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FROM HABITS TO HABITUS:

CHINESE ELITES ATTEMPT TO CREATE AN ARISTOCRATIC CLASS
ALONG THE BRITISH MODEL

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Abstract

Lately, new trends have appeared in the spending habits of Chinese elites, which include money spent on etiquette classes, butler service, British afternoon tea, debutante balls, education in boarding schools, and immigration to Britain. These new consumption patterns of Chinese elites signify their desire and attempt to adopt the British aristocratic lifestyle portrayed in popular TV series, classical novels and mass media. This study examines anthropological research, documentary videos, news reports and interviews with Chinese elites and applies Bourdieu's theory of habitus as the main analytical tool in order to explain this phenomenon. Considering that forty years ago all Chinese people were at a similar class status—meaning that everybody came from the same or at least a very similar habitus—this research argues that the richest people in China are trying to create a new habitus: the aristocratic class. Furthermore, immigration to Britain, as a variation of lifestyle migration, and education in British boarding schools, can be regarded as pathways to this new habitus. This study attempts to answer whether it is possible to convert financial capital into social and cultural capital, and what implications these issues have on local and global scales. This research builds a foundation for further discussion about creating a new habitus in a very globalized and interactive world, which provides abundant opportunities to experiment with self-identity.

Keywords: Chinese elites, habitus, Chinese elite immigration, Chinese consumers.

What? Where? Why?

The economic reform started by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 not only stimulated China's rapid economic development but initiated a great transformation in Chinese society. After the end of the Cultural Revolution everyone in China was equally poor. However, today it is one of the most unequal societies in the world: in 2016, its Gini coefficient reached 0.456.¹

In March 2017 *Forbes* released the list of the richest people on the planet. Among the 195 newcomers on the list 76 people come from China.² According to *Forbes*, China has 319 billionaires, Hong Kong has 67, and Macau has 1; thus, China occupies a second place after the USA in the total number of billionaires.³ Moreover, statistics affirm there were 1.34 million millionaires in China in 2016, representing an increase from 1.21 million in previous years.⁴ Nevertheless, this is only the tip of China's class iceberg. McKinsey research suggests that by 2022 over 550 million people will be considered middle class in China.⁵ The upper middle class represents the most important segment, as it is "poised to become the principal engine of consumer spending over the next decade."⁶ The rising purchasing power of Chinese means that they will be reshaping the global economy and setting consumption trends in the world.

While China's economy has been growing in double digits for the past thirty years, consumption patterns of Chinese citizens have undergone a huge transformation. From the 1950s

¹ National Bureau of Statistics of China, "Gini Coefficient in China: Inequality of Income Distribution in China from 2005 to 2016," <https://0-www-statista-com.ignacio.usfca.edu/statistics/250400/inequality-of-income-distribution-in-china-based-on-the-gini-index/>.

Gini coefficient measures income inequality: Gini of zero expresses perfect equality, Gini of 1 expresses maximal inequality.

² Luisa Kroll and Kerry A. Dolan, "Forbes 2017 Billionaires List: Meet the Richest People on the Planet," *Forbes*, March 20, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kerryadolan/2017/03/20/forbes-2017-billionaires-list-meet-the-richest-people-on-the-planet/#7a0b87162ff0>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Fung Business Intelligence Centre, "Number of Millionaires in China from 2012 to 2016," <https://0-www-statista-com.ignacio.usfca.edu/statistics/702759/china-number-of-millionaires/>.

⁵ Kim Iskyan, "China's Middle Class is Exploding," *Business Insider*, August 27, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/chinas-middle-class-is-exploding-2016-8>.

⁶ Dominic Barton, Yougang Chen, and Amy Jin, "Mapping China's Middle Class," *McKinsey*, June 2013, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/mapping-chinas-middle-class>.

until 1970s, the so-called Four Big Things—which included a bicycle, a sewing machine, a wristwatch, and a radio—were the markers of success in China. In the 1980s, the original Four Big Things were replaced by a refrigerator, a television, a washing machine, a camera, an electric fan and a videocassette recorder. After economic reform fostered China's rapid development and lifted half of its population out of poverty, "consumers desired even more expensive items, with air-conditioning units becoming the most sought after product by consumers in the country's eleven largest cities."⁷ A contemporary version of the list of possessions that define a middle-class Chinese citizen as successful includes an expensive cell phone and a personal computer, a decent car, a big apartment, luxury foreign brand clothes, various leisure activities and traveling. Thus, the consumption mode of the Chinese middle class is changing from necessities to luxuries, from luxuries to experiences.

Lately, new trends in consumption patterns have surfaced among China's elites, which include money spent on British afternoon tea, etiquette classes, butler service, debutante balls, British furniture, golf and polo. As the Chinese middle class grows, luxury goods are becoming affordable for more and more people. Therefore, in order to reinforce their unique elite status, Chinese millionaires are not simply buying luxury items, they are exploring a certain lifestyle. James Hebbert, managing director of Seaton, a British culture and etiquette company in China, says: "It used to be China's rich were all about buying luxury brands to show their status, but now the focus is on consuming knowledge as a way to differentiate."⁸

⁷ Karl Gerth, *As China Goes, So Goes the World: How Chinese Consumers Are transforming Everything* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 14.

⁸ Kathryn Vasel, "The Next Big Thing for China's Wealthy: Etiquette Classes," *CNN*, November 20, 2014, <http://money.cnn.com/2014/11/19/luxury/wealthy-china-etiquette/index.html>.

Furthermore, Visas Consulting Group and the Hurun Report assert that half of Chinese millionaires consider emigrating abroad, and education is identified as the main motivation.⁹ Accordingly, this project investigates education in boarding schools and emigration to Britain as major expenditure items on the list of Chinese elite consumers. According to Hurun Research Institute, Britain is not the primary emigration destination for Chinese millionaires, and occupies third place after the USA and Canada.¹⁰ However, my research concentrates particularly on the immigration to Britain because it is a variation of lifestyle migration, which falls in line with other new consumption trends among Chinese elites and their overall affection for all things British. I analyze immigration of the wealthy elites as “a form of class-based consumption,” because it is available only to people with very high incomes.¹¹

These new trends among Chinese elite consumers signify their desire and attempt to adopt the British aristocratic lifestyle portrayed in popular TV series, classical novels and mass media. Considering that forty years ago all Chinese people were at a similar class status, which means that everybody came from the same or at least a very similar habitus, my study argues that the richest people in China are trying to create a new habitus. In this case, immigration to Britain, especially if it is initiated in childhood (when affluent parents send their kids to study in boarding schools), can be regarded as a pathway to a new habitus. This paper attempts to answer whether it is possible to convert financial capital into social and cultural capital. Moreover, it provides insights into why Chinese elites choose Britain as a role model and whether immigration guarantees the establishment of a new habitus. Finally, my research aims to understand what

⁹ Hurun Research Institute, “Immigration and the Chinese HNWI 2017,” July 15, 2017, <http://www.hurun.net/EN/Article/Details?num=51636DE2A1F4>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Gracia Liu-Farrer, “Migration as Class-based Consumption: The Emigration of the Rich in Contemporary China,” *China Quarterly* 226 (June 2016): 499.

implications these issues have on local and global scales for the already highly unequal Chinese society.

