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The Self-identification and Media Literacy
Of Middle class through Media in China
An Empirical Study in Beijing

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Abstract

The middle class in China is a new emerging class that plays an important role in the socio-economic development. Their cognition segmentation with the upper classes and lower classes implies that they have increasingly become independent in the objective status and leads to their dependence on the media to learn the alien classes. However, the middle class members in China have not yet establish a united class self-identification. The middle class is in a dilemma situation of the integration between their objective status and their subjective identity. The objective cause is that there is no definite description of the Chinese middle class both in the government documents or the academia. And the constitution of the middle class members are in accordance with various dimensions, it is difficult for the middle class members to establish a united class identification matching with all the dimensions. When gaining the recognition of alien classes through the media, on one hand, the middle class cannot get enough discourse power on the media as the objective image of the middle class is limited in reporting on the media; on the other hand, they cannot establish an precise class self-identification through the media information because of the false report of the alien classes on the media. The media literacy of the middle class with the characteristics of the social transformation leads to the distortion of their recognition of the alien classes and the expansion of their sense of relative deprivation.

In this research, I try to explore the influence of media literacy on the middle class in China with regards to the processes of convergence of the similar classes and exclusion of the alien classes.

Key words  middle class  class identification  media literacy
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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

SECTION 1 LACK ON IDENTITY OF MIDDLE CLASS IN CURRENT CHINA: PRESENT SITUATION AND EXISTING RESEARCH

1. Realistic Issues

The two sessions of the “NPC & CPPCC” (National People’s Congress and Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference) of China in 2008 held a special press conference for the "new class" representatives\(^1\), where the high-profile appearance of the term "new social class" won the support of the people very quickly. In fact, as early as in 2001, during the celebration of the 80th anniversary of the founding of CPC, Jiang Zemin, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, had pointed out that, since the reform and opening up, there have been many changes in the compositions of the social classes in China, wherein some social classes such as technical and managerial staff in private enterprises and foreign enterprises, self-employed individuals, private entrepreneurs and free professionals have appeared\(^2\).

According to the estimate of the Vice Minister of the United Front Work Department, Chen Xiqing, together with all the employees of the related industries, the total number of the "new class" was about 150 million. They master or manage about 10 trillion RMB of capital, using more than half of the technology patents of the country, contributing nearly 1/3 of the tax each year of country and creating more than half of the new jobs each year\(^3\).

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\(^1\) On March 8th, 2008, the press conference with the theme of “new class members talking about the social responsibility” was held by the eleventh meeting of the CPPCC National Committee in the Great Hall.


\(^3\) China Economic Weekly, 17 March 2008.
How similar this "new class" is to the "middle class" in terms of kinds of occupation, income level, education level and social prestige. Although the term "middle class" has not yet appeared in the official text, the above data shows that the middle class in China has officially arrived on the political stage. And as early as 2007, it was reported in the Seventeenth Party Congress, that the expansion of the income of the middle class had been listed as an important strategy for comprehensively building a well-off society in 2020. It is such an important class that assumes an important social function and high expectations in China. However, in the future, the features and conception of this class are vague in the scale of its membership with many deferent versions. Table 1 is the proportion of the middle class in the overall social employment measured by different scholars in accordance with their respective index system since 2001.

**Table 1   Parts of the Measurement results of Middle class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Year of data</th>
<th>Respondents with questionnaires (VQ)</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Analysis index</th>
<th>The proportion of middle class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lu Xueyi</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Questionnaires 12 Provinces and Municipalities. (Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Shandong, Heilongjiang, Hebei, Henan, Jiangxi,</td>
<td>VQ: 11000</td>
<td>Divided into 10 classes according to industry model. Sort from top to bottom except the highest and lowest class</td>
<td>Entire country: Around 15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>Index Distinguish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Chunling</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sichuan, Guizhou, Neimeng; People with age from 16 to 70; Random sampling in Multi-stage stratification</td>
<td>VQ: 6093</td>
<td>Distinguish: Occupation, income, consumption and subjective identification four individual indexes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Chunling</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prestige stratification. Stratification based on index score of 161 kinds of socio-economic status of professional groups.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entire country middle class in complex indexes: 8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zheng Hangsheng, Li Lulu and so on</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaires, ten cities in China (Changchun, Jilin, Tianjin, Xi’an, Zhengzhou, Kaifeng, Changsha, Xiangtan, Guangzhou, Zhongshan).</td>
<td>VQ: 4738</td>
<td>Disparity: Occupational, education level and income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhao Yandong</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaires, 31 provinces, municipalities and autonomous religions.</td>
<td>VQ: 11094</td>
<td>Subjective identification of individual class property as the main index.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhou Xiaohong</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaires, 5 cities in China (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Nanjing, Wuhan).</td>
<td>VQ: 3038</td>
<td>Disparity: Occupational, education level and income.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The descriptions of the middle class, either by the academia or by the large members of society, are still in the process of being employed. Currently there is no proper integration between the objective status and subject identification of middle class in current China. On one side, this new emerging class is occupied in accumulating economic and political power, on the other side, this class cannot form a clear and objective understanding of themselves because of the complex social class structure, and thus cannot be able to get the legalization support in discourse, which undoubtedly leads to certain obstacles on the sustainable and healthy development of middle class.

2. Existing Domestic Research

The existing research on middle class is mainly concentrated in the source, composition, size, behaviour characteristics and development prospects of this class (Zhang, 2004), (for details, see Appendix 1). There are also parts where scholars have explored the subjective identification of the middle class, and recognized that there is some dislocation between the objective status and subject identification of the middle-class groups (Li, 2003; Zhang, 2004; Zhao, 2005; Zhou, 2005).
Among the research, Chunling Li and Wanli Zhang defined the scale of the members of current China’s middle class by using the same set of data information. Chunling Li described the problem of the low consistency and integration between the objective status and the subjective identity of the middle class, that although the numbers of people who considered themselves as middle class according to four indicators of profession, income, consumption and subjective identity separately achieved the overall proportion of middle class of 15.9%, 24.6%, 35% and 46.8%, the number of people who considered themselves matching all the four indicators at the same time was 4.1%. Wanli Zhang argued that the “new middle class” had already established an obvious sense of belonging to middle class status but were lacking positive social reorganization (Li, 2003; Zhang, 2004). Yandong Zhao also pointed out the lack of self-identification of middle class in China through the analysis of research data which showed that the correlation coefficient between subjective class identification and a variety of objective stratification was not too high (Li et al, 2005, p. 70), and the entire community had shown a tendency of “downward shift” of self class identification. Hui Shen quoted Taiwan scholar Shuling Cai’s notion that there was a “false class consciousness” (ie: inconsistency between the subjective self-positioning and the objective stratification of the middle class members) and low self-positioning existed in the current Chinese urban middle class (Zhou, 2005, p. 87).

For the causes of the inconsistencies between objective status and subjective identification of current middle class, scholars give the explanation mainly from two points of view.

a) Point of structuralism

From the perspective of society as a whole, the lack of self-identification of middle class is caused by the objective social stratification structure with relatively small middle layer (Li, 2003; Li et al, 2005; Zhou, 2005). In terms of the interior of the group members whose objective socio-economic status located in the middle position,
as described by the scholars, the lack of class identification is mainly caused by the differentiation of the internal structure of the middle class in the process of social transformation in China, including the differentiation of the source to constitute the middle class (parts of cadres and intellectuals separated from the traditional middle class under the planed economic system, the new emerging private business owners and township entrepreneurs since the reform and openness, the “white collars ” on behalf of the middle class), the differentiation of the type of the occupation, urban-rural division, regional differentiation, income differentiation and so forth. The reality of the heterogeneity of the middle class members leads to the difficulty of class identity (Li, 2001; Zhang, 2002; Li et al, 2005). At present, the differentiation of various dimensions has not been completely unified, which cannot achieve the situation that a large number of people are all located in the middle position in each dimension and establish a common cultural identity in order to integrate the whole society in the aspect of cultural values (Li, 2003). The interpretation of this point of view, as Marx pointed out, “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but their social existence that determines their consciousness (Marx, 2008), which still is the main voice of this field of research.

b) Point of constructivism

Some scholars also recognize the factors that affect the forming of the subjective identity of middle class members. They do not simply adopt the objective decision theory, but also depth to the psychological mechanism of the class-consciousness and class identification of the middle class members, thus leads to the possibility of mutual dialogue between the psychological mechanism and the theory of class identity in the point of constructivism.

Since Xin Liu (2002), the Chinese scholars began to introduce the proposition of “relative deprivation”, aiming to analyze how the perception of the social members on the living changes and social inequality exerts an influence on the formation of their
subjective class consciousness. The subjective judgment of the social members has since been used as an independent variable indicator to explain the generation of class consciousness. Follow this path, Yandong Zhao (2005), Hui Shen (see Zhou, 2005) and so forth all made some discussion on the “relative deprivation” of the middle class. Yandong considered that the proposition of “relative deprivation” had a valid explanatory on the subjective class identification of social members. He also noted that, with the rapid changes in social structure and the rapid development of IT, that when choosing the reference groups, people had no longer been confined to their surrounding social groups, but may evaluate their own social status on the basis of the ideal social groups and ways of life that they knew through a variety of information. Thus, the experience of “relative deprivation” of the middle class members of today is more obvious than the former situation when they took the people’s surrounding’s or similar status as a reference (Li, 2005, p. 84).

