夏儿童网的短板。]—Hong

According to Wang Caigui’s proposal, anyone who has received education above preliminary school second grade can lead their children reading classics as long as he knows the Chinese phonetic alphabet.

Hong thought Wang’s idea was fine from children’s perspective. However, the main problem faced by HKC was how to attract parents and maintain its customers so that HKC’s model can exist continuously.

It is very important to enhance teachers’ expertise and temperament in terms of Confucian cultural mastery. Most parents have the thought of seeking quick success and instant benefits. Before they find out the progress made by their children, we can only let them see the personality charm of the teacher who has been well educated by classics reading. [提高教师的国学素质与气质非常重要。家长基本都是急功近利的思想，在没有感觉到孩子进步之前，只有用教师的人格魅力让他们觉得读过经的人是什么样的。]—Hong

Hong thought that HKC need to improve its program according to the mainstream ideology that values efficiency and quick success so that Confucian tradition can be promoted more effectively. The adaptation and invention of HKC’s developing model will be marked by the interpenetration of tradition and modernity. The whole structure of HKC may change as its operation will shift from placing children at the
center to considering more about parents needs. This possibility has been seen in Wanke site when an independent class has been opened for parents in 2012. The meaning of Confucian tradition to HKC’s parents and children may change again as the context of promotion has been changed.

Ms. Luo planned to open the third classics-reading class in Daning and to develop activities of tea arts and martial arts into profitable programs taught by experts at the Daning class site.

Because the parent-child classics reading class is free, some families came once or twice and they just left. The expense of our reading materials came from the donations of parents and volunteers. Some parents took those reading materials and never showed up. Ms. Luo got an idea to deal with this situation. We will charge participants of classics reading class 50-100 RMB every semester. We will give them 20% discount when they take martial arts and tea art classes. Parents will be more likely to persevere because they have paid for those classes.

When traditional Chinese culture turned into a source of profit, it took on new meanings for HKC and participating families. For Ms. Luo, it became a means for HKC to achieve a smoother operation and retain customers. For parents who would like to pay, they may not be as free as before when deciding if they should keep attending those classes, because they placed themselves in an exchange of economic capital for symbolic capital, and the learning of traditional culture became consumption and an investment in their children.
Difficulties Met by HKC Volunteers Within Teaching and Managing Practices

The most commonly experienced difficulty is that children cannot concentrate their attentions on reading for a long time. When I attended the Xinfengcheng class, I found that there were 15 children but only three parents. When they learnt Chang Li Ju Yao, two boys began fight with each other while others were reading. It took the teacher a certain period of time to return the class to order. On the other hand, teachers in Wanke class felt it to be less stressful, because most students had their parents alongside them. Parents can help teachers maintain the order in the classroom. Additionally, teachers may feel embarrassed when they brought up a question but received no response. They wanted to have interaction with students but were not experienced enough to make sure the complexity of the question was understandable to the children. Sometimes, teachers prepared incentives in order to enhance children’ enthusiasm to participate, but that can cause new problems. In each martial arts class, the martial arts teacher would bring three lollipops to reward the top three performers. One time, after the teacher handed out the lollipops, a boy started crying very sadly. He yelled, “How come I never get the reward? I tried my best to perform well every time. Why does the teacher always give it to others?” Then other teachers comforted the boy and said, “You know, you performed very well, but we need to encourage those children younger than you.”

Children care about honors. They will cry if they cannot get the lollipop. We thought that contending for a lollipop or other stuff is a childish behavior. The elder children should be courteous to younger children. We thought it this way because “respect the aged and take good care of younger children” is our tradition.

—Gao
Most parents I interviewed agreed that children’s behaviors did not change a lot by reading classics. In HKC’s class, it was easy to see that their actions were mostly directed by their desires and emotions rather than Confucian teaching. When HKC’s teachers and parents disciplined the children’s action, most of them would refer to social norms, such as “elder children should be courteous to younger children,” rather than quoting related instructions in Confucian classics. Therefore, reading classics and promoting traditional Chinese culture may not go hand in hand with internalizing Confucian teaching into behaviors. However, it did not mean that HKC teachers had not tried to use strategies to facilitate this kind of internalization. At the beginning of HKC’s establishment, Ms. Luo made a list of behavior rules based on Di Zi Gui’s instructions and handed copies of the list to parents. Parents would use this list to check if their children’s behaviors meet those standards every week and handed back to HKC every weekend. However, it was so troublesome that none of the parents actually made special efforts to check the list.

As a durable system of generative principles and schemes, habitus constrains how people cognize the world and sets limits for individual innovation (Bourdieu 1977:95). In HKC’s case, the habitus set barriers between thoughts and practices. Although people realized the importance and goodness of learning Confucian classics, the arbitrariness of their habits prevents them from putting Confucian ideas into practice.

The most significant difficulty in managing the program was the shortage of volunteer teachers. No more than 10 volunteers can keep participating HKC’s activities for more than one year. Many volunteers would like to help organize activities, but few of them were willing to be teachers.
Other difficulties are about volunteers. In the beginning, many parents were very warm-hearted. They said that we would like to be volunteers and give lectures. But most of them cannot hold on to the last. We felt disappointed, but we cannot complain. After all, they have enthusiasm. We do not lack helpers. What we really need are teachers.

[其他的困难就是志愿者方面，最早有很多家长很热心，都说我可以来当志愿者上课啊什么的，但是很多都不能坚持。我们会失落，但是也不能抱怨，毕竟人家有热情。帮忙的人不缺，真正缺的是能讲课的。]—Shirley

The leaving of volunteers may due to the fact that their teaching ideas had conflicts with Ms. Luo’s ideas.

Only a few of volunteers can hold on to the last. Some of them found my ideas are different from their own objectives. I invited a teacher from a child-care center. However, he left HKC soon. His way of teaching does not fit for my expectation. For those who would like to insist their own ideas, they are not willing to accept my advice. It’s better for us to be friends only.