This topic is new, timely and important, because “the consumer, irrespective where he or she is buying, is becoming more Chinese.”¹² The rising number of Chinese consumers are becoming the main clients of the luxury brands outside of China, meaning that they are setting consumption trends domestically as well as globally. Moreover, huge amounts of investments made by wealthy Chinese immigrants signify that they are gaining more power and influence in the world.

Where Is the Gap?

The rising purchasing power of Chinese consumers means that they are becoming one of the major forces on the global market. That is the reason why Chinese consumerism has attracted the close attention of academic and business researchers. Doctoroff, Rein, and Gerth provide an extensive analysis of political, cultural and economic forces shaping Chinese consumer culture, the huge modifications it has undergone in the last four decades and the role of Chinese consumers in the global economy.¹³

Along with the burgeoning middle class in China, the demand for luxury products is also growing. Among the leading personal luxury goods markets in 2015, China occupied third place

¹² “Writing China: Erwan Rambourg, ‘Bling Dynasty,’” *Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2014, <https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/09/12/writing-china-erwan-rambourg-bling-dynasty/>.

¹³ Tom Doctoroff, *What Chinese Want: Culture, Communism, and China's Modern Consumer* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Shaun Rein, *The End of Cheap China: Economic and Cultural Trends That Will Disrupt the World* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2014); Karl Gerth, *As China Goes, So Goes the World: How Chinese Consumers Are transforming Everything* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010).

after the USA and Japan, with its estimated value at 17.9 billion euros.¹⁴ Even though there was a drop in demand for luxury goods in 2013 in China, because the government attempted to clamp down on the excessive spending, “China is still forecasted to remain the world’s biggest luxury goods market by 2020.”¹⁵

Most of the literature dedicated to the Chinese super rich is concentrated on the motivations that drive luxury consumption in China. Such works include “Luxury Fashion Consumption in China: Factors Affecting Attitude and Purchase Intent,” “Materialistic Consumers Who Seek Unique Products: How Does Their Need for Status and Their Affective Response Facilitate the Repurchase Intention of Luxury Goods?,” “Exploring Luxury Value Perceptions in China: Direct and Indirect Effects,” and “Understanding Luxury Consumption in China: Consumer Perceptions of Best-Known Brands.” These empirical research studies use surveys, questionnaires and interviews to collect data, develop hypotheses and then process it using various models.¹⁶ Offering a business-oriented approach and perspective, they provide valuable marketing strategies for companies entering or already operating in the Chinese market.

Another part of the existing literature—including *Anxious Wealth: Money and Morality Among China’s New Rich*, “Lifestyles of the Rich and Infamous: The Creation and Implications of China’s New Aristocracy,” and *The New Rich in China: Future Rulers, Present Lives*—describes lifestyles of the new rich, the ways they accumulated their wealth, and social tensions

¹⁴ Bain & Company, “Value of the Leading Personal Luxury Goods Markets in 2015, by Country (in Billion Euros),” <https://0-www-statista-com.ignacio.usfca.edu/statistics/245645/leading-personal-luxury-goods-markets-by-country/>.

¹⁵ Wenfei Guo, “Chinese Consumer Behavior in Luxury Market - International Luxury Brands in China” (thesis, Lapland University of Applied Sciences, 2015), 18.

¹⁶ Bopeng Zhang and Jung-Hwan Kim, “Luxury Fashion Consumption in China: Factors Affecting Attitude and Purchase Intent,” *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 20 (2013): 68-79; Wing Yin Chan, Chester K.M. To, and Wai Ching Chu, “Materialistic Consumers Who Seek Unique Products: How Does Their Need for Status and Their Affective Response Facilitate the Repurchase Intention of Luxury Goods?” *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 27 (2015): 1-10; Gong Sun, Steven D’Alessandro, and Lester W. Johnson, “Exploring Luxury Value Perceptions in China: Direct and Indirect Effects,” *International Journal of Market Research* (April 2016): 1-16, doi:10.2501/IJMR-2016-021; Lingjing Zhan and Yanqun He, “Understanding Luxury Consumption in China: Consumer Perceptions of Best-Known Brands,” *Journal of Business Research* 65 (2012): 1452-60.

and hatred towards them instigated by their immoral behavior, lavish expenditure and corruption.¹⁷ These academic studies explore the causes of high inequality in Chinese society and examine the implications of the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

The rising interest of Chinese elites in British traditions, etiquette, sports and lifestyle—being a relatively new phenomenon—has not been sufficiently represented in the academic literature. Moreover, there is a lack of research regarding the immigration of elites and especially Chinese millionaires, likely because they constitute a small percentage of immigrants as compared to migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers and other groups. Hence, my paper aims to fill these gaps.

In order to understand new consumption trends among Chinese elites, Bourdieu's theory of habitus provides a central analytical tool. My research area is narrowed down to China's political and business elites, because new spending habits appeared particularly among this stratum of Chinese society. Using a qualitative method of analysis, this research examines secondary sources, such as books and articles in peer-reviewed academic journals and consults documentary videos, news articles and economic reports. The variety of sources ensures that this analysis is comprehensive and holistic in examining the phenomenon of establishing aristocratic class in China.

The research findings are significant for understanding current social issues in the most affluent and powerful stratum of Chinese society. They also provide valuable insights for the industries and businesses that aim to appeal to super rich Chinese consumers in China as well as abroad. Ultimately, easy access to the abundance of information and the flow of ideas, cultures

¹⁷ John Osburg, *Anxious Wealth: Money and Morality Among China's New Rich* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013); Karl Gerth, "Lifestyles of the Rich and Infamous: The Creation and Implications of China's New Aristocracy," *Comparative Sociology* 10 (2011): 488-507; David S. G. Goodman, ed., *The New Rich in China: Future Rulers, Present Lives* (London: Routledge, 2008).

and traditions around the world have stimulated people's imaginations and provided resources for them to experiment with self-identity. Thus, my research builds a foundation for further discussion about creating a new habitus as an essential part of one's identity, a process enacted by converting financial capital into social and cultural capital in a very globalized and interactive world.

Towards a New Lifestyle: New Spending Habits Among Chinese Elites

In order to understand new patterns in consumption behavior of Chinese elites, the motivations behind them, and the implications on local and global scales, it is essential to identify who these elites are. Even though “the political and economic elites comprise some seven million people, or 1 percent of the employed population,” due to their close connections to the Chinese Communist Party and the amount of wealth they possess, they play a highly important role in China's development trajectory.¹⁸ According to *Business Insider*, there are “104 billionaires in the upper echelons of China's leadership,” which include 45 billionaires in the National People's Congress—China's legislature—and 59 billionaires in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which serves as the party's top advisory body.¹⁹ Their total net worth amounts to US \$624 billion, which is “more than double Ireland's GDP, and more than three times that of New Zealand's.”²⁰ While these people are on top of the class pyramid in

¹⁸ Karl Gerth, *As China Goes, So Goes the World: How Chinese Consumers Are transforming Everything* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 62.