Hui Shen went further than Yandong when she pointed out that the formation mechanisms of middle class could be analyzed from two aspects of the social mechanism and psychological mechanism. But she herself only analyzed the objective impact of the “power-market mixed mechanism” since 1978 in China on middle class without explaining how a unique convergence process that the middle class had experienced in aspect of psychological mechanism. In terms of psychological mechanism, she considered that the wrong choice of reference led to the non-rational self-identification of the public because the urban public neither compared their present lives with their past lives nor compared their lives with the lives of lower classes but only took the lives expected by the upper social strata as a reference (Zhou, 2005. pp. 51-52). She vaguely attributed the wrong reference of middle class to media publicity, that the current understanding of the Chinese people on the middle class was mainly the input of the external information, and thus denied that there were rational thinking and self awareness against the media publicity within the middle class.
According to the empirical data, the interactive process of “group reference selection” and “media effects” are both important parts of this resolution path, which is worthy of further exploration.

SECTION 2 INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It can be seen from the above review that, for the research of China’s middle class, there is still a large space needed to be continuously explored. The author wants to make a supplement on the mechanism of subjective identification of the social members whose objective socioeconomic status is located in the middle class.

The usual strategy is that, reviewing the literature again and forming the questions based on the literature, deducing the research hypotheses, verifying the situation in China through empirical research. However, in the case of relatively few existing studies there is a train of thought whether the research can be implemented in a different perspective? Morse and Richards (2002) have mentioned that, in such circumstance, the best option is the use of qualitative research methods, especially the grounded theory method which discovers and develops the theory from the data.

The existing studies have shown that, in western societies, the period during the births of new and old generations of the middle class is more than a century, where the old middle class was mainly industrialized births and the new middle class was the births of the transmission from industrial society to post-industrial society. However, since 1978 in China, the two generations of the middle class almost came one after another in quick succession (Zhou, 2005, p.7). Thus, both the changes of its realistic structure and the evolutionary process of the ideology field are sharply compressed. As current academia usually put the middle class theories in the background of social structure in developed market economy (Liu, 2007, p. 2), we question whether these theories are suitable for the current social reality of China.
With this in mind, I chose the grounded theory, that rooting in the local environment, inducting and constructing localization theory directly from the empirical data, and then comparing the localization theory with the western theories (Glaser & Strauss, 2009).

It starts from a broad topic rather than a clear hypotheses deduced from existing theories, collecting information directly into the site as well as analyzing the information, then making theoretical sampling according to the concepts revealed in the information analyzing, and again collecting relevant information as well as comparing and analyzing them, and so forth, until theoretical saturation and the theory that closely related to the data is established (for details see Chapter 3).

Although grounded theory is usually applied to cultural studies and social policy research, in my opinion, since the study design is an interactive process (Maxwell, 1996), as well as the class identity, thus the research strategy of class identity should also be done in an interactive process.

When applying the grounded theory method, the initial research questions can neither be too narrow to impede the discovery based on information, nor be too broad to include everything. The purpose of the questions is to make clear the phenomenon that needs to be studied and the subject that is expected to learned (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 40-41).

After the description of the current situation of the middle class in China and the existing research on it, I have many queries in my mind such as what the current formation mechanism of class identification of middle class is, whether media exposure has impact on the class identification of middle class and what the germination mechanism of the impact is.

These queries need to be further clarified. Some conceptions such as what is social class identity need to be illustrated through literature review, that is why I don’t
fully abandon the strategy of carding the existing class identity theories to find the path to enter the survey, and at the same time root in the local environment, inducting and constructing localization theory directly from empirical data and comparing them with existing theories. The purpose of this literature review does not lie in the formation of hypotheses, but the formation of research questions (Creswell, 2003; Flick, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). And I will give the specific questions at the end of Chapter 2 (p 29).

CHAPTER 2 THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

SECTION 1 SOCIAL CLASS AND IDENTITY

1. Concept of Identity

The concept of identity was well known as it was applied in the study of identity crisis of young people by psychologist Erikson (1995). Since the 1960s, identity study has been widely used in many fields such as sociology, political science, philosophy, anthropology with diverse and complex meanings.

There is a wide range in Erikson’s description of identity, mainly concentrated in the discussion of the characteristics and interactions among self, collective self and environment. It can be understood as the unity of the society and the individual, the unity of the subject self and the objective self of the individual, the unity of the understanding of the historical reality and subjective desires of the individual. Identity can also be interpreted as, in any case including the past, present and future, the individual can fully recognizes that itself is the subject of consciousness and action, namely the “true self”, as well as be referred to “core self”. In Erikson’s description, identity not only has the connotation of districting the individual and the otherness, but also has continuity and consistency, which is a process of interacting constantly
with the social environment (Erikson, 1995). Many social psychologists improved the concepts of identity after Erikson. Aronson (1988) considered that identity is a fight back against the social impact, which the reaction is due to the individual’s desire to become the same individuals who exert influence. In the identity process, one person takes the same action with others because he confirms the relationship between himself and the individuals or groups he approves with satisfaction.

In Chinese social psychologist Lianxiang Sha’s opinion, identity is used to explain the mechanism of personality integration in psychology, that is, an inter power to maintain the interaction between the personality and the society, and thus maintain the unity and consistency of personality. Therefore, this concept is used to represent the subjectivity and sense of belonging (Sha, 2002, p.2).

2. The Main Angles of View of the Genetic Theory of Class Identity

It can been seen from the above analysis that identity occurred between the individuals and the external environment along with two simultaneous and intertwined processes, wherein one is an active observation, monitoring and comparison process with the individuals effect on the outside world, and the other is a passive acceptance and acknowledgement process with the individuals affected by the external world. As the terminus of identity is “acknowledgement” and “acceptance” (Verkuyten, 2005) in the two processes, the individual needs to mobilize the ability of rationally comparing. As a comparison of two objects – the individual and the external environment, there may be an association with confounding factors.

Similarly, social class identity also contains these two processes, but because it faces a more complex and changeable external environment (Bryan, 2008, p.140), the process of active observation, monitoring and comparison is more difficult to complete. Also because that the individual faces the whole society, and social facts (such as social income stratification) will exert more significant power on the individual, there is more possibility of deviation and differentiation of social identity.
In fact, the social identity study by the sociologists is also guided by the two points of view – the structuralism perspective oriented by the passive acceptance and acknowledgement and the constructivism perspective oriented by the active observation and monitoring.

a) The Genetic Theory of Class Identification in the View of Structuralism

“Class stratification” refers to “the ‘layers’ or strata of social groups in which they are thought to be arranged, one on top of the other, in various human societies” (Saunders, 1990, p. 1) Then initiators of social stratification research such as Marx and Weber have pointed out from the outset that the social stratification is closely linked with the subjective awareness of people rather than a purely objective phenomenon (see Saunders, 1990, p. 1-26). Marx pointed out that only when the working class having full consciousness of their class position and class interests, they can then be transferred from “class-in-itself” to “class-for-itself”. In accordance with the reasoning of Marx, the “class-in-itself” is bound to become “class-for-itself”, although this takes time with process of the inspiration and mobilization of class consciousness (see Cleaver, 2001, pp. 83-84). What he stressed was a subjective “class consciousness”. “Class consciousness is the awareness that a class structure exists and the identification with others in one’s class position” (Andersen & Taypor, 2008, p. 241). The basis of the class consciousness is the direct and sharp interest conflicts among the different social groups.

Correspondingly, the scholars affected by the Weber’s social stratification view are more willing to regard the subjective consciousness associated with social stratification as a kind of “strata consciousness”, that is the subjective awareness, evaluations and feelings of an individual with a certain social class status on the social inequality and the socioeconomic status he finds himself in. The strata consciousness is not only built on the differences of the material and economic interests, but also built on the unequal distribution of resources in the economy, power and culture
As an integral part of strata consciousness, the subjective status identification reflects the perception of an individual on his position in the strata structure (Jackman & Jackman, 1973, p. 569), which constitutes a very important aspect of class-consciousness.

The genre of class identification theories of structuralism can also be divided into two different theoretical orientations – static model and dynamic model (Liu, 2002).

The static model implied a basic consummation that the class/strata consciousness of the people is decided and constrained by their objective economic position (Liu, 2002). The studies of Dahrendorf (1959), Poulantzas (1973, 1975), E.O. Wright (1976, 1985) and Carchedi (1975) all have confirmed that the structural position of people has explanatory power on their class-consciousness. The studies of Hodge & Treiman (1968) and Jackman & Jackman (1973, 1985) have confirmed that the objective status including the occupation, educational level, income and so forth has an influence on class/ status consciousness.

The dynamic model puts emphasis on the influence of the social mobility between different classes and the relative changes in life on the class/ strata consciousness of social members. Such an orientation believes that the emergence and development of class/strata consciousness is related with the sense of relative deprivation, while the appearance of relative deprivation is closely linked with the level of intensity of social changes. Only under the premise of losing the vested interests or failing to get the desired interests, the individual will fall into the status of relative deprivation, which leads to the sense of social injustice, resulting in the class cognition that the society is layered in gradient (Liu, 2002).