[真正坚持下来的很少。有的发现跟他自己预期的目标不一样，我曾经请到过一个做晚托机构的，请他来讲了不久就没讲了。他讲的方法不是适合我。喜欢做大的人是不愿意被人指点的，大家做朋友比较好。]—Luo

One day, Ms. Luo communicated with Shen (Di Zi Gui teacher) and Gao (Analects teacher), two teachers of Wanke class, in terms of teaching ideas during lunch time. She also invited me to stay with them. She suggested Shen to spend more time on reading rather than explaining. Shen felt it may be too superficial if she did not tell children the meaning of the texts. When I interviewed Shen, I found that she was not satisfied with being a Di Zi Gui teacher. I did not see her in the 2012 volunteer communication meeting, and Ms. Luo said she had already left.

When Ms. Luo asked me if I would like to teach, I did want to teach the Analects. The Analects is the essence of our culture. It had been considered as classics since the Spring and Autumn Period by many dynasties. It is a great scholarship. Di Zi Gui does not have such a great cultural value. It just expresses ordinary meanings by three-character verses. It only teaches children behavioral rules. It does not cover great topics of politics, managing state affairs, and cultivating one’s moral character.

[罗老师让我教的时候我是比较想教论语的，论语毕竟是文化的精髓，论语从
After the Spring and Autumn, Warring States periods, many later dynasties regarded it as a classic, and placed it in a prominent position. The rules of behavior in society haven’t been so culturally significant, so they just feel very concise, which actually means expressing a very common idea. It teaches children some behavior rules in society, but not like the Analects, which discuss politics, governance, and self-cultivation.

“Even for teachers who agreed with Ms. Luo’s teaching ideas, their perceptions of learning traditional Chinese culture varied. Their perceptions may direct their teaching practice while their teaching practice may change their original perceptions.”

The education of national learning can replace current Chinese education. The best way to learn Chinese is to understand the meaning of each Chinese character by analyzing the character’s structure. It was practiced in the ancient education system. We can get to know some philology from childhood and learn the truth in life through The Great Learning.

“国学教育可作为语文教育的替代品。最好的学习方法是用字的构造来了解含义。古代的教育系统就是这样教的。从小可以融入文字学的东西。大学就开始教做人的道理。”

Learning traditional Chinese culture is good for children, especially the learning of Di Zi Gui. Although Di Zi Gui cannot replace all the moral education, it guides us to deal with interpersonal relationships. Chinese people have a lot of traditional virtues. However, children in modern societies are mentally fragile. Many parents emphasize material achievements, especially the blundering education of practical skills. Children will be psychologically vulnerable.

“我觉得学习传统文化对儿童很有好处。尤其是弟子规。虽然弟子规不能代替所有的道德教育，但是它指导人与人之间的相处关系。因为中国人有很多传统的美德，但是现在社会孩子心理脆弱。现在很多家长偏重于物质的东西，特别是外面这种浮躁的技能化的教育，我觉得到最后孩子的内心是很脆弱的。”

The main purpose of reading classics or learning traditional culture is to teach children truth in life and make rules for them. We need to set up standards for children. Nothing can be accomplished without norms or standards. I am a teacher in a secondary vocational school. My students have not had a good educational environment before. A person’s standing posture, manner of dealing with people, and speaking manner can reflect what kind of education he accepted. 

“读经或者传统文化主要还是教孩子做人的道理和立规矩，不管怎么样，小时候还是需要一点规矩的，如果没有规矩不能成大器。我现在教的是中职学生，他们以前的读书氛围本来就不是很好，一个人站立的仪态，跟人打交道，说话的语气，很能体现出他以前读书的环境。”
Differentiated perceptions of Confucian tradition showed how HKC volunteers used “classics-reading,” “national learning,” and “traditional Chinese culture” as cultural categories to engage the empirical world and how they attributed new meanings to those categories by referring to their practical experience. Those cultural categories are reproduced and altered by “agents who function as purposive users and semantic resignifiers of historically constructed sign system or discourses (Spiegel 2005:21).”

Due to their differentiated perceptions regarding the value of Confucian classics, HKC teachers may emphasize different parts of Confucian tradition in their educational practice. When they explain Confucian texts by telling stories or addressing general knowledge points, they only present their understandings of Confucian texts partially and selectively. They may get new ideas from their teaching practice and keep revising the content of their class (e.g., Dong suggested spending more time on education when teaching children who were above third grade in preliminary school), or changing the way of operation (e.g., Hong suggested opened an class only for parents). Those changes put the “structure of conjuncture” at risk, because actors and narrators continuously reproduce cultural categories and give them new values out of the pragmatic context (Sahlin 1985:125).

In HKC’s classes, Confucian tradition is a system of meanings that is not merely associated with the past, because it can reproduce itself at present. Through the renewal of the teachers’ perceptions and the revision of their teaching practices, Confucian tradition is going through countless ephemeral states, and the present turns into a historical moment constantly (Appadurai 1996:64).
Although HKC teachers’ perceptions and teaching practices varied, all of them agreed that some chapters of the Analects should not be taught and some sentences in Di Zi Gui should be reinterpreted regarding current social situation.

I hope the contents that are presented by traditional cultural classics are something we can advocate among children. Regarding some out-dated instructions, such as the statement that “if my parents pass away, I will mourn them for three years; I will not decorate my home and I will avoid eating meat and drinking alcohol.” The specific practice can only be introduced as a cultural background, but the implication of respecting parents is good… Because our society and values are developing, some old ideas may only fit for old social environment, but some basic spirits and moral requirements will not change. I always like the five virtues -- benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trustworthiness. If every one can adhere to these virtues, our world will be very harmonious.

In the Tian Yi Ge classics reading event, we taught children the right pose when making a bow with hands folded in front in the salute section. The main purpose is to teach them to be polite. It is not realistic for children to do it in daily life. This instruction is only to communicate a spirit – to respect the elders. I always thought that it is mainly about transmitting spirits. We choose traditional culture as a template for child education, because it has a complete system of ideas in terms of spirit.

In the Analects, the first chapter is about studying, and it is suitable for children to learn. The second part is not very suitable for children as the topic is the practice of government. An empire should learn that. Additionally, the political ideas in Confucian era are not longer applicable now.
Due to teachers’ selective presentation of Confucian texts, Confucian tradition was reproduced, adapted, and reinvented. Most instructions given by Di Zi Gui were taught without modification. Children were expected to obey certain rules of behavior and act according to their roles in different social contexts. While some rules proposed by Di Zi Gui were inapplicable nowadays. When teaching the following sentence “when my parents fall ill, I taste the medicine first (to see if it’s been brewed to the proper degree),” the teacher would never recommend children to taste the medicine first, but they would emphasize the spirit of being good to parents implied by this kind of behavior and suggest children do something else for parents. In addition, teachers did not consider the Analects as completely suitable for children to learn, choosing chapters that were suitable for children based on their own understandings. Confucian tradition was promoted under the modification conducted by HKC. Just as Ms. Luo said, “Confucian tradition has its own vitality, but it grows passively.”