¹⁹ Tara Francis Chan, “Communist China Has 104 Billionaires Leading the Country While Xi Jinping Promises to Lift Millions Out of Poverty,” *Business Insider*, March 4, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/billionaires-in-china-xi-jinping-parliament-income-inequality-2018-3>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

China, the targeted research area of this paper is a bit broader. It includes people that have built extreme wealth in the last four decades of China's rapid economic growth—the newly rich.

Karl Gerth and other experts define four primary groups of China's newly rich. The first group is comprised of individual entrepreneurs, who originally came from the lower social classes and “were often described as criminals, illiterate, and uncultured.”²¹ The second group includes state enterprises that exploited the dual-track prices, especially the children of high-ranking officials or ‘princelings’ “who used their connections to gain control over public resources and ensure state buyers even for bad products.”²² The third group consists of land speculators, who became rich in the late 1980s. Finally, the last group is represented by former managers of state-owned enterprises, who took advantage of “corrupt conversion of public enterprise into private and stockholder-owned companies beginning in the late 1990s.”²³ Hence, Chinese elites, also referred to as “new rich” and “new aristocracy” in the existing literature, are the product of market reforms that took place at the end of 1970s and beginning of 1980s, who were able to use connections with the powerful Party members in order to accumulate wealth in a relatively short period of time.

In 2016, Chinese consumers' contribution to the total global luxury market was 32%, and it is estimated that by 2020 this share will account for 44%.²⁴ Significantly, in recent years, China's wealthiest people have acquired new spending habits. Besides investing in personal luxury items, they have started to explore and adopt British aristocratic rituals, services, sports, and leisure activities.

²¹ David S. G. Goodman, ed., *The New Rich in China: Future Rulers, Present Lives* (London: Routledge, 2008), 100.

²² Karl Gerth, *As China Goes, So Goes the World: How Chinese Consumers Are transforming Everything* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 57.

²³ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁴ Lambert Bu et al., “Chinese Luxury Consumers: The 1 Trillion Renminbi Opportunity,” *McKinsey*, May 2017.

The first major trend that has appeared among Chinese elites is the rising interest in Western etiquette. According to *Telegraph*, “demand for a professional tutoring in the fine arts of deportment is soaring among the country’s nouveau riche.”²⁵ Consequently, this phenomenon has led to the proliferation of etiquette schools in major Chinese cities. These schools offer a variety of courses: for example, students learn how to hold a cup and a saucer properly, how to peel an orange with a knife and a fork, how to pronounce names for Western food correctly when ordering from a menu, “how to wear a hat like Kate Middleton and how to swap their American-tinged English for a more refined British tone.”²⁶ Furthermore, the courses are available both for adults and children. The classes for school-aged children in Debretts school, a London-based luxury lifestyle school, “focus on developing a personal brand, dining etiquette, social networking skills, interview techniques and conversation skills.”²⁷

It is important to emphasize that such courses, which are mostly taught by British consultants, are very expensive. For example, the “Hostessing” course in Institute Sarita, a modern version of European finishing schools in China, costs 100,000 RMB (US \$16,216) for 12 days.²⁸ Western etiquette courses communicate the same social meanings as luxury goods—high social status, prestige and success. Therefore, Chinese elites are willing to spend a lot of money on learning new skills, because “they are looking to good manners as a new form of status symbol.”²⁹

²⁵ Neil Connor, “China Takes a Shine to Fancy English Manners,” *Telegraph*, March 19, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/12199064/China-takes-a-shine-to-fancy-English-mannners.html>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Kathryn Vasel, “The Next Big Thing for China’s Wealthy: Etiquette Classes,” *CNN*, November 20, 2014, <http://money.cnn.com/2014/11/19/luxury/wealthy-china-etiquette/index.html>.

²⁸ Neil Connor, “China Takes a Shine to Fancy English Manners,” *Telegraph*, March 19, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/12199064/China-takes-a-shine-to-fancy-English-mannners.html>; Virginie Mangin, “Western Manners: The Latest Chinese Status Symbol,” *BBC*, February 20, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20150219-the-latest-chinese-status-symbol>.

²⁹ Virginie Mangin, “Western Manners: The Latest Chinese Status Symbol,” *BBC*, February 20, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20150219-the-latest-chinese-status-symbol>.

One of the essential skills for modern wealthy Chinese offered in etiquette schools is how to serve British afternoon tea. Even though a traditional tea ceremony has very deep roots and a long history in the Chinese culture, British afternoon tea has become an invented tradition among Chinese elites. For Chinese consumers “the tea has an aura of luxury and quality, and gives [them] a sense of partaking in the posh British culture popularized globally by TV shows and fashion shows.”³⁰ Unlike traditional Chinese tea ceremony, British afternoon tea is served in thin porcelain teapots with pastries in three-tiered cake stands. These newly imported rituals have stimulated the demand for tea houses serving British afternoon tea. In 2011, Annvita English Tea Company managed ten tea houses around China, but in 2016, this number has grown tenfold, with more planned.³¹ Another consequence of the Chinese consumers’ affection for afternoon tea is the rising imports of British tea. In the first five months of 2016, British tea exports to Hong Kong nearly tripled in value compared with two years earlier.³²

These foreign everyday practices, such as British afternoon tea, are especially popular in more cosmopolitan cities—Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong. Peter Wynn, the manager of a boutique luxury hotel in Beijing, claims that “afternoon tea has really become ingrained in the lifestyle and is part of the social fabric of the city.”³³ British afternoon tea is a new luxury experience on the Chinese elites’ list of leisure activities, because only people with high incomes can afford it on a daily basis. The price for Annvita company’s British tea best sellers ranges from 200 RMB (US \$30) to 568 RMB (US \$86) per pot.³⁴

³⁰ Leonora Beck, “British Tea is Booming in China, the Drink’s Birthplace,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, September 4, 2016, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-china-world-leader-in-tea-grows-a-taste-for-uk-2016sep04-story.html>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Yuan Ren, “How China Went Crazy for Afternoon Tea,” *Telegraph*, February 19, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/food-and-drink/features/how-china-went-crazy-for-afternoon-tea/>.

³⁴ Emma Gonzalez, “English High Tea Takes off in China,” *Telegraph*, September 1, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world/china-watch/culture/english-high-teas-in-china/>.