As mentioned above, the dynamic model can both be regarded as a transformation of the “objective structural determinism” and an interpretation similar to the view of constructivism, because it starts to pay attention to the psychological mechanism of the class identification of social individuals, and most notably, it takes
the perception of the level of intensity of social changes—this subjective variables—as the main factor for promoting the occurrence of class consciousness and class identification, and thereby opens up a channel of dialogue between the class identification of structuralism and constructivism.

b) The Genetic Theory of Class Identification in the View of Constructivism

Some scholars consider that class consciousness is constructed by the definition and publicity of intellectuals. Alfred Schutz continued the tradition of phenomenology. He particularly described the concepts of “the world life” and “intersubjectivity” and regarded them as the core category of phenomenological sociology to discuss. In his view, the world of life is to be understood, interpreted and constructed in accordance with the common sense of people, and the common sense originates from the sociality of people (see Crossley, 1996, pp.73-98).

His theoretical perspective was adopted by many communication researchers and was applied in the media effects research. The relatively prominent theory is the “media reality” theory. This theory starts from The Problem of Reality by Schutz (1962), and is further elaborated by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann that divides the social reality into three kinds of objective reality, symbolic reality/media reality and subjective reality. The objective reality is often treated as facts and judged through common sense by people. The symbolic reality/media reality is the symbolic representation of the objective reality, which is the content conveyed through media. The subjective reality is the views and knowledge of the world formed in the human mind on the basis of combining the above two realities, that is individual consciousness. In the interactive process of the human mind and the outside world, the social reality constructed by the mass media through the media reality continuously affect, define and modify the value and behavior of the individual, and potentially becomes an increasingly important reference scenario framework of modern social culture (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).
The cultivation theory on television communication since the 1970s further confirms the important role of the media reality in the context of modern social culture (Artwick, 2004, p. 169). Some researchers hold that the contemporary mass media is trying to continuously construct the ideal models of different classes in order to make members of society get into the “myths” of not being able to establish an objective image of the others (Aitchison & Lewis, 2003, p.18-24).

c) The Genetic Theory of Class Identification of Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu (1989) stressed that the goal of explaining the deep structure of social life and its regeneration mechanism can only be achieved by adopting a dialectic “structural constructivism” or “constructive structuralism”. This theory can be summed up as that the structure brings up the habitus, and the habitus decides the practice, and then the practice regenerates the structure (Bourdieu, 1989).

Bourdieu put forward that the “society” is a “social space”. The social structure stipulated by the three dimensions of social space – the amount of capital, capital composition ration and the historical track of the capital evolution – can internalize the unique class habitus of people. And the class refers to the people whose positions are close with each other in social space. He pointed out that the differences in lifestyles in fact reflected the struggles between the classes and the relationship of domination and obedience among the different class habitus. The class taste not only reflects the differences of objective class positions which deeply hides behind the class habitus, but also reflects the struggling relationship among the classes. It is in this struggle that the people are aware of their own class position (see Danahay, 2004, p.106-113).

Bourdieu applied the concept of class habitus that tried to get rid of the confusion of determinism. However, because the class habitus arises through the external objective class structure internalizing into the mental structure of people, as for the questions of where the initiative of the mental structure comes from and how it
becomes a dynamic power, there was no clear explanation.

3. Discussion: the Psychological Mechanisms of Identification and the Identification of Middle Class

Taking all these above points of view, it is not difficult to find that, in terms of the relationships between the individuals and society, the identification of people is the continuum posed by social identity and self-identity. The so-called self-identity refers to the personal perception of one person on his position occupied in the social class structure (Jackman & Jackman, 1973). The social identity refers to the common identity of a group. Because the self-identity mixes together various components of the social identity of an individual, which is the combination of various elements of social identity on the individual (Brewer & Hewstone, 2004, p. 198), it is relatively more representative, that is why I choose to research from the perspective of self-identity.

In terms of the definition of “self-identity”, it must distinguish between the following two sets of concept – a) self and otherness; b) similarities and differences. Firstly, people only position themselves and generate identification when they need to distinguish themselves with others. Self-identification actually involves the relationship between self and the otherness, namely the relationship between self and the reference (see Bell, 2002, p.117). Secondly, self-identification needs to be built on the comparison between the self and the otherness. The same characteristics of an individual in different periods or the similarities between the members of a group in fact constitute the differences with other individuals or other groups (Jenkins, 1996, pp. 3-4). Therefore, the collective self-identity easily results in the exclusive emotions, because the representation by people on the groups they belong to is always built on the description of the characteristics of other groups.

Similarly, the self-identification of class identity of social members needs to be
finished under the premise of supervising the otherness. Here the “otherness” is changeable according to the process of distinguishing “similarities and differences”. Because there are the unities and oppositions of the “similarities and differences”, the self-identification process of social members also includes the process of “convergence” and “exclusion”. When directly establishing the convergence process of the middle class, the “otherness” that the individual members of society face is the person who has similar objective social status with them. While establishing the exclusion process of the other classes, the “otherness” refers to the person in different classes which are in alien with each other. The self-identification of a class completes indirectly through the exclusion of alien classes, but it will eventually achieve a convergence process to gain the behavior style of some other class who has the consistent knowledge and emotion with the class, so as to construct the implementation mechanism of the behavior.

Therefore, in the completion of self-identification, the individuals cannot put aside the process of feeling, selecting and absorbing a variety of information given by the outside world. As the medium of disseminating all kinds of information, mass media indeed plays an important role in the genetic mechanism of the class self-identification of social members. As the previous theory has indicated from multiple perspectives that an initiative is required for the external objective structure internalizing to the mental structure of people. In my opinion, humans are not the passive recipients of outside information, as well as the production calibrated by the objective economic status. Faced with a complex outside environment, people have the capacity to actively contact, screen, select and critically interpret the information. Through the critical interpretation of the media, the individual members can form the observation of the entire society and their own class status, and thus affecting the self class identification, wherein the ability of critical interpretation can be summarized as “media literacy”.

The class hierarchy theory of Marxism defined the middle class as the intergrade
between the basic classes in the two-dimensional class structure (see Hepp IV, 2003, p. 14). Since then many scholars (i.e. Dahrendorf, 1959; Poulantzas, 1973; Wright, 1976) regarded the middle class as the class between the basic classes in position. Due to the particular position in the class structure, the class consciousness and class identification of the middle class has been considered to be prone to encounter the risk of not being able to rely on any side with swing between the two major classes. Lederer has pointed out that the medium position between the two classes is “a negative characteristic rather than definite technical function, is the social mark of the salaried employees and establishes their social character in their own consciousness and in the estimation of the community” (cited from Bell, 1976, p. 69). In other words, the class identification of the middle class is actually formed mainly from the rest of the identity after the exclusion of the identity of the non-middle classes. Based on this definition, it can be seen that the exclusion process in the formation mechanism of the class identity of the middle class is more important than the direct convergence process. The description of the “reference groups” in the path of “relative deprivation” adopted by the current Chinese scholars also implies this logic. So in this research, I think the examination of the recognition of alien classes of the middle class and its influence by the media is more important than the examination of their definition of self-image. The discovery part of this research is also unfolding from this perspective (for details see Chapter 4).

SECTION 2 MEDIA EXPOSURE AND CLASS IDENTIFICATION

1. The Multi-dimensional Angles of Media

In this section, the role of the media in the recognition mechanism will be pointed out.

Firstly, in terms of the point of view of structuralism, the mass media is an important social resource, which constitutes a part of the cultural capital. The volume
of the cultural capital could greatly affect the level of the participation in the market competition of the social members and the process of their upward mobility (Miller, 2009, p.154). However, many scholars merely took the institutionalized education as the only indicator of cultural capital, ignoring the reality that the mass media had assumed more and more social responsibility in providing environmental monitoring and secondary education. Similarly, as a social resource, the media field is also undergoing the severe shock brought on by the structure transformation which is a struggle between the government and the market.

Secondly, in terms of the point of view of constructivism, the media communication has the function of providing the “media reality” for the social members. In the Chinese society with increasingly serious social differentiation, two different social reference systems (i.e. the image of otherness) are easy to come out in the media reality. The dislocation of the reference system will make the “sense of relative deprivation” of social members increase, thereby enhancing the “stratification consciousness”.

2. Media Literacy is a Multidimensional Concept

Media literacy refers to the capacity of the public to interpret and criticize a variety of media information and the ability to use media information to serve their personal life and social development, specifically including the ability to select, understand, evaluate, query, create and criticize the media content. It originated in the areas of education, with strong color of criticism and ideology shaping, and then gradually developed into a research framework with multiple functions including assessment, education and the launching of social movement in the pan-democratization movement, violent resistance movement and consumerism movement (Alexander, 2007, pp.1-8).

Until now, there is no one standardized and unified framework system for the assessment of the media literacy. But many scholars (or institutions) have been trying
to put forward their own analytical framework, such as the core concept of the media phenomenon of the British Film Institute (Silverblatt & Eliceiri, 1997, p.69), the education system of Key Aspects advanced by Buckingham (2003), Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (see Riedling, 2007, p.6), and the dimension evaluation strategy of Stanley J. Baran (2011). All the above research models can be summarized as the dimensions of the assessment of media literacy which covers the investigation and the monitoring of the capacity of the audience in accessing, analysis, evaluation and dissemination of the information. It mainly includes the breadth, depth and initiative of the media exposure and the indicators of prejudging, filtering and evading the mandatory effect of the outside world.