Confucian texts were selectively taught, because some teachings in those classics were far from what is taken for granted in current social context. In other words, the content of Confucian tradition was modified by the “doxa” mentioned by Bourdieu. Doxa are formed when systems of classification are able to naturalize the arbitrariness of social order and turn deep-founded beliefs into self-evident universals (Bourdieu 1977:168). The appropriation and interpretation of Confucian texts allowed Confucian tradition to be fully integrated into socially approved categorization. The meaning system of those texts is limited and reproduced by the doxa. It keeps growing through “functional re-evaluation and resignification on the part of agents” (Spiegel 2005: 21).
Traditional Cultural Activities and My Participation

The reproduction, adaptation, and reinvention process can also be found in the ways in which traditional cultural activities are conducted. Teachers showed pictures to present the art of Chinese paper cutting and ancient clay sculpture. Chinese water ink cartoon films were used to demonstrate traditional Chinese ink painting style. However, HKC did not have experts to demonstrate certain skills, and the materials children used were only water color markers, colored paper, and playdough. Therefore, those activities looked like ordinary craft and painting classes and were not closely related to traditional Chinese culture as it was claimed (Figures 9 and 10).

FIGURE 9. Huaxia Kids Community’s traditional cultural activity about clay sculpture.
As a photographer for HKC, my presentation became a source for constructing traditional cultural activities. When I wrote newsletters and posted pictures of cultural activities on HKC’s website, I needed to present the harmonious order and perfect achievements of each class. It may mislead readers of these newsletters as I hide the imperfect part of HKC’s classes. I thought it was not appropriate to post pictures of a crying child or a terrible drawing even if they were part of the reality. If I did that, my contribution to HKC would have been devalued by Ms. Luo, and it may have prevented me from getting more help from her. Therefore, I had to act like an advertiser rather than a fieldworker at certain moments so that I could attain the trust of my informants (Figures 11 and 12).
FIGURE 11. A picture of bad drawing that I did not post on Huaxia Kids Community’s website.

FIGURE 12. A picture of good drawing that I posted on Huaxia Kids Community’s website.
CHAPTER VII

PARENTS’ INVOLVEMENT AND THEIR
UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD
EDUCATION

Parents’ Struggle Within the Current Situation
of Child Education in China

To understand the role of classics-reading within child education, it is necessary to look into the mainstream school system. After exploring parents’ attitudes towards the mainstream school education and reading Confucian classics, we may find out why the educational aspect of Confucian tradition is accepted by some parents while rejected by others.

All of the parents I interviewed thought that the mainstream school education in Mainland China was problematic. The problems they mentioned covered various aspects, such as textbook content, homework assignments, over-emphasis on examination techniques, and the contradictory requirements within educational institutions. Their complaints came from the contradiction between ideal and reality. On the one hand, their ideal child education was hardly being realized under current social conditions; on the other hand, these same social conditions constrained their ideas and practices of child education.

I think an ideal educational model can foster children to “set the will on the path of duty, let every attainment in what is good be firmly grasped, accord with perfect
virtue, and find relaxation and enjoyment in arts.”¹ Before 13 years old, children should read Chinese classics of Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist schools and English classics. In short, let them read thousands of books…From 13 to 18 years old, let them focus on finding relaxation and enjoyment in arts. The six arts include rites, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics. Rites include philosophical, political, educational, and social knowledge. Music implies dancing, movie, music, and fine arts. Archery includes modern sports. Charioteering includes driving cars and other transports. Calligraphy can be extended to literature and history. Math indicates all the natural sciences. … If my family members did not prevent me from educating my daughter in my own way, I should have cooperated with other wise parents and given our children Sishu education…I am frustrated because my wife and I cannot reach an agreement. I don’t think it is necessary to get a college degree, but my wife thinks it is unbelievable to live without a college degree.

I read a book called ‘Totto-chan, the Little Girl at the Window.’ The book talked about a private school established in Japan before World War II. The school gave admission to children who were kicked out of public schools. There were only fifty or sixty students. Everyone could choose subjects according to their own interest. The school did not require students to learn a subject at a certain time. Teachers would let children choose their favorite subject to be a principal axis, then students interest can radiate to other subjects. For example, if you like to do experiments, you may like to research how to do an experiment by reading books, and then you need to learn the words used to write these books. Children’s interest can be broadly developed. This will be an ideal educational model. Now, Chinese people began to try similar model. A kindergarten in Shanghai operates like this. However, there is a problem that you need to pass the college entrance exam. Students that receive this kind of education cannot pass the entrance exam. [我认为理想的教育模式就是培养孩子“志于道，据于德，依于仁，游于艺”。让孩子们在13岁之前，通读儒、释、道、英文的经典……简而言之，读万卷书。13岁至18岁，则游于艺，所谓六艺也：礼、乐、射、御、书、数。礼，包括哲学、政治、教育、社会等所有文化。乐，包括舞蹈、影剧、音乐、美术等。射，等于现代的体育等。御，驾车等各种交通工具。书，文学及历史。数，科学……如果没有家人的阻力，应该会选择和其他有智慧的家长一起，对孩子进行私塾教育……无奈的原因是和爱人的意见不统一，我并不认为文凭是必须的，爱人认为没有文凭是不可思议的。]—Hong

¹ From The Analects, Book VII: Shu R, Chapter 6. 出自《论语》，述而第七，第六章
Both Hong and Lin mentioned the social pressure they faced when they looked for possibilities to put their ideal into practice. Hong’s pressure was from his family members, and Lin’s concern was about passing the college entrance exam. Their struggles originate from the fact that to get a college degree has become a dominant social belief in contemporary Chinese society. Although most parents knew that the examination-oriented education will do little good to their children, they still choose to send their children to the mainstream school system as it is the least risky path for their children to get a college degree. Their cognitions and actions regarding child education have been restricted by the *habitus* that “getting a college degree” becomes an inevitable prerequisite to “getting a good job” and “having a bright future,” and all the educational options may be unconsciously evaluated by people according to this standard.