British etiquette and afternoon tea parties help Chinese elites to enhance and elevate their status in public. However, the desire to create an aristocratic self-identity has penetrated into the private sphere as well, which is seen in the growing popularity of butler service. Chinese, inspired by *Downton Abbey*, the television series about blue blood family in England, fuel “demand for the services of homegrown butlers trained in the ways of a British manor.”³⁵ Although butler training schools and agencies have been operating in Chinese market for more than a decade, “the number of recruits has grown sharply in recent years, according to those in the business.”³⁶ The demand has caused the influx of aspiring Chinese butlers willing to spend hours learning how to serve tea and black-tie dinners, choose fine wine, greet guests, and get table placings perfectly aligned. A six-week course on food presentation, how to iron shirts the proper way, and maintaining serene decorum costs 50,000 RMB (US \$7,500) at the International Butler Academy in Chengdu.³⁷ The students are Chinese and some of them “have never eaten with a knife and fork before.”³⁸ This transition from daily rituals to domestic services shows a progression and deeper integration of a new lifestyle into the identities of Chinese elites. Moreover, it has greater implications for labor market, since the demand for butlers creates new jobs, as well as shapes the standards of hospitality industry in China.

Along with incorporating British manners, traditions and services into their lives, Chinese elites have demonstrated new preferences in sports. Gerth argues that golf is considered “the top luxury import” in China.³⁹ There were attempts made by the government to ban golf, because the

³⁵ Chris Buckley and Karoline Kan, “Rich Chinese, Inspired by ‘Downton,’ Fuel Demand for Butlers,” *New York Times*, January 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/14/world/asia/rich-chinese-inspired-by-downton-fuel-demand-for-butlers.html>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Charlie Campbell, “‘Always Stay Professional.’ Inside China’s Booming Butler Schools, Nothing But the Best Will Do,” *Time*, November 1, 2017, <http://time.com/5003462/china-butler-school-xi-jinping/>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Karl Gerth, “Lifestyles of the Rich and Infamous: The Creation and Implications of China’s New Aristocracy,” *Comparative Sociology* 10 (2011): 494.

sport for millionaires is against the communist ideology. However, the demand for golf is still high and it “is now being made compulsory in schools to teach children etiquette and instill good behaviour.”⁴⁰ Sara Jane Ho, the founder of one of the most famous finishing schools in China—Institute Sarita—states that golf was “the first wave of rich sports,” adding that the most recent trend among Chinese wealthy is equestrian.⁴¹ Based on the data from the China Horse Fair, 100 new equestrian clubs opened across China from 2015 to 2016, and by 2016, their number reached 907.⁴² Moreover, “the average annual growth rate of club memberships in China is up 33 percent, reaching 270,000 members by the end of 2016.”⁴³ Golf and equestrian, like personal luxury products, are associated with high social status and prestige. Thus, people play them because they want to create a social identity of a noble and successful person.

This new identity of the Chinese elite is further reinforced by another invented tradition imported from Britain—the debutante ball. The first debutante ball was brought to China by Vivian Chow Wong, a Chinese socialite, and took place in Shanghai in 2012. Interestingly, that ball was attended by 13 debutantes coming from Britain, Australia, Taiwan and Hong Kong, but none of the ladies from mainland China received an invitation, because as Vivian Chow Wong said, these girls “have no manners and don’t behave like ladies.”⁴⁴ Today the Shanghai International Debutante ball has become an annual international event, which is why only two to three Chinese debutantes are invited each year.⁴⁵ Moreover, Chinese debutantes have appeared at

⁴⁰ Neil Connor, “The Rise of ‘Green Opium’: Golf Made Compulsory in Chinese Schools to Instill Manners,” *Telegraph*, October 21, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/21/rise-green-opium-golf-made-compulsory-chinese-schools-instill/>.

⁴¹ Devin Friedman, “The Bling Dynasty,” *GQ*, January 4, 2015, <https://www.gq.com/story/chinas-richest>.

⁴² Huang Tianchen, “China’s Elite Riding Club Launches Equestrian Education Project,” *CGTN*, July 6, 2017, https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d6b544e7859444e/share_p.html.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ David Eimer, “High Society Meets Shanghai Society as China Hosts the First Debutante’s Ball,” *Telegraph*, January 8, 2012, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8999644/High-society-meets-Shanghai-society-as-China-hosts-the-first-Debutantes-Ball.html>.

⁴⁵ Vivian Chen, “Debutante Balls Reinvent Themselves as Highly Exclusive Social Networking Events,” *South China Morning Post*, February 5, 2015, <http://www.scmp.com/magazines/style/article/1694191/high-society-women-are-brought-together-during-special-ball>.

other prestigious debutante balls across the world, including London, Paris and New York. In 2016, three debutantes from China attended Queen Charlotte's Ball in London—"an annual cornucopia of high fashion and etiquette once restricted to English aristocrats."⁴⁶ All debutantes are required to attend a pre-ball etiquette course, where they learn correct forms of address, formal table manners and how to walk properly. Additionally, "they must also be adept at aristocratic protocol."⁴⁷ These kinds of events, same as etiquette courses in finishing schools, are supposed to cultivate and shape the elite class in China, as well as establish morality and upper-class values.

The intention to imitate British aristocratic lifestyle has not only affected Chinese elites' behavior in public and private spheres, but also had an impact on their surroundings. Thames Town is a replica of an English town situated thirty kilometers outside of Shanghai. The architecture of the town resembles classic British market towns; some of the buildings are exact copies of the buildings in Britain. Thames Town was built in 2006 and was supposed to provide housing for the students studying in the Songjiang University City. However, huge investments in the properties from wealthy Chinese made the housing prices skyrocket. As a consequence, Thames Town has literally become a ghost town. At the present time, it serves as a great tourist destination and a Mecca for wedding photography. Those who cannot afford to go to the original England to make wedding photographs, choose Thames Town.

⁴⁶ Mingjie Wang, "London's Aristocratic Season Welcomes Chinese 'Debs'," *China Daily*, November 23, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-11/23/content_27471886.htm.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

5,055 Miles West: Immigration and Education in British Boarding Schools⁴⁸

The appeal of the British aristocratic lifestyle has not only inspired Chinese elites to incorporate new rituals, traditions, sports and services into their daily lives but also has motivated them to immigrate. The latest Hurun Report found out that half of Chinese millionaires consider emigrating abroad. It is essential to emphasize that “the more wealth a Chinese resident has, the more likely he or she is to migrate: about one-third of those whose assets exceed 100 million yuan (US \$15 million) have obtained immigration status abroad.”⁴⁹ In 2016, the UK was second only to the USA in Chinese Emigration Index, which “assesses the attractiveness of major global emigration destinations on eight categories: education, investment destination preferences, immigration policy, property purchasing, personal taxation levels, medical care, visa-free travel and ease of adaptability.”⁵⁰ However, last year Canada overtook the UK and moved it into third place on the list of countries most popular among Chinese millionaires.

A new motivation behind the rising numbers of Chinese millionaire migrants—“the desire for an ideal living environment”—accounted for 53% in 2017.⁵¹ Experts identify this type of migration as lifestyle migration, or consumption-led migration. Lifestyle migration refers to a phenomenon when an increasing number of people make a decision to migrate “based on their

⁴⁸ 5,055 miles is the distance from Beijing to London.