It needs to be pointed out that the research of media literacy was born accompanied by the development of the media industry, and so its development is closely related with the development level and the openness degree of the socio-economic and the degree of media industrialization (Kubey, 2001, pp. 73-74). In China, because the openness of the media market has only lasted for more than twenty years until now, and thus the research of media literacy is still in an elementary stage with the situation expressed in the follow three aspects.

Firstly, the current research of the media literacy is focusing on a young audience, especially teenagers. Compared with the research of the media literacy for teenagers, there was little research on the media literacy for adults, which makes the current research of the critical interpretation ability on the media of the adult lacking. However, the middle class in China are mainly constituted by the adults in terms of their occupation and income (Rong, 2011), thus the media literacy research on the adults needs to be further explored.

Secondly, the journalism education has been limited to the cultivation of professional education for media practitioners, which makes the ability of utilizing media only being mastered by part of the professionals. For the public, the media literacy education still needs to be improved to enhance the critical interpretation
ability of the media in the range of the whole society (Rong, 2011).

Thirdly, the media management departments are lacking the attention and effective measures on the media literacy education, which is in sharp contrast to the strict control on the releasing of media resources by the administrative management departments. It results in the distortion of the middle class on their recognition of the alien classes and the expansion of their sense of relative deprivation, which is unfavorable for maintaining social stability in the context of the increasingly obvious stratification (Rong, 2011).

SECTION 3 RESEARCH QUESTION

1. The “Middle Class Identification” is a Local Phenomenon

In the comprehensive reading of the research results of the Chinese scholars, it can be basically identified that the “middle class identification” in China is a social reality with regional characteristics.

Firstly, due to the trend of uneven regional development in China, the people in the western undeveloped regions are more prone to have a sense of relative deprivation than the people in the eastern developed regions, and thus have lower identification of their social status (Li et al, 2005, p. 84). Selecting Beijing – this eastern metropolis – as the research site is conductive to control the relative deprivation caused by the regional differences in order to guarantee the research validity and reliability.

Secondly, taking the class structure of the resident population into consideration, the amount of people with relatively more income in Beijing is larger than that of the other second-tier cities, where its income and consumption levels are in convergence with the world-class rich. And there is a huge number of relatively affluent middle
class in Beijing. At present, the proportion of the middle class in the social class structure of Beijing has exceeded 40% with about 5.4 million people. This proportion is higher than the national average of about 23%, which is closely related to the economic and cultural advantages of Beijing as an international metropolis. The studying of the middle class in Beijing is convenient and necessary.

Moreover, Beijing is the culture center of China. Since the originator of the Chinese journalism history, Beijing had always been the center of the Chinese press. Since the liberation of the country, Beijing has gone through several times of reform in the field of politics and public opinion and has been in the lead in the media marketization process. The current media field of Beijing gathers the outstanding media practitioners from the whole country. It is appropriate to research the media literacy of the social members in Beijing.

In summary, the regional economic and social structures, cultural ecology and media publicity combine together to constitute the generating system of the “class self-identification” of the middle class. Due to the different levels of economic development and cultural traditions, the forms of the generating system are also different, and thus leading to the different generating mechanism of the class self-identification.

2. Determination of the Research Questions

The initial queries were proposed in the second section of the first chapter (p 15) that what the class identification is, what the mechanism of the class identification is, what the factors that play an influence in the process of class identification are, whether the mass media is ranked among these factors, how the mass media affects this process as one of the factors. Through the above literature review, these initial queries can be modified to make the scope of the research clear. Firstly, it is necessary to clarify the

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meaning of social identity.

“Class identification” can be briefly defined as the subjective judgment, evaluation and recognition of the individuals of the social members on their own social class status. “The class identification of the middle class” means that whether the people who are located in the middle position of the objective socio-economic status (i.e. the “objective middle class”) recognize themselves as the middle class.

The mechanisms of the class identification can be divided into two parts of social mechanism and mental mechanism. The discussion of the research will be focused on both of the two field of mental mechanism, the social mechanism focuses on the influence of the media management system (especially the government) on the middle class identification, and the mental mechanism mainly includes the process of monitoring and convergence of the similar class groups as well as the process of screening and exclusion of alien classes.

So the research questions can be identified as:

What are the factors that affect the types of media exposure of the middle class in China?

What role does media literacy play on the middle class in China with regards to the processes of convergence of similar class and exclusion of alien classes?

In what ways does the force on media exerted by the Chinese political environment affect the media exposure of the middle class and its class identification?
In Section 2 of Chapter 1, I introduced why to choose the grounded theory as the research method in my study. Now I will describe the grounded theory in detail. Grounded theory has become the most popular method of collecting and analyzing the data in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 584). The process of the grounded theory is shown as follows (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 585).

### Table 2  Processes and Outcomes in Grounded Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Research questions</td>
<td>4a Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Theoretical sampling</td>
<td>5a Categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Collecting data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Coding</td>
<td>7a Hypotheses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Constant comparison</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Saturate categories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Exploring relationships between categories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Theoretical sampling</td>
<td>11a Substantive theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Collecting data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Saturate categories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Testing hypotheses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Collection and analysis of data in other settings</td>
<td>12a Formal theory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The grounded theory method starts with a general research question, the research enters the survey site to collect and analyze data, make a theoretical sample of the relevant respondent, collect and analyze data to discover some concepts, compare the concepts to establish some categories, explore between the categories to establish the hypotheses, then continue to theoretically sample and collect data, test hypotheses until theory saturation. “Concepts and categories are perhaps the key elements in grounded theory. Indeed, it is sometimes suggested that, as a qualitative data analysis strategy, it works better for generating categories than theory” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 585). There are still some arguments that the grounded theory does not begin with exact hypotheses, but in the accordance with the localization characteristics of the Chinese middle class and the lack of current existing research on it (see section 2 of chapter 1). The grounded theory is the most appropriate method in my research.

2. The Method to Enter the Site and Contact with the Respondents

The survey of this research is Beijing.

Beijing is the capital of China, as well as the political and cultural center of the country. The resident population of Beijing is 19.619 million, among which the household population is 12.578 million. The no-farm population accounts for 78.75% of the household population. The proportions of the three types of industry are 0.9, 24.0 and 75.1 in separate. There are 5.87 million employees. The annual per capita GDP is 11218 dollars.

Until the end of 2010, there were 259 types of newspaper in Beijing with a total printing number of 7.81 billion.

There are 3030 types of journals with the total printing number of 1.005 billion.

There are 155152 types of books published annually.

There are 24 sets of public radio programs with 236465 hours of annual public
broadcasting time.

There are 27 sets of public TV programs with 224265 hours of annual public broadcasting time.  

The above data shows that Beijing is an area with concentrated media resources.

a) The Operational Definition of the Concept of Middle Class in Beijing

Because this study focuses on the relationship between the subjective class identification of social member individuals and the media exposure under the premise of specific objective social class status, it is necessary to firstly make a definition of the standard of the objective class position of the middle class. After comparing the definitions of the concept from a number of Chinese and foreign scholars, I decided to adopt a theoretical model proposed by Professor Liu Xin in 2007. The reason is that I agree with the exposition of Liu Xin that it does not make sense to define the middle class just according to the relative share of the valuable social resources because the middle class defined as this exists in any society (Liu, 2007, p.2). The definition of middle class needs to reflect its position in the specific social economic and political structure of China. The another reason I adopted this model is that the class analysis structure of Professor Liu also contains such a basic logic that the middle class is the class located between the typical classes divided into two basic parts, which means that only when the social members are differentiated into authorities to the powerless and the property owners to the proletarian workers by the control power of resources, the position of middle class can be revealed. The middle class members can only establish their own class-identification in the process of excluding the characteristics of the identity of alien classes and getting the convergence of the classes with the similar characteristics. This is consistent with the mutual relations between convergence and exclusion of the recognition that I described in the second chapter

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The theoretical foundation of this model is that, in current Chinese society, the public power and the market power constitute the main dynamic foundation for class differentiation. The public power can be further conceptualized as: a) the power as a social and public affairs manager, b) the right to represent the people in possession of public assets. The market power can be conceptualized as: a) the ability to put the personal economic capital property into the actual in the market competition, b) the ability to put the personal human capital into actual transactions. The public power is the primary motivation factor taking precedence over the market power, and the market is embedded in existing political and authority structures (Leng, pp. 85-90). The national cadres in China can be roughly divided into several categories from the top to the bottom, including the national central committee, ministerial and provincial-level cadres, cadres of departments under a provincial government, division-level and county-level cadres, section-level and township cadres, clerks and officers (Zhong, 2003, pp.96-97). In Liu Xin’s model, the division-level and county-level cadres are included in the middle class in China.

**Table 3  The Chinese Urban Middle-class Structure Model by Liu Xin**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution of Class Members in Multi-standard</th>
<th>Percentage in the Total Number of the Society</th>
<th>Percentage in the Number of Middle Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.Division-level party and government institutions cadre</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The section-level person (or equivalent) in charge of state-owned enterprises.</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Business owner with 2-9 employees.</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Manager of private enterprises with more than 10 employees.</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Technical personnel with middle-level title or above.</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>19.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Section-level party and government institutions grass-root cadre.</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>7.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Below section-level person (or equivalent) in charge of state-owned enterprises.</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The model of Liu Xin objectively reflects the class structure of the middle class, including the relationship between the resources procession and social system. I will designate the constitution of the interview subjects of this research on the basis of this model.