No matter what kind of education she receives, the goal is to make sure that she can be admitted to a college and receives higher education, or she will be an illiterate person without social recognition. It is necessary to get into a college. In current society, if you have not received higher education, it will be difficult for you to get a job. [无论现在接受什么教育，还是要保证她能升学受高等教育，不然不就成了一个不被承认的文盲吗，读大学是必须的。这个社会如果没有受过高等教育，就业和求职都成问题。]—*Lucy*

My child will get involved in the mainstream examination-oriented education system. I feel helpless. We just get involved gradually… I am not a victim of examination-oriented education, but I can feel more deeply about how this kind of education does harm to our children. The most terrible thing is that most parents think it is ok to torture the child as long as the child can get a college degree and a good job in the future, since other children are also under the torture. [我的孩子还有两年就要进入主流的应试教育，自己也觉得很无奈，慢慢就被]
卷入了。我自己谈不上是应试教育的受害者，但是越来越感到应试教育对现在儿童的摧残。最可怕的是绝大多数家长认为，为了一纸文凭，一个好工作，摧残就摧残了吧，只要别人也一样受摧残就好。]—Hong

Most parents I interviewed believe that getting a college degree is a must for their children and receiving education from the mainstream school system is the only way for their children to get a college degree. This belief works as a “doxa” within the field of education. It regulates people’s practices and turns sending children to the mainstream schools into an arbitrary choice. It keeps affirming the dominant position of the mainstream school system through people’s dispositions and attributing subordinate status to other forms of education, such as extracurricular “cram” classes and afterschool clubs.

Some parents I interviewed are afraid that their children will be disadvantaged in when competing with others. Just like most parents in Shanghai, they send children to extracurricular “cram” classes to make sure that their children would not be left behind on certain school subjects. They also send their children to afterschool clubs or to learn skills, such as musical instruments, English speaking and reading, painting and ballet dancing after the children turn four years old. Sending children to afterschool classes and clubs has become a social norm that parents will feel pressures if they do not fulfill. “If other children have a variety of skills but my child has no specialties, I am afraid my child may fail in future competition” One parent said. According to the mark adding policy of college entrance exam, students who have specialties will earn extra marks to their exam scores.

My daughter (4 years old) attended many interest classes, including English, math, piano, film and television performance, and swimming. They are all from my wife’s decision. I opposed all of them except for swimming.
In the beginning, all my family members opposed my idea of educating my
daughter with classics reading. They thought this kind of education was not
compatible with the mainstream education system and reading classics would be a
waste of time. Rather than wasting time, why not spend time learning an English
word, playing piano, painting…and they are afraid my daughter will become
unrealistic under this kind of education.

It is interesting that one of my interviewees described the social norm of
sending children to afterschool classes as “a traditional pattern of child education
conducted by modern families.” In the context of her discourse, “traditional” is used to
describe some widely accepted practice, which is directed by a dominant ideology in the
field of education. At the same time, reading Confucian classics was turned into a new
and revolutionary educational practice. It went beyond social norms which emphasize
examinations, scores, college degrees, and practical skills. Confucian tradition is
transformed when it is revived in the form of an educative project. It is no longer trapped
in a stereotype of old-fashioned way of living, because “traditional” and “novel” became
two sides of the same coin. To express which side of the coin depends on how it is
situated in certain social contexts.

Although parents admitted the necessity of receiving education from
mainstream school system, they did not turn a blind eye towards problems within the
system. Those problems inspired parents to seek alternative education and provided
social space for classics-reading classes and modern Sishu to emerge and develop.
Some parents complained that math textbooks used in preliminary schools are too difficult, because they were not designed to meet children’s comprehension. They thought that schools were pushing children to understand something difficult with the supposition that all the children were geniuses.

Preliminary schools always claim that they are reducing students’ burden. However, the content of learning becomes more difficult. They just want students to achieve excellent results as soon as possible and push students to be outstanding. This is wrong. It is wrong for the school to set its goal as fostering outstanding and superior students. You can be good at several aspects and know something that others don’t know. However, you cannot be all-round skillful.[小学总是要求减负，结果是越来越难，都是想早点出成绩，要与众不同，这是不对的。如果你是要把与众不同或者超人一等作为目标，那是错误的。你可以有一两手绝招，有点别人不会的，你不可能是全能的。]—Jin

Some parents were disgusted by the over-emphasis of examination techniques. They believed that it was only useful in a short term and children’s potentialities were sacrificed for the vicious competition between teachers.

Even if you are admitted to Tsinghua University or Peking University, it only means that you are excellent in terms of being an examination machine. The difference between key middle schools and general middle schools is that whose students are more skilled at examination and who can get higher scores in exams. I don’t want my daughter to waste her life on practicing examination techniques. It is meaningless.

[你考取了清华北大，也证明的仅仅是你作为一个考试机器特别出色，重点中学和非重点中学区别就在于谁更会考试、谁考得分高。我不忍心让我女儿这样，浪费生命没意思。]—Xie

Ms. Luo told me that students in her class did not perform as well as before in this Chinese exam. This is because essay writing was added to this exam, and students in Ms. Luo’s class did not get good score in this part. Parents of students in other classes told me that teachers of other classes asked students to recite six sample essays and use them in the exam. As a parent, I do not agree with using this technique. As a parent, I think it will obliterate the distinctive ideas of each child. [我听罗老师说，他们班级这次语文考试不如以前好，原来他们班都是挺好的，这次涉及到作文，就不如其他班好。我听其他班的家长说，其他班老师让孩子背6篇作文。背作文这件事情作为家长我很不赞成。作为一个老师，我觉得这是抹杀了孩子的个性，他的思维发展就被扼杀了。]—Dong
Unreasonable homework assignments were another concern. Preliminary school students were ironically called the most hard-working social groups in China by social media, because young children often stay up late at night in order to finish their homework. Parents thought some of the homework was time-wasting and meaningless. They argued with teachers but the situation did not change much.