⁴⁹ Tian Fangmeng, “Millionaire Emigration: The Allure of Investor Visas among China’s Elite,” *Migration Policy Institute*, September 20, 2017, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/millionaire-emigration-allure-investor-visas-among-chinas-elite>.

⁵⁰ Hurun Research Institute, “Chinese Investment Immigration White Paper 2016,” December 2016, <http://www.hurun.net/EN/Research/Details?num=4C8EE051357E>.

⁵¹ Hurun Research Institute, “Immigration and the Chinese HNWI 2017,” July 15, 2017, <http://www.hurun.net/EN/Article/Details?num=51636DE2A1F4>.

belief that there is a more fulfilling way of life available to them elsewhere.”⁵² It is important to underline a key distinction here: this migration of the affluent stems from a drastically different set of motivations and means than those of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers who often leave their home countries in order to escape difficult conditions, seek employment opportunities, and find better economic and life conditions. These, however, are not the top priorities for Chinese lifestyle migrants, who instead aspire to experience and be immersed in British culture and values first hand.

The quality of education and environmental concerns were identified by wealthy Chinese as the main reasons for emigrating overseas (76% and 64% respectively).⁵³ An estimated 83 percent of Chinese millionaires plan to send their children to school abroad, and moreover, “the average age of being sent abroad to study fell from 18 years old in 2014 to 16 years old in 2016.”⁵⁴ Similar to the increasing demand for personal luxury products from the rapidly growing Chinese middle class, the demand for foreign education is also rising. Therefore, some families decide “to send their children abroad as early as middle school in an attempt to get a head-start” and facilitate their adaptation to cultural differences.⁵⁵ Additionally, it is much easier to gain acceptance into junior colleges and secondary schools, and “graduates from these schools are expected to have a much higher chance of entering reputable universities in the future.”⁵⁶ This phenomenon—“the migration of *xiao liuxuesheng* (‘little overseas students’)”—has become

⁵² Michaela Benson and Karen O’Reilly, “Migration and Search for a Better Way of Life: A Critical Exploration of Lifestyle Migration,” *Sociological Review* 57, no. 4 (2009): 608.

⁵³ Hurun Research Institute, “Immigration and the Chinese HNWI 2017,” July 15, 2017, <http://www.hurun.net/EN/Article/Details?num=51636DE2A1F4>.

⁵⁴ Hurun Research Institute, “Chinese Global Citizen 1.0: Immigration and the Chinese HNWI 2015,” June 2016, <http://up.hurun.net/Humaz/201606/20160607130229107.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Lauren Hallanan, “Are Chinese Elites Going Abroad Too Young?” *Jing Daily*, January 18, 2018, <https://jingdaily.com/are-chinese-elites-going-abroad-too-young/>.

⁵⁶ Biao Xiang and Wei Shen, “International Student Migration and Social Stratification in China,” *International Journal of Education and Development* 29 (2009): 519.

nationwide in China.⁵⁷ According to statistical data, four out of five students from China study full time at UK boarding schools, where average fees are nearly £10,800 (US \$15,214) a term.⁵⁸

Even though Britain is not the most desired emigration destination for Chinese elites and cannot match the United States and Canada in terms of options, it has “a unique appeal based on its heritage of educational rigour and tradition.”⁵⁹ Students from mainland China already represent the largest group of international pupils at British boarding schools, reaching 8,000 in 2017—a 10 percent increase from the previous year.⁶⁰ According to the British Council’s forecast, “the total number of Chinese students in the UK will reach 130,900 in 2020.”⁶¹ Education “has been identified by planners and ordinary citizens as a new consumption item with great potential.”⁶² The former headmaster of Taunton Prep School in Somerset, said that many of his Chinese students at The English Manner “come to Britain on a quest to acquire that hard-to-define charm associated with the English public-school system.”⁶³ Li Jin, a deputy head of a middle school in Shenyang, sent her son to Manchester to attend a private school, when he was 15. She claimed that her son received a lot of creative opportunities during his two years in the UK, as well as learned skills like skiing and golf that will “prepare him to make friends with elites in the future.”⁶⁴ Hence, elite British boarding schools—including Eton, Harrow School,

⁵⁷ Biao Xiang and Wei Shen, “International Student Migration and Social Stratification in China,” *International Journal of Education and Development* 29 (2009): 519.

⁵⁸ Michael Bow, “Focus: Best of British as Elite Public Schools Tap Up Wealthy Chinese Pupils,” *Evening Standard*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/focus-best-of-british-as-elite-public-schools-tap-up-wealthy-chinese-pupils-a3662236.html>.

⁵⁹ Hurun Research Institute, “Chinese Global Citizen 1.0: Immigration and the Chinese HNWI 2015,” June 2016, <http://up.hurun.net/Humaz/201606/20160607130229107.pdf>.

⁶⁰ Michael Bow, “Focus: Best of British as Elite Public Schools Tap Up Wealthy Chinese Pupils,” *Evening Standard*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/focus-best-of-british-as-elite-public-schools-tap-up-wealthy-chinese-pupils-a3662236.html>.

⁶¹ Christina Ianelli and Jun Huang, “Trends in Participation and Attainment of Chinese Students in UK Higher Education,” *Studies in Higher Education* 39, no. 5 (2014): 805.

⁶² Biao Xiang and Wei Shen, “International Student Migration and Social Stratification in China,” *International Journal of Education and Development* 29 (2009): 517.

⁶³ Luke Mintz, “The Yorkshire School Where Chinese Pupils Go to Learn How to Behave Like Royalty,” *Telegraph*, October 26, 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/10/26/yorkshire-school-chinese-pupils-go-learn-behave-like-royalty/>.

⁶⁴ Li Jing, “More Chinese Flocking to Elite British Schools,” *China Daily*, June 30, 2017, http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2017-06/30/content_29943853.htm.

Wycombe Abbey, Dulwich College, Radley College, Caterham School, Downe House School—do not only provide a wide range of high-quality knowledge, skills, social manners, sports, but also open doors to a global elite society.

Furthermore, the demand for British-style education has fostered British private schools to open their branches in China. In August 2016, “Harrow School, the 445-year-old institution whose alumni included Lord Byron and Winston Churchill,” opened its campus in Shanghai, following one in Hong Kong and another in Beijing.⁶⁵ Another top English school—Malvern College—that taught two Nobel laureates and US spymaster James Jesus Angleton, opened two satellite schools in Qingdao and Chengdu.⁶⁶ Education of children in elite prestigious institutions has become a new status symbol and a sign of distinction for Chinese parents, because it is affordable only for people with very high incomes. For example, it costs a total of 180,000 RMB (US \$26,260) for a student to attend Malvern College branch in Chengdu, which is five times the average annual income of a local resident.⁶⁷ Setting this within a wider context, we see a deeper integration of multiple elements of British culture—from etiquette to sport and leisure activities, from services to education system—into the lives of affluent Chinese citizens.

Why Britain?