**b) Sampling**

As the “non-probability sampling methods can be divided into two board types: convenient, or purposive. Most qualitative sampling methods are purposive in nature because we usually approach the sampling problem with a specific plan or purpose in mind” (Bowers, House & Qwens, 2011, p.320), I chose the purposive sampling as my sampling method in the research.

In accordance with the purposive sampling, I selected the target respondents through personal relationships. For example, the respondent 01, who is a section-level clerk in the municipal government of Beijing, meets the characteristic of the sixth type of the model above - section-level party and government institutions grass-root cadre. He is my friend, and he is a perfect match for my field of research. Consequently, I chose part of the samples by utilizing the interpersonal relationships and took into account the age and sex ratio of the respondents except for the demands of the class status and the occupation type listed in the model.

Moreover, I also selected the respondents through “snowball sampling”, which “begins with a person or persons who provide names of other persons for the sample when an appropriate target population is not readily identifiable” (Dantzker & Hunter, p.115). Such as, I got to know the respondent 20 who is one of the agents of the
respondent 02 in my first batch of interviews, and the respondent 20 owns his private advertising company of about 20 people which meets the characteristic of the fourth style in the model - manager of private enterprises with more than 10 employees.

Through these two ways, I have a total of direct access to 21 middle class members. For the information in details of the respondents, see Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

Based on the above model, I initially identified about 20 people as the total interview samples with the specific distribution as follows.

**Table 4  Type Distribution of the Class Position of the Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partition of different class members based on Multi-standard</th>
<th>Theoretical frequency</th>
<th>Number of adjustments</th>
<th>Percentage in the total middle class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Division-level party and government institutions cadre</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The section-level person (or equivalent) in charge of state-owned enterprises.</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Business owner with 2-9 employees.</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Manager of private enterprises with more than 10 employees.</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Technical personnel with middle-level title or above.</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Section-level party and government institutions grass-root cadre.</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Below section-level person (or equivalent) in charge of state-owned enterprises.</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Staff with administrative level</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Management of private enterprises and managers of small enterprises.</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Technical personnel with junior title or no title.</td>
<td>8.71</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Data Collecting Method

When collecting data, I applied qualitative interview, because the process of qualitative interview has flexibility, which is the most suitable for grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 28-29). My interview was divided into two stages. The first part was about the media contact habits. The early stage of this part was usually relatively objective with obvious structured features, the questions were like this: “Which way do you prefer to get information, through TV, newspapers and journals, or the Internet? Is there some other access to information?” And other close ended questions. Later the interview was a gradual transition to open ended questions, such as: “Do you listen to, watch or browse foreign or Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan media? Why are you interested in foreign media? What do you think the credibility of the current mainstream media in China?” And so on, while trying to cover the various aspects of the concept of “media literacy” as well as highlighting the most important aspects in the opinion of the respondents in accordance with their natural reaction.

The second part was about the opinions of middle class on class identity. I first did the guiding questions that “Do you think social stratification has emerged in current society in China? What is the obvious stratification in your opinion?” This is a semi-open-ended question to give sufficient space for respondents to provide the information of social stratification that they think is important, while is helpful for making the interview quickly enter the discourse context of the theme of “social stratification”. After this question, based on the information provided by respondents, I continued to ask the respondent about his (her) judgments for his (her) own class, the description of alien classes and its sources, the understanding of middle class, the feelings and opinions about the reasons of social stratification and the degree of expansion of social income differences, the judgments on the possibility of upward mobility of himself (herself) and so on. Such questions were also open at the beginning. For example, when asking the “alien classes”, I firstly asked that, “How much do you know about the upper classes in the society?” However, with in-depth
data analysis, according to the needs of theoretical sampling, the questions gradually transferred into semi-structured, such as: “What channels you get such a judgment through? Do you have personal contacts with them? How much of a gap do you think exists between yourself and them in economics?” and so on. (for the list of the interview questions, see Appendix 4 at the end of the thesis)

In addition, when analyzing the relationship between the nature of media texts and the formation of media reality, because the publishing process of media contents are monitored by the State authorities through the means of reviewing and publishing the executive order, I collected the information to literature analysis and consulted for some questions with director Mr Huang of the Municipal Publicity Department and director Mr Shao of the chief editor office of Beijing Daily, in order to learn the guiding roles of these administrative means on mass media in reality.

4. Theoretical Sampling

The grounded theory is different from the quantitative research in sampling method. Rather than adapting probability sampling and a predetermined sampling plan, this research takes the theoretical sampling that, based on the concepts emerged in the data analysis during the research process, through the constant comparison, selecting relevant information to enrich the properties and dimensions of the concept and developing the theory. In theoretical sampling, what is extracted is the events or phenomenon related with concept and development of theories rather than the respondents themselves (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.202). This sampling process only ends in the case of theoretical saturation.

There is no special requirement of this sampling method on the initial samples, so I entrusted my friends to randomly sample 5 people of middle class to do the interview in accordance with the given type of occupation. Once the interview started, the subsequent sampling is required according to the needs of the theory development. For example, I found in the analysis of data after the interview with “01”and “03” that,
they have more access to the lower classes due to their nature of work, and thus their understanding of the people of lower classes less relied on media communication, but they have relatively vague understanding of the group for the upper social strata which mainly depends on the mass media. While after the interview with “02”, it can be found that, due to her career as an attorney who mainly acts as agent of intellectual property, and thus she can come into contact with a lot of upper class people in daily life and she has a more comprehensive knowledge of this part of people with getting rid of the stereotype created by the mass media. But she does not have knowledge of the plight of the lower groups which her understanding of them mainly comes from some column and news on the TV.

Therefore, I took the “the cognitive channels of alien classes” as a standard of theoretical sampling and did the two-dimensional division on this base that: for the respondents, whether their knowledge of the upper social classes and the lower classes is mainly from their personal contacts or mainly from the media publicity?

Through the first phase of the interview, it can be found that most of the middle class, especially the people who compete in the market with technical and human capital, tend to rely on mass media to gain knowledge of the upper class and the lower class. Part of the respondents, because of their own work relationships or inter-generational transferring factors, can achieve the communication with the upper class who control the public power and marker property (such as “08” and “13”), but this part of people usually have less contract with groups of lower class.

Are there any people that have personal contracts both with the upper and lower classes at the same time? With that purpose, I find the media industry related person “05”, professional photographer “11”, and legal adviser “14” in legal aid center and so on. Combing the interviews of these respondents, it can be found that the comparison between their own recognition of the image of alien classes in reality and the contents of media communication make their own media literacy distinguish with the characteristics of ordinary middle class. This part will be analyzed in detail in Chapter
Through the above theoretical sampling, I obtained the model of cognitive channels of alien classes represented by the following table. I thought the significance of different channels on the media literacy and the judgment of self-class has been found with theoretical saturation, so I stopped theoretical sampling.

### Table 5 Theoretical Sampling in Two-dimensions: the Cognitive Channel of Alien Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition of the lower classes: from the personal contact</th>
<th>Upper Class</th>
<th>Media-Dependent Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media-weakening Type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 17</td>
<td>01 06 15 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of the upper classes: from the personal contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 11</td>
<td>03 10 16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 13</td>
<td>04 09 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 20</td>
<td>07 12 21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LowerClass Media-Dependent Type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of the lower classes: from the media publicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. **Data Analysis Method**

Different from other research methods, in grounded theory method, the data analysis is not arranged after the data collecting is completed, but at the same time with the collection of information. The main data analysis method is coding, including three stages of open coding, axial coding and selective coding. In open coding, the concept and its properties and dimensions can be found in the data. In axial coding, taking certain areas as “axis”, the sub category can be related with the category in the level of properties and dimensions. In selective coding, the central category can be
determined and the theory can be refined (Bornheim, 2000, p.77). For example, in the open coding, I found the various cognitive channels of alien classes had influence on media literacy and class self identity, thus I further took the category of “cognitive channels of alien classes” as an axis, associating it with the sub categories of “upper medium-dependent type”, “lower medium-dependent type”, “comprehensive medium-dependent type” and “medium weakening type”, and finally I associated the “cognitive channels of alien classes” with the obtaining of class identity, class closure, media exposure in depth and other categories, constituting the central category of “medium dependent”.

SECTION 2 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

A high-quality qualitative research should continue to check and avoid the validity and reliability threat (Maxwell, 2005, pp. 113-116). I adopted the following strategies and techniques to check the validity and reliability threat.

First, I tried to improve the credibility of the research through systematically choosing the subjects and patterns with different and rival explanations (see Karim, 2002, pp. 54-60). I will report the analysis process during the process of analyzing, in order to show how I maintain introspection and reflection in the whole research process, so that making the results confessional.

Second, looking for negative cases and fixing the conclusions through the appearance of negative cases and evidence.

Third, taking prolonged engagement and persistent observation. I made a return visit to three of the respondents. And because all the respondents are in my daily communication range, the long-term understanding and communication substitutes this part of function to a certain extent.