The daughter of my husband’s classmate cannot finish her homework until 11:00 at night. I know Ms. Luo’s son starts learning English now in the first grade, and he needs to do a lot of copy tasks. He cannot finish his homework until 9 o’clock. They stay up late, and it will result in poor physical condition and immunity. [我老公同学的女儿，天天晚上作业做到11：00，英语我知道罗老师的儿子现在1年级就要抄写了，天天作业做到9点。这也会导致现在孩子体质很差、抵抗力很差。]—Dong

They have a lot of copy tasks in Chinese homework. Once, I asked the teacher, “I just forgot to sign the homework this time, why do you ask my daughter to redo the homework?” The teacher said, “This is not the first time.” Actually, that was the first time I forgot to sign the homework. The teacher knew nothing about it. The teacher thought it was my daughter’s mistake, and she let my daughter copy her homework five to ten times. The teacher just wanted to punish you but not let you understand the learning content.

Some parents pointed out that those problems discussed were structurally embedded in the inappropriate organization of China’s system of education and the standards applied in the evaluation of schools and teachers. Therefore, parents’ complaints towards teachers would not make any change to the system, because teachers were as vulnerable as parents and dominated by the bureaucratic power in the field of education.

The commission of education requires that public schools should not leave homework to Grade 1 and Grade 2 students. Students are relaxed most of the time.
However, when exams are coming, teachers ask students to do a lot of pre-examination papers every day, and students are very stressed. It would be better if they did homework regularly. The commission of education made a medium to long-term educational plan in order to cultivate talented students. However, it still evaluates schools and teachers by examination scores and rates of admission to key middle schools.

教育局规定低年级不许留家庭作业的，回家是很轻松。但是到了要考试的时候，老师要成绩的，就像这种A3纸这个大的卷子，一天发很多张，你说不是做死人吗，还不如平时做一做。现在教育局规定上海的中长期教育计划是要培养人才的，但是实际上对学校和老师的考评还是以分数和升学率为准。]—林

It is more and more difficult to be a good teacher. I did not have so many stresses when I began to work as a middle school teacher. Now, there were many standards to evaluate schools and presidents, such as qualifying rates and admission rates. Evaluating the president means evaluating teachers. The problem of China’s education system is that the examination commission and the education commission are operated by different groups. They should merge into one group so that they can understand the system as a whole.

[现在老师越来越难做。我刚开始工作的时候压力没有这么大，现在我们指标很多的，合格率、升学率，局里面对学校的考核啊，对校长的考核其实就是考核我们老师。所以说中国的教育制度存在的问题是考试院和教委是两家人，两套班子。其实应该合并，要对系统有整体的了解。]

When parents realized the sufferings their children need to deal with when getting involved in the examination-oriented education system, the doxa of “getting a degree” came under question, especially in the circumstance that the number of unemployed college graduates keeps increasing every year. Considering the unbalanced cost and benefit brought by the mainstream school system, parents began to seek for other educational options. On the other hand, those who tried to enhance their positions in the field of education invented modern Sishu education, equipped it with the symbolic capital of Confucianism, and turned it into a plausible educational option for parents.

The educational philosophy of classics-reading was perceived as both contradictory and complementary to the schemes of the mainstream school education.
Classics-reading emphasizes training in manners, aesthetic appreciation, and moral education, which are downplayed by the examination-oriented mainstream school system. On the other hand, reading-classics can facilitate children’s learning at school by enhancing their memory capacity and literacy.

I started teaching my daughter the Analects when she was in the top class of a kindergarten. At that time, I thought that all of us can speak vernacular Chinese, so there was no need to teach her mandarin specifically. The ancient Chinese prose is very beautiful but most people in modern times would not like to learn it. I feel we are wasting resources...I should let my child learn this traditional culture. The main purpose is to let my daughter feel the beauty of traditional culture and to develop her reading and linguistic competence. The school cares about exam scores, but the school seldom teaches students the standard for being a human and how to distinguish right and wrong.

Now I feel Di Zi Gui can help children and adults for proper behaviors. We lacked this kind of cultural etiquette education when we were young. When I think back over my life, I think we do need to learn this.

I think reading classics helps to foster a kind of language sense, which will help her develop her writing ability in the future. When I was a child, I liked the rhythm of ancient classics. Now I think ancient texts are very concise. I taught my daughter reading Three Character Primer and One Hundred Family Surnames. I hope she knows something other children do not know... I want her to be good at Chinese especially, because Chinese sets the basis of other subjects.

Although parents taught their children Confucian classics for different reasons, most of them thought it was only a complement to the education provided by
mainstream schools. Considering the current social environment, they do not think Confucian learning would become a mainstream education in the future.

I don’t think reading classics should become a mainstream education. It can only be used as a means for self-cultivation. It does not correspond to the current social situation. The classics are old ideas after all. We spent decades criticizing them. They have not been handed down in a consistent way. There is a gap. Regarding the mainstream ideology of current society, our state system and trends of thinking have become more westernized. If you make a bow with hands folded in front when meeting others, people will think you are ridiculous.

One of the difficulties in promoting classics reading was that most parents thought that reading classics could not teach their children any practical skills. Some parents sent children to HKC but they gave up soon because they did not want to gamble the time for an unpredictable outcome.

Many people did not carry on, because they want to see demonstrable effects in a short time period. Modern people are anxious to achieve quick success and get instant benefits. However, we may not see the positive effect of classics reading until 10 or 20 years later.

For three years, I have recommended the educational model of children reading classics to other parents more than 20 times. I gave them ‘the handbook of classics-reading education,’ but there were almost no parents agree with this idea. The power of the system is too strong.

Although parents accept Confucian classics-reading as a plausible education, its promotion is still restricted by social conditions. This is because people’s actions are directed by the habitus, where people’s dispositions in the field of education are...
combined with the dispositions they developed in other fields. In other words, people may not only evaluate classics-reading from the dimension of educational philosophy, they would also consider its effectiveness, efficiency and compatibility with current social conditions.

However, individual agents can generate strategic practices in response to the demands placed on them by different social contexts (Bourdieu 1977:95). Although there were many difficulties and restrictions, several parents made great efforts to make classics reading the main educational method for their children. These advocates managed to overcome difficulties and even changed the others’ attitudes toward the Confucian tradition. They reflected on the meaning of Confucian education to their children, families, and themselves and kept seeking for a better way to conduct classics reading at home or in HKC.