All the new traditions, experiences and activities that are becoming the definitive features of a new identity of Chinese elite are imported from Britain. The paper argues that by learning

⁶⁵ Celine Ge, “British Boarding Schools Journey to the East to Give Chinese Elite a Taste of Prestige and Privilege,” *South China Morning Post*, May 28, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/business/article/2095981/british-boarding-schools-journey-east-give-chinese-elites-taste-prestige>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

and acquiring British attributes of aristocratic class—etiquette, social manners, rituals, education, sports—the wealthiest Chinese are trying to establish their own high society in China. Why particularly Britain was chosen as a role model?

First of all, Chinese consumers generally give preference to Western products instead of Chinese alternatives, because of the “Made in China” stigma, meaning that Chinese products are associated with cheap price and low quality. Hence, Britain, perceived as elegant, classical and graceful, provides a perfect example for the Chinese elites to create an aristocratic class in China.

Second, research shows that the high interest in Britain among Chinese citizens was inspired by various TV series, such as *Sherlock Holmes*, *Game of Thrones*, and especially *Downton Abbey*, that became very popular among Chinese audiences. When Taunton Prep School launched its Shanghai operation in 2014, it even used a *Downton Abbey* theme, “taking advantage of the 160 million Chinese viewers the ITV show pulled in each week.”⁶⁸ Analysts say that the demand for British lifestyle was “fueled by portrayals of British high society featured in TV shows, news stories of the British royal family and classical novels like Jane Austen’s.”⁶⁹

As the world becomes increasingly globalized and interconnected, mass media plays a highly important role in the flow and exchange of ideas, traditions and cultures. According to Appadurai, in the modern times different media provide “resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of persons.”⁷⁰ Therefore, the variety of information and images depicted in mass media stimulate imagination and force individuals “to monitor

⁶⁸ Luke Mintz, “The Yorkshire School Where Chinese Pupils Go to Learn How to Behave Like Royalty,” *Telegraph*, October 26, 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/10/26/yorkshire-school-chinese-pupils-go-learn-behave-like-royalty/>.

⁶⁹ Leonora Beck, “British Tea is Booming in China, the Drink’s Birthplace,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, September 4, 2016, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-china-world-leader-in-tea-grows-a-taste-for-uk-2016sep04-story.html>.

⁷⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

reflexively their actions and to fashion their lifestyles as ‘routinized practices’.”⁷¹ It means that people start to apply those images to themselves in order to create a desired social identity. For example, images of Eton-educated Olympian equestrian sportsman Alex Hua Tian, a British citizen who competes for China, “have helped bolster the ‘aristocratic’ reputation of boarding schools,” which contributed to increasing the demand for British-style education.⁷² Similarly, Chinese consumers exposed to British culture through mass media, have started to aspire to the aristocratic lifestyle they see in TV series or read about in novels and news articles.

Furthermore, it is essential to emphasize that “collective experience of the mass media, especially film and video, can create sodalities of worship,” or what Appadurai also calls “‘community of sentiment,’ a group that begins to imagine and feel things together.”⁷³ Immigration to Britain and education in British boarding schools, along with the rising interest in etiquette courses, debutante balls, equestrian, and tea houses have grown from a trend into a wave among Chinese wealthiest citizens. This wave signifies the establishment of a certain “community of sentiment,” even if this community represents only one percent of the country’s population. However, this desire to raise aristocrats is not limited to people belonging to the top of the Chinese society, since universities and schools are starting to promote this idea as well. The president of Xiamen University, which made golf classes mandatory for certain majors in 2006, said that “first-rate universities should cultivate the elites of society.”⁷⁴ It means that both

⁷¹ Caroline Oliver and Karen O’Reilly, “A Bourdieusian Analysis of Class and Migration: Habitus and the Individualizing Process,” *Sociology* 44, no. 1 (February 2010): 50.

⁷² Michael Bow, “Focus: Best of British as Elite Public Schools Tap Up Wealthy Chinese Pupils,” *Evening Standard*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/focus-best-of-british-as-elite-public-schools-tap-up-wealthy-chinese-pupils-a3662236.html>.

⁷³ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 8.

⁷⁴ Karl Gerth, “Lifestyles of the Rich and Infamous: The Creation and Implications of China’s New Aristocracy,” *Comparative Sociology* 10 (2011): 496.

the president of Xiamen University and China's super rich can be included in the same "community of sentiment."

Another explanation of why Britain was chosen as a role model may be found in the parallels between British class system and Chinese social hierarchy. Experts say that in general, Britain's class system appeals to people from republican countries such as China and Russia.⁷⁵ China had a long history of social hierarchy: during the imperial period, Chinese society was divided into four classes. Even though the actual class system was abandoned after the Communist Party came to power, the social hierarchy remained engraved in the Chinese culture. Aristocracy occupies the highest stratum in Britain's class system and represents the highest level of prestige and reputation, which are the essential values in modern China. The Chinese super rich attempt to establish an aristocratic class in order to strengthen their status and gain the social advantages implied by "aristocracy."

Finally, the affection for British culture may be partly explained by China's outbound tourism. In 2015 330,000 Chinese citizens visited the United Kingdom, in addition to those who already migrated there and the children who were sent by their parents to study in boarding schools.⁷⁶ After China's economic reform lifted half of its population out of poverty and made it more open, its citizens had opportunities to explore the world, which was closed to them for so many decades. Yu states that "the desire to become more knowledgeable about the world outside their immediate experience is a strong motivator of consumer behaviors in China."⁷⁷ The main target audience of etiquette schools, tea houses and butler agencies are rich people who

⁷⁵ "The World's Newly Rich Are Snapping Up Traditional British Butlers," *Economist*, October 15, 2012, <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-worlds-newly-rich-are-snapping-up-traditional-british-butlers-2012-10>.

⁷⁶ "Britain's Billionaire Immigrants—2017," YouTube video, 1:00:27, posted by "HARRY 3," February 3, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02uvGzMiaA0&feature=youtu.be>.

⁷⁷ LiAnne Yu, *Consumption in China: How China's New Consumer Ideology Is Shaping the Nation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 182.

frequently travel abroad. Consequently, inspired by experiences in Britain, they start to import elements of its culture and shape the consumption trends within China. This argument is also supported by experts who claim that “as people grow richer, travel and live abroad, [they] bring back a demand for polished, attentive service.”⁷⁸ Hence, globalization and the freedom to cross geographical, cultural and imaginary borders have provided Chinese elites with new opportunities to explore the world and choose resources for self-expression. Thus, Chinese lifestyle migrants use this flexibility created by the conditions of a reflexive modernity in order to fashion a new self-identity within the new cultural setting—Britain.

From Habits to Habitus:

Converting Economic Capital into Social and Cultural Capital

This research analyzes the current phenomenon of establishing aristocratic class in China within the theoretical framework of habitus. According to Bourdieu, habitus “describes those internalized structures, dispositions, tendencies, habits, ways of acting, that are both individualistic and yet typical of one’s social groups, communities, family, and historical position.”⁷⁹ Additionally, habitus is instilled in a person unconsciously, “by growing up in a certain sort of family or by sharing a sensibility with a certain group of friends.”⁸⁰ Basically, habitus is characterized by one’s family lineage, background and traditions, childhood experiences, culture a person is exposed to, education, acquaintances and overall surroundings.