Fourth, taking triangulation. That is, studying the same social phenomenon from
multiple perspectives (see Karim, 2002, pp. 54-60). I first collected data from multiple perspectives which included both the interviews with the middle class and the interviews with the information provider and other literature. In addition, peer debriefing and member checks can also be regarded as the triangulation. Because I have used a voice recorder, there is no need to ask the respondents to recheck the accuracy of the original resources. The cases about the peer debriefing and member checks for the preliminary study have been described in the above and will not be repeated here.
CHAPTER 4 THE COGNITIVE CHANNEL OF ALIEN CLASSES

SECTION 1 STRATIFICATION CONSCIOUSNESS: ACCEPTANCE AND RESISTANCE

The exploration of causes of class identification must be based on the description of the status of class identification, in which the primary is making clear about the status of the cognition of class stratification in the mind of middle-class groups. In this research, I first learned about their perceived strength of the social stratification and the basis of stratification.

Social stratification is not an established concept, and there is no definition of it on any specialized executive order issued by the government department, thus the understanding of social stratification is entirely from the perceptions of the respondents themselves.

It can be said that there has been a very high degree of perception on the topic of “social stratification” among the middle class in Beijing. When asked the question that “do you think our current society can be stratified into different classes”, all respondents were clear that,

“Certainly it can be stratified.” (respondent 01)

“I think so.”(respondent 05)

“Yes, it should have already appeared the stratification.” (respondent 12)

“The stratification is obvious.” (respondent 13)
“Are you speaking of class? It shouldn't be class. The social stratification today is somehow different from the class before. It is completely on another level which should not be called class. It is a social stratification of more social levels.” (respondent 17)

However, when being asked that “what are the factors or standards to distinguish between various stratification in your impression”, the majority of respondents actually reflected a kind of binary value system with the opposition between the “self” and “otherness”. They can clearly feel and point out that our society is generally stratified according to the economic income (wealth/assets), but also expressed that they personally did not want to use the concept of economic stratification, and thus showed the doubt on the rationality of vertical social stratification.

“Usually it can be distinguished easily by fortune. But it is not my way to stratify. But I have to admit sometimes fortune is the most obvious standard to distinguish people to different classes.” (respondent 05)

“Well, it is hard to say. I don’t think it is reasonable to divide people by their incomes. I think in modern society, we should not divide people into upper, or middle, or lower classes. You can only divide people in different parts. But there is no high and low distinction between the people of different parts.” (respondent 01)

“I do not think there is a definite concept of the phenomenon (social hierarchy). But I believe it could be separated into different levels from the culture. The cultural atmosphere I am contacting with in the city Beijing now should be in a certain level, but if I would be in touch with the weak social groups, it must be in another level. But if you stick to separate it into different levels, I do not like the standard we adopt now. I do not like the way that we separate the whole society into different levels artificially. I think we can change it by some measures, as we know there are weak social groups even in the developed countries which are in a poor living level. I really do not like the way people separate Beijing by luxury or poverty.” (respondent 03)
“Take China for example, we distinguish different social class by incomes. However there are many explanations, such as upper-middle-down pattern, waist drum pattern, spindle pattern, etc. But I do not think these theories are good enough.” (respondent 14)

When talking about the standards of stratification, the respondents clearly differentiated their own views and external social statements, and they showed a great deal of rejection to the standards of stratification in accordance with the economic income which they thought were the most popular standards in current society. What is the reason of the phenomenon? If in accordance with the classic perceptive of structuralism, the class/stratum is originally and directly determined by its objective socio-economic status, so there should be no problem of inconsistency of self-identity and social identity. While if following the interpretation of constructivism perspective, the sense of social stratification and self-identity arises from the sense of relative deprivation of individual members of society, and the sense of relative deprivation because they fell into the status of relative deprivation. In the process of social transformation, there are two factors that have led to people falling into the status of relative deprivation; one is the loss of vested interests under the traditional conditions of socialism, and the other is the failure to obtain the expected reform income (Liu, 2002), where the relationship can be shown below.

Table 6  Status and Relative Deprivation and Class Consciousness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life changes in the reform</th>
<th>Status of relative deprivation</th>
<th>Sense of relative deprivation</th>
<th>Class consciousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lost the vested interest gained before the reform</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not get the expectation interest after the reform</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this link, however, almost none of the respondents considered themselves losing interest in the process of current social change and resulting in falling into the
status of relative deprivation. All of the respondents admitted the income gap in China is getting wider, but no one thought that they had become the losers in this process.

“If we look at it overall, I have actually gained some of the benefits. Why? The number of the poor is increasing, and the income of the public functionaries is actually relatively stable; therefore, I stay the same, but some people have fallen behind.” (respondent 08)

“Let me think… In fact, I made detours. I may have been paid more than my current income if I had stayed with my former company, but I rely on my own efforts to get something now (business, starting a company). There’s nothing fair or unfair, and social conditions are like this. Then I have to get my income or other things I want through my own efforts. Of course I cannot be vulnerable groups. I did not fall into the lower class because of social changes. If I did not benefit, it proves that I did not seize this market opportunity and I cannot blame others. Although I think I should be better, now it is good enough.” (respondent 13)

“Well, you should take the problem like this. Many people at my age are suffering a hard life because of being laid-off and retirement. I have a good job which gives me a stable income and welfare. All of my children have jobs and there is no one with serious illness in my family. It's pretty good.” (respondent 17)

“I don’t think so. But I should place myself in the position of common career path: I will get more wages if I promote to upper class. I have synchronized with our society. I may not become the victim of reform and opening up like my parents. More and more people can benefit from stock and finance, but it does not have a big impact on me. I should live my own good life and climb up my own stairs. I never feel I am treated unfairly.” (respondent 05)

It can be seen from the above answers that the middle-level cadres of the party and government institutions and the technical managers occupying the traditional large and medium-sized state-owned manufacturing enterprises (respondents 08 and 17) both considered that they had successfully got rid of the adverse effects of the restructuring of society and occupied a certain social resource in the new social
pattern. The manager of private enterprise such (respondent 13) expressed satisfaction on the earnings expectations benefited from the market reforms. The professional person (respondent 05) also was satisfied with the situation that their social status can be maintained stably with a trend of steady improvement.

In the total of 21 respondents, 15 of them started work after 1990, which occupies 71% of the total. They engaged in non-manual types of work when directly entering enterprises and institutions after finishing university education, and thus for them, the problem of losing vested interests under the condition of traditional socialism did not exist.

In the remaining 6 respondents, the majority had not yet attained a degree of high school education before the advent of the tide of social reforms, not to mention accessing higher education, most of which are farmers, industrial workers, unemployed youth (only respondent 14 was recommended as the “worker-peasant-soldier” student on the Beijing University of Foreign Languages, learning English major, graduated in 1977). According to the study of Victor Nee (1989, 1991, 1996), education is a key factor in measuring human capital, and thus their abilities to resist risks brought from cultural capital and technology capital (that the abilities to avoid falling into the bottom of society in the fierce market transformation process) were in a similar level and were all very weak. However, until 1990, these 6 respondents had completed university education (except respondent 19), so the process of human capital accumulation and reforms of the 20 respondents were in simultaneous development. In fact, almost all respondents considered that they were in a rising process of social status, which shows that, through comparison on the historical dimension, they achieved the conclusion that they did not fall into the relative deprivation status in the social transformation.

But on such a basis, all respondents were still able to clearly feel that the society is stratified in gradient and unanimously agreed that this stratified trend is becoming increasingly obvious. Does this contrast constitute a challenge to the class
consciousness theory of structuralism? In the interview process, I found that there is no error about the class consciousness process concluded by the schools of structuralism that the status of relative deprivation can indeed lead to the sense of relative deprivation and thus gives rise to the occurrence of class consciousness. But the sense of relative deprivation not only come from the status of relative deprivation, because during the occurrence of the sense of relative deprivation, the interference of external factors make the sense of relative deprivation of middle class occur in the non-relative deprivation status, the characterization of which is the divergence of the social stratification standards between the views of the respondents themselves and the views of society mentioned in the beginning of this section.

SECTION 2 THE COGNITIVE CHANNEL OF ALIEN CLASSES: CLASS SEGMENTATION AND STATUS ATTAINMENT

As already pointed out above, the recognition process of the middle class first relied on the exclusion of the identity of alien classes, the investigation of this section will commence from the effects of recognition of alien classes.

We have already known through the description of the previous section that no matter whether the middle class accepts or resists the economic income as the standard to divide social classes – in fact, no matter what the stratification standard is – they can always feel that there are people in the levels higher or lower than themselves, and no matter whether they accept the concept of “middle class”, they always identify themselves as belonging to “the middle layer”:

“Me? Of course not at the bottom of the society, a little better than the wage earners; I do not have countless money, and I am not an official. Perhaps I am in the middle class of the society.” (respondent 19)
“For me, I think I am in the middle class, living in a way that is neither a poor one nor a luxury one.” (respondent 03)

“Some people are very rich. Some are decent, not very rich. But they do not have any restriction on doing daily shopping. Others like me, I am not rich but I am not poor either. The lowest level people are very poor. They even cannot afford their living.” (respondent 16)

“I maybe…it's hard to say…But I'm sure, I'm not the bottom of society. But…uh…In sense of my income, I belong to lower-middle class, but according to society status, I may be the middle class, if we just talk about education background, I should belong to the middle-upper class.” (respondent 02)

It can be seen through the answers of the respondents that the process of excluding alien classes is still the primary process for them to seek self-identification of class identity. They firstly differentiated the “upper class with money or power” and “the lower class with no money or power” according to the social stratification structure in their own minds, and then sought their positions in the rest class space. This is inconsistent with the inference of the class structure theory of Marxism previously described and the recognition process that the exclusion of alien classes is prior and more important than the convergence of the same class I have pointed.