Learning Classics at Home or in HKC: Classics Reading is Not Only About Reading

Among all of my interviewees, three parents believed that getting a college degree was not necessary, and they did not want to send their children to the mainstream schools.

Hong’s daughter is 4 years old. He got to know Wang Caigui’s educational theory long time ago and tried to put it into practice after his daughter was born. In the beginning, his idea was strongly opposed by other family members. However, their attitudes have been gradually changed by his persistence.

I have played classics reading recordings to my child since she was one year old. In the beginning, all of my family members opposed this practice. I have kept doing it
for four years, and at least there is no opposition now. The records I played include Di Zi Gui, the Book of Changes, the Analects, the Classic of Poetry, and Oxford’s Streamline English. My idea is very simple. That is forcing my daughter forming a habit of learning when she has not been able to resist. I do not let her watch TV, and all the family members do not watch TV in front of her.

Mr. Xie and Mrs. Cao’s daughter is five years old. Xie is a business man and a part-time English teacher. Cao studied Chinese medicine, but she became an accountant with the certificate from Association of Charted Certified Accountants. Both of them had got to know Wang Caigui’s ideas three years before they gave birth to their daughter. Xie strongly insisted on educating their daughter according to Wang’s methods, and Cao agreed to quit her job and focus on her education. With Xie’s recommendation, Cao brought her daughter to Meng Mu Tang (孟母堂) when the girl was three years old.

Meng Mu Tang is a full-time modern Sishu and operates like a boarding school with forty to fifty students. The founder and teachers of Meng Mu Tang were the first group of people who followed Wang Caigui’s instruction and promoted classics reading in Mainland China. After studying for one month in Meng Mu Tang, Cao got familiar with the teaching method and she decided to teach her daughter at home. Reading materials were Chinese and English classics edited by Wang Caigui.

In the very beginning, I held her in my arms and we listened to the recordings of those classics. I pointed specific words at the book according to the playing of the record. She listened to the record, imitated the sound, and at the same time followed sentences pointed by my finger. Later, she could point at words and read by herself. We read each book 100 times. Then she could recite it as she had become quite familiar with it. We have finished the Four Books and will begin to read the Book.
of Changes (I-Ching) in October. After we finish Shakespeare’s sonnets, we plan
to read the Bible. I hope she can finish the sonnets and the Bible before she gets six
years old.

[最早的时候，我抱着她一起听，我指着书，磁带放到哪里我就指到哪里，她
就这样跟着我看，到后来她就会自己指着读。每本书我们都会读100遍。读着
读着就会背了……四书都读掉了，10月份开始读易经……十四行诗读完就准
备给她读圣经，也是教材里面的。希望她在6岁之前把十四行诗和圣经读掉]
—Cao

Xie had recommended Wang Caigui’s book to his friends before he had a
child, but no one gave him positive feedback. After his daughter made great progress in
both Chinese and English learning, his friends began to think differently about Xie’s
suggestion. They invited Xie to be their children’s English tutor, because they thought his
teaching method on English classics-reading was effective. However, they still thought
learning English was much more useful than reading Chinese classics.

I recommended Wang Caigui’s book to my friends and told them it is good for their
children. They didn’t think my words were justified, because I did not have children
at that time. There are two barriers for them to accept my ideas. First, they don’t
know much about national learning; second, they know nothing about the memory
capacity of children. If they do not try to put it into practice, they will never
understand its goodness. They can only understand the benefits after doing it. Then,
when they see the effects on my daughter they change their attitude. Although they
accept the teaching method, they only pay close attention to English rather than
Chinese. They think their children can save face, find a good job, and go abroad if
their English is good.

Hong and Xie’s experience in changing others’ attitudes towards classics-
reading reflects that the social condition can be changed by the individual agency of both
actors and observers. Hong and Xie’s narratives and practices provided a base for the
change of their family and friends’ perceptions of classics-reading. The reflexivity of
habitus emerged when observers’ changing attitudes were reflected through their practices: Hong’s family members no longer oppose Hong teaching his daughter classics, and Xie’s friends were willing to apply Xie’s teaching method into their children’s English classics learning. At the same time, the constructive power of individual agency is mediated by the social condition. In other words, people’s dispositions were influenced by the preexisting social context. For example, Xie’s friends only valued English classics-reading while their attitudes towards Chinese classics-reading remained unchanged.

The agency of actors is also reflected in the situation when they strategically cope with the resistance from their children by changing reading-classics from a private practice into a social activity. It is not always easy to get children to listen to your instruction, sit down, and read. When parents found that it was hard to teach children only by themselves, they took children to attend various classics reading activities so that they would be more engaged with peer groups. Especially for Hong, he found that it was difficult to make his daughter concentrate on reading at home. He realized that his daughter might not respect him as a teacher because of his role as a father. It would be better to send his daughter to HKC, letting her taught by a “real” teacher and study with other children.

My daughter is irritable and impatient, she always like to move her feet and hands except for when she is drawing something. In the beginning, I just told her to read classics. She resisted vigorously. The results were not good. Then I tried another way. When she was playing or drawing, I read one sentence and asked her to follow me. In that relaxing atmosphere, the results were good. HKC’s model is what I expect. My child needs classmates and models.
我就在她玩或者画画的时候，我读一句，她跟着读一句，结果这样放松的状态下，效果反而不错。华夏儿童网的模式是我所梦寐以求的，孩子需要一起学习的榜样。]——Hong

I send my child to HKC because I want her to attend some activities and communicate with other kids. She needs an atmosphere of studying with classmates, and Ms. Luo can provide this atmosphere. This spring, I took her to Beijing to attend a Spring Camp called The Analects One Hundred. Most participants are college students. There were only three children including her. Wang Zi is six years old, Jin Jin is four years old.

送去华夏是因为想让她参加一些活动，跟小朋友多一点交流。她需要同学的气氛，罗老师那边正好可以提供这种同学的气氛。我们今年春天的时候去北京参加了论语一百的春令营，主要是大学生，小朋友也有，算她有三个。王梓5岁，津津6岁，还有她4岁。——Cao

The Meaning of Reading Classics to Children, Parents, and Families

Reading classics meant different things to different families. Some parents found that their life attitudes and family relations were changed by reading classics with children. Others observed how their children developed learning abilities in literacy and memory. During this process, Confucian tradition gains its agency and transforms itself by updating its system of meanings. Parents’ attitudes toward Confucian tradition keep changing with their accumulative practices of child education. At the same time, children also understand Confucian teaching in their own way and reflect on it in their daily life. They communicate with parents about their perception and that gives parents new understandings of classics reading. Then, the new understandings bring about the reproduction or change in their child-rearing practices and the way in which they integrate Confucian tradition in their life.