⁷⁸ Chris Buckley and Karoline Kan, “Rich Chinese, Inspired by ‘Downton,’ Fuel Demand for Butlers,” *New York Times*, January 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/14/world/asia/rich-chinese-inspired-by-downton-fuel-demand-for-butlers.html>.

⁷⁹ Caroline Oliver and Karen O’Reilly, “A Bourdieusian Analysis of Class and Migration: Habitus and the Individualizing Process,” *Sociology* 44, no. 1 (February 2010): 56.

⁸⁰ David Brooks, “Getting Radical About Inequality,” *New York Times*, July 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/18/opinion/inequality-pierre-bourdieu.html>.

Furthermore, it influences every aspect of a person's life by defining how one talks, eats, behaves, what music he or she listens to, what books he or she reads, etc. Accordingly, habitus provides a set of rules and codes that help people to successfully navigate a certain stratum of society.

The structure of the Chinese society represents an inverted "T" "that consists of a massive low-income population and a tiny minority who possess disproportionately large amounts of wealth on the top."⁸¹ However, those on the top of the class pyramid in China come from the same, or at least a very similar, habitus than those on the bottom. China's new rich come from a variety of economic, professional, familial, and social backgrounds from all over China, and thus "should not be considered a 'coherent class.'"⁸² Sara Jane Ho called them "random wealth from random cities."⁸³ Chinese elites are different from those in the West, in that they "lack an established old bourgeoisie to emulate, as well as access to many forms of symbolic and cultural capital accumulation employed by elites elsewhere, such as charity and patronage of the arts."⁸⁴ Moreover, "stories abound of the humble rural origins and 'frugal' lifestyles of China's new super rich."⁸⁵ This can also provide an explanation for why they chose Britain: to follow its deeply rooted aristocratic tradition as the path towards upward mobility. The adoption of certain elements of British culture promoted by mass media, popular British TV series and traveling signifies that China's richest people are trying to establish an aristocratic class, which represents their attempt to create a new habitus.

⁸¹ Biao Xiang and Wei Shen, "International Student Migration and Social Stratification in China," *International Journal of Education and Development* 29 (2009): 513.

⁸² John Osburg, *Anxious Wealth: Money and Morality Among China's New Rich* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013), 13.

⁸³ Devin Friedman, "The Bling Dynasty," *GQ*, January 4, 2015, <https://www.gq.com/story/chinas-richest>.

⁸⁴ John Osburg, *Anxious Wealth: Money and Morality Among China's New Rich* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013), 121.

⁸⁵ David S. G. Goodman, ed., *The New Rich in China: Future Rulers, Present Lives* (London: Routledge, 2008), 102.

Previously, “the most efficient way to distinguish oneself in society was through luxury consumption for its rareness and superiority.”⁸⁶ Nevertheless, as the purchasing power of Chinese middle class, which is estimated to reach over 550 million people by 2022, is rising, more and more people can afford to buy luxury goods. Therefore, in order to differentiate themselves from the growing pool of luxury consumers and reinforce their elite status, China’s super rich upgraded their demands and spending habits and started to invest in knowledge and experience.

The desire to distinguish themselves shows that class formation is in progress in China. According to Bourdieu, distinction is “a way of converting economic capital into forms of social prestige that appear to be rooted in noneconomic qualities: good taste, refinement, class.”⁸⁷ Similarly, by attending British boarding schools, enrolling into etiquette courses, learning how to play equestrian, and participating in debutante balls, Chinese elites try to convert their economic capital into social and cultural capital. In this context, social capital refers to “one’s group affiliations and social circles, and the influence or prestige that these groups represent,” and cultural capital refers to “one’s education, knowledge, and upbringing, which could all be viewed in terms of social status.”⁸⁸ Lifestyle is a product of habitus, but China’s wealthiest people are currently involved in a reverse process: they learn and adopt an aristocratic lifestyle in order to make a new habitus.

Consequently, this phenomenon raises very important questions: Is it possible to convert economic capital into social and cultural capital? Is it possible to create a new habitus? Bourdieu

⁸⁶ Pierre Xiao Lu, “Luxury is a Necessity in People’s Republic of China: Social Rejection of New Wealth in the Socialist Market Economy,” *European Business Review*, January 11, 2013, <http://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/luxury-is-a-necessity-in-peoples-republic-of-china-social-rejection-of-new-wealth-in-the-socialist-market-economy/>.

⁸⁷ John Osburg, *Anxious Wealth: Money and Morality Among China’s New Rich* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013), 118.

⁸⁸ LiAnne Yu, *Consumption in China: How China’s New Consumer Ideology Is Shaping the Nation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014),

claimed that “habitus, a product of history, is based on past experiences ... in particular by experiences at an early age, including gender division of labor, household objects, modes of consumption, and family experiences such as parent-child relationships.”⁸⁹ Hence, habitus is shaped and accumulated over a long period of time beginning from very early childhood. In this case, the migration of “little overseas students” plays a crucial role in the process of establishing a new habitus. When Chinese students are exposed to British culture on a daily basis in elite boarding schools, British aristocratic lifestyle becomes an integral part of their identities. One Chinese journalist claimed that these Chinese students are “new aristocracy, but they are real aristocracy.”⁹⁰ Therefore, immigration initiated in early childhood and education in British boarding schools can be regarded as pathways to a new habitus for Chinese elites.

Furthermore, habitus is “reflected in individual in a less-conscious and sustainable manner, which embodies thinking, perceptions, and actions with cultural characteristics.”⁹¹ It means eating without the need to remember what type of fork and knife should be used for a particular dish, walking and sitting without constantly controlling one’s posture, communicating and acting without the need to prove that one does belong to a certain habitus. All these embodied characteristics of the habitus are “the most offensive or the most obvious markers from which people wish to disassociate themselves.”⁹² These tastes, mannerisms and attitudes are hard to acquire if one is not living in a certain environment. However, when Chinese students are

⁸⁹ Yanbi Hong and Yandong Zhao, “From Capital to Habitus: Class Differentiation of Family Educational Patterns in Urban China,” *Journal of Chinese Sociology* 2 (2015): 5.

⁹⁰ Biao Xiang and Wei Shen, “International Student Migration and Social Stratification in China,” *International Journal of Education and Development* 29 (2009): 519.

⁹¹ Yanbi Hong and Yandong Zhao, “From Capital to Habitus: Class Differentiation of Family Educational Patterns in Urban China,” *Journal of Chinese Sociology* 2 (2015): 5.

⁹² Caroline Oliver and Karen O’Reilly, “A Bourdieusian Analysis of Class and Migration: Habitus and the Individualizing Process,” *Sociology* 44, no. 1 (February 2010): 60.

immersed in British aristocratic society from the early age, these features of the habitus get instilled in them unconsciously on a daily basis.