Since they considered themselves located in the “middle” position, then how did they know which people were in a “higher” and “lower” lever than them? And how they compared themselves with the two alien classes during the process of self class classification?

1. The Model of Cognitive Channel of Alien Classes

After the respondents describing the general social stratification impression in their mind, I often asked them two questions instead of rushing to ask them their self-positioning. One question is what kind of person is in higher level than you in
your opinion and do you have knowledge of them, the other question is what kind of person is in lower level than you in your opinion and do you have knowledge of them. Normally, at this stage, the respondents came to a halt to think. This is not because it is difficult to describe the people with “higher” or “lower” lever than themselves, but because the thought of having knowledge of the people made them feel a little guilty. The majority of the respondents modestly said after thinking that they did not have really deep understanding of the people they described and then cautiously expressed that their description was just the impression they had, but there was also somebody immediately and confidently proposed that “Of course I know, because I just come from the rural side. Our village also has living level difference. And it has been becoming bigger and bigger over recent years” (respondent 16). According to the differences of the cognitive resources, the respondents can be divided into the following types.

a) The Comprehensive Media-dependent Type

It is an extreme type that the respondents completely relied on the mass media to get the main recognitions of the upper and lower alien classes with no adequate and direct contact with the alien classes due to several factors that they located in the middle class and communicated with the people at the same class in daily life, and also their family structures were relatively stable with a lack of large structural changes among parents and peer relatives or friends.

They can describe the approximate "status symbol” of the upper classes and tended to generally use "poor economic conditions" to summarize the image of the lower classes with blinding sympathy instead of a real understanding of the life of lower classes.

Although it is an extreme case, it has also appeared in many cases (6 respondents) in my interview, particularly among the young professional and technical personnel. And the class identity of this group also shows specificity and representativeness on
its characteristics, which will be analyzed in the following.

\textbf{b) The Upper Class Media-Dependent Type}

This is the most common type of middle-class groups. They either experienced hard work before entering the middle-class queue or concerned for the underprivileged in a long term or passively lived in the internal space of the lower classes...In short, they have maintained close ties with the people of the lower classes in their own ways, and thus have the right to speak of the lives of underlying. But on the other side, they are similar with the vast majority of members of society, harboring curiosity to the “invisible upper classes”, taking delight in talking about their way of life without really expanding communications with them. Therefore, the groups of the upper media-dependent type are only partially dependent on the media, or saying, partially trusting the media. They need to resort to the media to obtain awareness about the groups “higher than me”, but in the recognition of the groups “lower than me”, they are often contemptuous of the media. With diverse identity and complex cognition structure of the representatives, this type is the mainstream of middle class in current society of China.

\textbf{c) The Lower Class Media-Dependent Type}

This type of middle class is just the opposite to the “upper class media-dependent type” that they have a more realistic understanding of the upper classes rather than the lower classes. They may not control a lot of organizations or economic resources themselves without large power or wealth, but they can maintain relatively close contact with the upper classes and get involved in their life and work, so they were sometimes very sharp to point out that the description of a television program for the psychology of the wealthy real estate consumers “was a joke” (respondent 02), but made unclear whether the “low-income groups defined by the government include white-collar workers who just work one or two years” or not (respondent 13). They have been quite rusty about the picture of life of most people in lower classes and can
only hear a word or two about them from the economic news.

d) **Media-weakening Type**

This is another extreme. The members of middle class located in this quadrant maintain the direct contact with the upper and lower classes at the same time. They were able to observe and understand the real life of alien classes as if they had experienced it themselves. They adopted both the accesses to information of “upper-dependence” and “lower-dependence”, so they can basically form an independent system of class recognition separate from the media influence. However, although they have the highest degree of freedom, they are the most painful in the process of facing the media communication, because they need to go through the period of screening and selecting a lot of information and always remain vigilant to struggle against the mediated picture. Thus their formation of class self-identification is the most difficult in all the members of middle class, just because they can clearly recognize the gap between the true reality and mediated reality.

**Table 5  Theoretical Sampling in Two-dimensions: the Cognitive Channel of Alien Classes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media-weakening Type</th>
<th>Upper Class Media-Dependent Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of the lower classes: from the personal contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of the upper classes: from the personal contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 17</td>
<td>01 06 15 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 11</td>
<td>03 10 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Class Media-Dependent Type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of the lower classes: from the media publicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Media-dependent Type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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About the type distribution of the 21 respondents involved in the interview, please refer to Table above. For convenience, I will collectively refer to the “upper class media-dependent type” and the “lower class media-dependent type” as “half-dependent type”, and shortly refer to the “comprehensive media-dependent type” and “media weakening type” separately as “fully dependent type” and “weakening type”.

In the interview process, I found that the differentiation of the cognitive channels of middle class on alien classes was mainly due to two factors, the first being the acquisition model of the middle-class status of the members, and the second, the manners of social communication of the members.

2. The Acquisition Model of Middle-class Status

Among the acquisition model of the middle-class status, the most central one is the social mobility experience of the members - whether there was flow upwards in the vertical direction.

The primary process is the inner generational mobility of the respondents themselves. In the employed population of current China (i.e. people not yet attained the statutory retirement age: 60 years old for men and 55 for women), the differentiation of the mobile experience is mainly reflected in the age characteristics, which can be divided into two types according to the age of the initial inauguration.

One kind of people are the ones who began work before 1980 (i.e. people born during the period from 1948 to 1964). They had not yet graduated from high school before the advent of the Cultural Revolution, and thus had not received higher education before getting the initial inauguration. Their initial inaugurations were relatively low, mostly of which were farmers, industrial workers, substitute teachers and so on, and some even unemployed or waited for employment. Among them, there are two ways of ascending from the lower classes into the middle class.
a) Accumulating human capital through the university education

No matter entering the higher institutions as the “worker-peasant-soldier students” in 1970s, or entering the University through a formal entrance examination reopened in 1977, or even in-service learning and refresher education all reflect the influence of education in promoting to obtain the class status:

“In 1968, I began my first job as a farmer in north-east moorland when I was just a boy at the age of 15. Originally, I was a student in local key middle school, and would be admitted by famous university undoubtedly. However, after the first half year in middle school, I somehow was sent to a remote area to farm. Most ridiculously, I was so happy at that time. Alas! No one could imagine the college life and also no one waited for the recovery of college entrance examination. But, fortunately, after a 10-year farming life, I had the qualification to take the exam in 1977 because I was not a worker in a factory who was forbidden to take the exam. But first time I failed the exam. Second time I passed the entrance examination successfully. Since then, everything changed, I was assigned back to Beijing after graduation.” (respondent 15)

“I had been working for 7 or 8 years initially, and then went to university of workers in which I got a college degree. Finally I got a University diploma in the second industrial university in 1998. I was raised to Division-level leadership after graduation, because I was already qualified to technology assessment and innovation achievements.” (respondent 17)

b) Seeking rapid improvement of economic status through the market transformation

The representative figures of this type are diverse private entrepreneurs. They may not have high human capital. Before the reform and openness, people such as farmers or workers might have had a certain prestige status. However, when the market became a major means of capital operation, the economic status of farmers and workers perished quickly accompanied with the decline of reputation and power. In this case, if they did not seek to increase the human capital, they can only gain the identity of
middle class again through giving up their original identity and participating in market competition. The respondent 19 is a typical example:

“It was funny that, people preferred technical skill schools than the universities when I was in junior high school. And you know that workers and technicians are more popular than college students. But when I graduated from secondary school, workers were not popular, as well as to the students graduating from universities and professors. “Selling boiled eggs are even better than Atomic bomb-maker.” Ha-ha. My brothers and sisters supported me with money and I opened a clothing store. The business of clothing was very good. And then my subordinates were responsible for the business instead of me and I did some stocks and real estate. My life was better than that of my laid-off friends.” (respondent 19)

These above two categories of respondents have both experienced a significant progress in social mobility. They entered the queue of middle class from the lower classes of society, which leads to an awareness of the lower classes which is mainly from their own personal experience, as well as affecting their manners of social communication, so that they always kept contact with the lower classes, and strive to maintain this emotional feeling of belonging. The specialty of this social communication further consolidates their recognition of alien classes:

“I do not think the status of a farmer is not so good. Even today, from time to time, I will go back to my hometown to see my fellows. Also, they often come to see me. Every time they come, I would like to arrange for them to live either in my home or a hotel. Of course I should pay for them. They used to suffer a lot, though they are living much better than before, they cannot catch up with us who come out of rural life many years ago. I have a farmer complex all the time. As long as the TV was showing dramas about rural life and farming, I will stop to watch. Some of the drama contents are not true. I have been back to the Northeast many times. In reality, farming cannot enable farmers to be very rich. The real rich people are these who leave rural early.” (respondent 16)

Another kind of person is the one that joined work after 1980 in which year the
first session of university students after the entrance examination reopened in 1977 graduated. So a large part of them gained the middle class status after their first job because of higher education, and when getting a professional capacity, they can often maintain a stable and gradually upward trend with the personal education capital. It can be said that their middle class status is relatively stable and closed. If there is no interaction with alien classes in their work, they are generally difficult to be affected by the identity of alien classes as if they had experienced it themselves.