For Dong, learning Di Zi Gui not only changed her daughter’s temper but also helped her to adjust her attitudes and behaviors when interacting with others.
My daughter became more kind than before. Previously, she cared about her belongings very much. When other kids want to borrow something from her, she would lend it but would become very nervous. She kept telling other kids not to ruin her stuff. Now, she is always at ease, she will just lend something without saying anything. If others do not return it, she will remind them once. Then if others still do not return it, she will just forget about it.

I also learned a lot by reading Di Zi Gui. After I learned it, my attitude towards my husband and daughter changed. Previously, I was always ordering my daughter to do something. I dealt with my husband in the same way. I always felt he should do this rather than that. Now I have changed. As a wife and a mother, I need to think more about what I can do for my husband and daughter rather than what they should do for me. I should have been happy rather than querulous when I do something for them. Before that, I was querulous and impatient. Although my temper has not been changed completely, I will not force my husband to accept my ideas when we do not agree with each other. I’ll just tell him my idea. My colleagues also thought my temper had changed. I thought I was very aggressive before, and now my speaking speed becomes slower. Previously, I spoke like a machine gun.

Cao experienced pressures and struggles after she quit her job. As time went by, she thought it was difficult for her to keep placing her daughter at the center while she sacrificed her own needs. However, she changed her way of thinking and found a new meaning of classics-reading for herself. Reading classics was not only a method to educate her daughter, but it was also a source of wisdom that would help Cao develop her view of life.
I have difficulty on my own side. People around me may wonder if I was wasting my time. I had been an excellent professional. I could have done my own things and had my own career. Now I spend all day at home reading classics with my daughter. The positive effect of this practice cannot be justified in a short term, so I always wonder if I am wasting time. This was my difficulty for a certain period of time. I can feel the pressure from the social environment. Sometimes, I must adjust my way of thinking. It is not enough to just say to myself that “this is very meaningful.” It is always difficult to persist. You must enjoy the process and find out what you can get from this practice, and then you are able to persist. The biggest difficulty for me was the flowing of time year after year. I always thought about how to arrange my time. I cannot always sacrifice myself for her. I must find a win-win option, and then I can stay with her without anxiety. I had not read those books. After reading them more than 100 times, my wisdom has developed, and I was able to figure out confusions and frustrations. In the very beginning, I could not accept the idea that we do not send my daughter to kindergarten when she becomes three years old. Now I plan to teach her at home until she is six years old. My husband suggests that I stay with her until she turns 13 years old. I think it is not possible. I can only deal with six years. When she gets to be six years old, I want to send her to a Sishu. Now we are searching for a proper institution.

I do not want to exaggerate the power of Confucian classics, because it is not the only factor which contributes to the change of people’s attitudes or behaviors. Confucian teachings will only be a set of ideas that will not make any difference to people’s life if we do not place it within the habitus developed by the interaction between individual agency and social conditions. The interaction keeps restructuring the structure
of categories, and Confucian tradition reproduces its meaning system as its relation with other categories are under the continuous internal and external construction of people’s dispositions.

The parents I interviewed showed some examples to illustrate how their children apply Confucian teaching in their daily conversations. The appropriation of certain sentences and the flexible interpretation of the classics content resulted in changes of the connotations of Confucian texts. The meaning of certain sentences keeps varying by children’s understanding, parents’ understanding, and the communication between children and parents in different contexts.

I asked her to not spend too much time on unimportant things and not be too serious. In the morning, she was almost late for school. She stood there and held the door open for other people who were going out of our residential building. She would not leave until others all passed through. I said to her, “You should hurry, or we will be late for school.” She used sentences in Di Zi Gui to argue against me. “Don’t hurry when doing things, or there will be many mistakes.” Then I did not know how to respond.

[女儿犯一些小错，我会用论语或者弟子规里的东西跟她讲道理，她会用另外的句子反驳我。比如，一些小的事情我就让她快一点，不要太较真。早上上学来不及了，她还帮人家拉这门，等人家走完了，才出居民楼，我让她快点，要来不及了。她说 “事勿忙，忙多错”。我就没话说了。]—Lucy

It happened after my daughter learnt Di Zi Gui for half of a semester. One day, we needed to bring my daughter to a wedding party in the evening. On the morning of that day, I attended a funeral, and then I was busy working all day. I got home after work and had not time to dress up myself before going to the wedding. I just brought a set of ordinary clothes. When I got there, I found out that it was a five-star hotel. I said to my daughter, “Our dress is not very appropriate for today’s environment.” My daughter said “In clothes value cleanliness, not fanciness. Since our clothes are tidy and clean, the aunt will not blame us.” I felt surprised when she tried to persuade me, because I had never explained or emphasized that sentence in Di Zi Gui. It seemed that she figure it out as she read it repeatedly. Then I told her that the sentence was followed by another sentence “first follow one’s station in life, second suit the family’s financial situation.” Therefore, our dress is a little bit incompatible with our station today.

[学了半学期弟子规以后，有一次我们晚上要去喝喜酒，上午我参加了一个葬
We can see that children may simply quote a sentence without considering the context in which it will guide their behavior. Due to their lack of experience in social interaction, they may just follow the instruction in Di Zi Gui in whatever situation or even use their appropriation to argue against their parents. They form a specific understanding of Confucian texts by themselves. On the other hand, the flexibility and ambiguity of Confucian texts allow parents to vary their interpretation according to different social situations. “Every act of symbolic attribution puts the symbol at risk, makes it possible that the meanings of the symbols will be inflected or transformed by the uncertain consequences of practice” (Spiegel 2005:21).

The symbolic risk may be weakened when individuals give up using the power of their discourse. Some parents chose not to explain the meaning of Confucian texts to children as they believed that there was no “right” explanation. Additionally, they thought that children may develop their own understanding when they encounter different situations.