Ultimately, reflexive modernity produced favorable conditions to experiment with one's identity and habitus. In the times of flexible cultural, geographic and imaginary borders, various kinds of capital—economic, social and cultural—“became actively convertible to each other.”⁹³ However, only people with high incomes have the luxury to pick and choose the lifestyle they desire, because “the transaction between different types of capital requires larger amounts of financial capital to start with,” meaning that this convergence is concentrated in the top stratum of society.⁹⁴ Hence, affluent Chinese elites, especially their children, are likely to succeed in establishing a new habitus. Necessary economic capital enables them to participate in British aristocratic culture through education in elite boarding schools, where they accumulate not only social and cultural capital, but also mannerisms and tastes intrinsic to that particular habitus.

Costs and Benefits of a New Habitus: Economy, Culture, Identity

Nowadays identities are like puzzles which the people of reflexive modernity assemble, each choosing the most appropriate pieces available in a variety of shapes, colors and patterns. Globalization and the development of mass media and transport provided people with resources to creatively approach the life-long project of self-making. As a result, “engaging in a particular lifestyle no longer reflects our already existing status as members of a particular class ... but says

⁹³ Biao Xiang and Wei Shen, “International Student Migration and Social Stratification in China,” *International Journal of Education and Development* 29 (2009): 513.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 521.

something about who we—as individuals—have decided we want to be.”⁹⁵ Thus, by learning British etiquette, rituals, and equestrian, hiring butlers, attending debutante balls, and finally immigrating to study in British boarding schools, Chinese elites have decided to become true aristocrats. This phenomenon has implications on many different levels.

First of all, Chinese elites’ immigration creates great economic gains for Britain. For example, Eton charges £12,900 (US \$18,397) a term, meaning that Chinese students are worth about £220 million (US \$313.6 million) annually to British boarding schools.⁹⁶ The education boom is also helping Britain’s real estate market (in London, for example, parents prefer to purchase property, because it is cheaper than renting) and in retail (in 2017, “Chinese nationals have overtaken the British to become the biggest spending consumers at Harrods”).⁹⁷ Thus, Chinese wealthy migrants and tourists are pouring considerable amounts of money into British economy, which is especially important after Brexit.

Second, financial benefits for Britain are actually economic losses for China. According to Bain & Company, “the value of investable assets held by HNWI [high-net-worth individuals] increased from RMB 9 trillion (\$1.37 trillion) in 2008 to an estimated RMB 27 trillion (\$4.1 trillion) in 2013, when China’s total GDP was nearly RMB 57 trillion (\$8.65 trillion).”⁹⁸ Taking into account that many millionaires have already left China and half of the rest consider emigrating abroad, one sees that China will face huge financial losses as well as the loss of human capital. Moreover, experts assert that along with the growing political engagement among

⁹⁵ Michaela Benson and Karen O’Reilly, “Migration and Search for a Better Way of Life: A Critical Exploration of Lifestyle Migration,” *Sociological Review* 57, no. 4 (2009): 616.

⁹⁶ Michael Bow, “Focus: Best of British as Elite Public Schools Tap Up Wealthy Chinese Pupils,” *Evening Standard*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/focus-best-of-british-as-elite-public-schools-tap-up-wealthy-chinese-pupils-a3662236.html>.

⁹⁷ Hurun Research Institute, “Chinese Global Citizen 1.0: Immigration and the Chinese HNWI 2015,” June 2016, <http://up.hurun.net/Humaz/201606/20160607130229107.pdf>; Tom Hancock, “Chinese Nationals Overtake Brits to Become Harrods’ Biggest Spenders,” *Financial Times*, November 24, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/9ea19ee2-d101-11e7-b781-794ce08b24dc>.

⁹⁸ Steve Hess, “The Flight of the Affluent in Contemporary China: Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and the Problem of Wealth Drain,” *Asian Survey* 56, no. 4 (2016): 630.

the working class, the outflow of the Chinese millionaires can shift political balance in favor of more redistributionist policies, which “in turn might propel even further wealth flight.”⁹⁹

Third, the desire to establish an aristocratic class in China has serious social implications. Chinese elites “have become admired super-consumers and larger-than-life symbols of the consumer lifestyles.”¹⁰⁰ It means that they create a new image of Chinese society and set the consumption trends, which as a consequence stimulates the rise of materialism and consumerism in China. However, the majority of population cannot afford to emulate such a luxurious lifestyle. Hence, in the country where a third of the national wealth is owned by 1% of households, and 25% of the poorest households own just 1% of total wealth, the desire to establish an aristocratic class can lead to an even bigger gap between rich and poor, as well as tensions, social discontent, hatred and even unrest.¹⁰¹

Finally, what are the cultural gains and losses and the cost of a new identity? While accumulating social and cultural capital in a foreign society, one might lose some or even all of the definitive features of his or her national identity. The research about young Chinese migrants in London found out that many of them avoid Chinatown and Chinese communities, because they are “integrated in a London cosmopolitan way.”¹⁰² Does it mean that they intentionally reject their Chineseness? However, at the same time Chinese international students have to deal with language barriers, cultural and social expectations and even stigma against Chinese

⁹⁹ Steve Hess, “The Flight of the Affluent in Contemporary China: Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and the Problem of Wealth Drain,” *Asian Survey* 56, no. 4 (2016): 649.

¹⁰⁰ Karl Gerth, “Lifestyles of the Rich and Infamous: The Creation and Implications of China’s New Aristocracy,” *Comparative Sociology* 10 (2011): 489.

¹⁰¹ Tara Francis Chan, “Communist China Has 104 Billionaires Leading the Country While Xi Jinping Promises to Lift Millions Out of Poverty,” *Business Insider*, March 4, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/billionaires-in-china-xi-jinping-parliament-income-inequality-2018-3>.

¹⁰² Caroline Knowles, *Young Chinese Migrants in London* (London: Runnymede, 2016), 17.

migrants. Such transnational approach to one's identity is a new phenomenon, which requires more research studies to fully comprehend its psychological dimensions.

Final Destination

This research traces the journey of the Chinese elites: from the incorporation of British customs and etiquette to the integration of British activities and education; from the physical quest that takes them miles away to Britain to the pop culture representations that impact their own perceptions and choices. Through this process, the Chinese elites attempt to elevate their status and form a new habitus, which, in turn, is a tool to gain cultural and social capital.

What is the final destination in the journey to a new habitus? This study raises a lot of questions and sets the stage for further discussion about creating a new habitus and identity in the modern world: not just for the Chinese elites but for others. This research serves as a catalyst for future studies in China and elsewhere. Such investigations are key to better understanding the complexities of filtering experience through a new, growing consciousness. Looking at current trends—the rapid exchange of ideas, cultures and traditions and the blurring of all kinds of borders—we see that people of reflexive modernity are moving towards becoming global citizens: citizens of the world free from stereotypes, classifications and standards.

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