You may say children do not understand those texts. What is the fact? You are not sure if they understand. How can we define “understand?” Nan Huai-chin (Master of traditional Chinese culture) understands it from his point of view while I have my own point of view. My understanding of the Analects may be totally different from his understanding. Children may absorb the knowledge by the six sense. This is also a kind of understanding. It is hard to tell.
叫做不理解, 南怀瑾 (国学大师) 有他的角度来理解, 我有我的角度来理解, 我理解的论语有可能和他理解的完全不一样, 小孩可能靠第六感一点点吸收,也是一种理解、酝酿和消化, 这都很难说。] —Xie

My daughter will ask me “what does this mean?” I told her she would know when she grew up. This is because there is no way to explain the meaning. What is more, my explanation may not be right. My explanation may set barriers for her to understand the texts.

[她会问这是什么意思,我说等你长大了就知道。因为没办法解释。再说我的解释不一定是正确的,反而可能会给她造成障碍。] —Cao

Reflecting on their child rearing and classics learning experiences, parents found out that the main function of Di Zi Gui may not be educating children. Parents formed new beliefs about how to integrate certain classics in their lives. Xie believed that Di Zi Gui should be read by parents rather than children, or children would use the instruction to argue against or even criticize their parents. His idea was demonstrated in Lucy and Dong’s experience when their children appropriate sentences from the Di Zi Gui. Therefore, the symbolic risk of Di Zi Gui texts produces new values of Di Zi Gui out of the pragmatic context and generates new dispositions.

Actually, Di Zi Gui is for parents to read and understand. Parents put its instructions into practices and children will imitate parents’ behavior. It is not necessary for children to read Di Zi Gui repeatedly, no matter considering its value as a classic or the effect of reading. If you force children to act according to rules proposed by Di Zi Gui, children may refuse to obey those rules. They may also criticize parents’ behavior by referring to those rules. Then the original purpose, filial piety, has been contradicted.

[弟子规其实是给父母理解的，父母学好以后做给孩子看的模仿的。弟子规是不值得反复诵读的，无论是经典范畴还是效果来看。弟子规的规范硬要孩子学，孩子可能有逆反心理，孩子就算学会了，会反过来指责父母，有时候反而会破坏了弟子规本来的目的：孝顺。] —Xie

Some parents found psychological value in the classics. The perceived linkage between modern psychology and Confucian teaching means that Confucian tradition was no longer trapped in an stereotype of “an ancient Chinese teaching.” As a system of
meanings, Confucian tradition is constructed by people’s durable habitus that can integrate various dispositions based on individual experience in different fields.

The Analects incorporate ideas of modern psychology. Confucius’ thoughts contain philosophical and psychological thinking. For example, we need to exchange roles and consider things by putting yourself in other people’s shoes. I have read some reports, proposing the psychological implication of the Analects. I absolutely admit it. Recently, I read some books on psychology and find correspondence in the Analects and Di Zi Gui. It is quite right.

— Dong
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The revival of Confucian tradition in contemporary Chinese society is far more complex than a simple return to the ancients. Regarding the promotion of modern Sishu education, the process engages interactions between past and present, Confucian classics and Western modernity, family education and educational institutions.

Confucian tradition gains its agency through the reproduction and transformation of two schemes of meaning. The macro scheme of meaning is formed within the habitus where individual’s practices are restricted by the system while at the same time reproduce social conditions. The macro meaning of Confucian tradition to individuals is embodied in the promotion of classics-reading, although this may change through time as their perception and practice in the filed of education are influenced by their experience in other fields of modern life. For HKC’s organizers and volunteers, classics-reading is transformed from an educational philosophy to a teaching method to retain children’s interest, to satisfy parents’ needs for cultural consumption, and to maintain and develop the market. For HKC’s parents, classics-reading not only allows their children to receive behavioral, aesthetic and literacy training, but also becomes an intellectual resource to improve self-education and interpersonal relations.

The change of macro meaning occurs through three mechanisms. First, individuals meet restrictions and barriers when they try to change current situation. Ms.
Luo’s promotion of classics reading is terminated in the mainstream school system when its symbolic representation is marked by religion. The failure of HKC’s cooperation with the IBM volunteer committee resulted from the incompatibility between classics-reading and the efficiency-oriented business world.

Second, individuals can generate strategic actions to transcend the limits set by social norms. Confucian tradition becomes a symbolic capital for HKC to make exchange with social communities, local governments, corporations, and social media. The economic and social capital gained through the exchange allows HKC to attract families from the middle and upper classes. Thus HKC’s symbolic capital accumulates with its increasing prestige. The connection and disconnection between traditional Chinese culture and contemporary social institutions keeps renewing the macro meaning of Confucian tradition to social institutions.

Third, individual agency is mediated by the social conditions and the power relations embedded in the exchange of capital. The promotion of Confucian tradition would concern the government’s control on grassroots organizations. The operational model of HKC is changing from replying on voluntary donations to developing profitable programs. Since HKC tends to gain an advantaged position in the profession of non-governmental organization in Shanghai, it needs to act according to the cultural norm of current NGO profession and attain self-sufficiency.

The micro scheme of meaning is reproduced by people’s representation, understanding and narratives of the content of Confucian classics and traditional Chinese culture. How classics are interpreted may vary by the narrator’s position and the social context where Confucian teachings are applied. People use “classics-reading,” “national
learning” and “traditional Chinese culture” as cultural categories to engage the empirical world. Tradition turns into multivalent cultural signifier when people attribute new meanings to those categories by referring to their practical experience. When HKC teachers explain Confucian texts by telling stories or emphasizing certain knowledge points, they only present their understandings of Confucian texts partially and selectively. Through the renewal of HKC teachers’ perceptions and the revision of their teaching practices, Confucian tradition is going through countless ephemeral states and undergoing symbolic risks in the structure of conjuncture. The flexibility and ambiguity of Confucian texts allows children to appropriate certain sayings to argue against their parents. In response to this situation, parents may relate those sayings with a pragmatic context and generate a new disposition based on their perception and social position.

Reading classics is no longer practiced in private tutorial schools or considered to be an ordinary phenomenon as it had been in Confucian era. Modern Sishu education is not only marked by Confucian features but also characterized by the involvement of modern institutions. The historicity and authenticity of Confucian tradition lie in the current representation of the past, which is generated by people’s dispositions mediated by the habitus and the symbolic risk situated in the structure of conjuncture.
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