In this type, the factor of intergenerational mobility had a great impact on the respondents. From the perspective of occupational status of the parents of the respondents, the stronger the intergenerational inheritance of class identity is, the easier it is for social members to generate segments of the recognition of alien classes. And the higher the degree of intergenerational mobility, even the higher the degree of the inner generational mobility of the parents themselves, the greater shifting of the recognition of alien classes from the respondents will come out. Specifically, if the parents came from the lower classes in society, their offspring will maintain many links with the lower classes; if the parents dropped to the lower classes from the middle-or high-level position for some reason, then the offspring will have closer links with the lower classes in society with a more intense sense of been deprived and sense of social stratification. Respondent 05 is a typical example.

Her parents are both middle-level cadres in a medium-sized state-owned enterprise in Beijing. Before 1990, the products of their plant sold throughout the country, and thus in terms of no matter what their economic income or their administrative level, they too were typical middle class then. However, after the industrial restructuring in 1991, their plant was merged with a large state-owned enterprise with most of the workers of the original plant becoming laid-off workers, and her parents became “idlers” only with an empty title from the respected managers. With reduction in income of half before the merger, her parents had to go to a private enterprise to engage in a sideline. The family of four people could only squeeze into
their house of about 60 square meters assigned by the plant in the mid-1980s until the respondent bought a new house with her own income after graduation for her parents in early 2006. In the opinion of the respondent, her parents were the “victims of the reform and institution. However, when she talking about herself, she thought that she would not fall into the lower classes as her parents with the protection of high education level (MBA), but she also did not think she can get any favorable resources from her family to support her to enter a higher level class of society. Her momentum of going upward is in the market. Because of the not so high class status of her parents and most relatives, the respondent had in-depth understanding of the daily lifestyle of the class status with low or middle income. As a senior member in high-end real estate marketing, the nature of work of the respondent determines most of the people of her daily interactions which are the rich people with social status of more than 10 million. Thus a variety of recognitions of alien classes built up in her, forming a complex picture:

“How to say, I often feel that I have seen too many sides of the society. For myself, maybe I cannot say that I have received unfair treatment because of the society system, but indeed it is true. My parents and younger brothers cannot get social support because of the registered resident problem. The migrant workers’ children cannot study at local Middle School. In current society, there are more and more rich men, many of my friends are suddenly becoming rich. But they usually have no special advantages over our common people. Here I take buying a house for example, they first need to consider their children’s living environment rather than luxury and style. So I feel it’s really hard to define classes. Not just like the media has said, consumption decides class. If so, what class should I belong to, I feel confused when you ask me this.” (respondent 05)

Similarly, if the previous generation came from the upper social strata, the offspring is easier to have cognitive estrangement of the lower classes. The father of the respondent 13 is a leader of the People’ Congress of Beijing and a bureau-level cadre, and the mother of the respondent is a botanic physician and an intestinal
specialist. The respondent himself entered a well-known real estate company and engaged in project development directly after getting a bachelors degree from University, and established his own company after graduation from an MBA. When being asked the question “Do you think it is easy for you to describe the lifestyles, consumption patterns, views and ideas of the low-level groups of the society”, he said with confidence that:

“Of course, I used to be a white-collar worker! Those years I just graduated without a house and a high wage, I spent all the money I earned every month. Before spending money, I always had a plan of what to buy, what not to buy. I was very considered about my actual spending. I have experienced the life of a white-collar worker.” (respondent 13)

I now asked, “Do you position the whiter-collar as the lower class?” He immediately realized and answered that “Oh, I really do not know much about industrial workers and urban low-income groups. Of course, I can still know some things from my colleagues or the reports about the ordinary people on the media.” The same situation also occurred in other respondents from the families of the upper classes.

In addition to intergenerational mobility, there is another flow which cannot be ignored, which is the class mobility brought by marriage. When the liquidity of the middle class members themselves is low and the gap between intergenerational classes is not significant, the impact of the class status of the spouse will be prominent. The respondent 08 came from a typical middle class family – her father was division cadre before retiring and her mother was vice principal in secondary school before retiring, and the respondent herself entered the middle class directly after finishing higher education with simple experience of the classes, and therefore she was relatively lacking in the recognition of both the upper classes and lower classes. But after four years of work, she married a junior of high-ranking officials as well as the responsible person for a large state-owned enterprise whose usual social circle was constituted of business owners and government officials. Such a combination
extended the recognition of the upper classes of society, while reinforcing the closure of her recognition of the lower classes. In contrast, if a person of a stable middle class marries with someone from the lower classes, then he/she will also strengthen the recognition and contact of the lower classes.

If analyzing from the perspective of communication, there are basically three ways for the middle class to get the information about the life situation of alien classes, which are personal communication, interpersonal communication and mass communication (including organizational communication) (Bittner, 1989, 10-15). In the aspect of the recognition of alien classes, the relationship between personal experience of class mobility and their dependence on the different communication modes are shown as below:

| Communication effects: whether there are tastes preference on the communication content | Communication effects: whether the communication information can be made “knowledgeable” |
|---|---|---|
| Strong preference (multi contact channels) | No (shallow interpretation) |
| Variety of professional information: economics, fashion, consumption, social science, culture, art and so on |
| Weak preference (single contact channel) | Yes (deep interpretation) |
| Entertainment information |
| Party and government news |

It can be seen that the groups without obvious class mobility show the strongest degree of dependence on the mass media. In the perspective of communication, it is generally considered that personal communication and interpersonal communication has more influence or persuasion than mass communication, and thus has more values for the individual. Because of the large-scale, large space, difficult information feedback and the secondary transmission of information, the mass media has less value of information for the individual, which is prone to be queried.
3. The Social communication Pattern of Middle Class

The relationship between class status and social communication has been a concern of the academia in these years. The class status limits the freedom of people to expand social networks and accumulate social capital. However, the class status sometimes will turn to the advantage of social networks and social capital. With this advantage, the class status will have the effect of subjective and objective possession of social capital. Objectively, social capital will bring a return on revenue; and subjectively, social capital will enhance the self-assessment of the socio-economic status (Bourdieu, 1986). For the social communication pattern of middle class, some academics have already given the multi-faceted investigation (Zhou, 2005). I would like to emphasize that the social communication pattern of middle class has a great influence on the recognition of middle classes on alien classes.

Firstly, the biggest feature of the social communication of middle class is “selective”. The sum of their social circle is more than the upper and lower classes, indicating that they have more social capital to choose the social objects compared with the lower classes and have more open social psychology than the upper classes. For this reason, the social communication pattern can be divided into two categories of spontaneous communication and passive communication.

a) Spontaneous Communication

Spontaneous communication complies with the combination of the principles of convenience, interest and income. The process of spontaneous communication is similar to the development of the “class habitus” put forward by Bourdieu. Firstly, the mobility experience of the social status determines that the middle class will communicate with the people who are easiest to contact with in a space scope in the mobility process. The farmers and industrial workers they got to know while making a living at the lower classes, the schoolmates in different sessions in the long period of
studying in schools and the customers in frequent interactions of work are all the important foundations for middle class to establish social circle. This determines that most of the middle class will communicate with the people who have a similar class position, but it does not exclude that some respondents will keep long term close contact with the friends of the lower classes. The absolute exclusion of the members of lower classes was not strongly reflected in the interview.

Secondly, the middle class may intentionally or unintentionally cultivate the leisure style with the nature of “status symbol”, strengthening the links with social members who have a similar consuming ability and interests through leisure. For example, the respondent 20 said that he had made close friends through participating in the equestrian club, and some of which had developed into business partners. It is relatively common to form a deeper social circle through the common interests of diet, sports, literature or art, sharing a similar daily life and emotional views. This is why the most intimate social circle of the middle class is often in the same class with them and the alien classes find it difficult to intervene in the real life of the middle class.

In addition, I have to mention that because the middle class is often aware of the importance of cultivating an excellent social circle, they have a consciousness to develop communication with the upper classes. But such communication usually treated with courtesy. The purpose shifting often further reduces their awareness of the lower classes, while their awareness of the upper classes is not necessarily real.

b) Passive Communication

Passive communication is often caused by some non-anti-social constraints, or contains a certain degree of “altruism” psychology. In this type, the determination of the nature of work and the work objects is a quite important factor. The recognition of the upper class of the respondent 5 and the recognition of the lower class of the respondents 14 and 03 mentioned above are all that their clients were limited in these two classes. As the considerations of recognition is for work, there is a number of
objective and rational ingredients in the awareness of middle class on alien classes, just as the respondent 11 said:

“As a photographer, I have the responsibility to pay close attention to them. So every year I spend several months driving to the west, central, rural areas of our northeast, or just a street in Beijing, to shoot the pauper and the poor street. To tell you the truth, I feel so terrible that the living conditions are so bad. The salient problem is their mentality of hating the rich. Sometimes my sport utility vehicle will be scratched or my tires will be poked by them when I drive out...Of course they won’t consider all of the people who own cars as bad people after they come to know me. How to explain this? Because they already have the prejudiced impression of the mass media that a man must be rich if he owns a car, dresses decently or uses his mobile phone frequently. So they just judged me as a rich man from my SUV. ‘Why are they rich while we are poor?’ This mentality is rather awkward. In my opinion, the mass media which advocates the status symbol or other things again and again has created a great stimulus to the underlying people.” (respondent 11)

Their awareness of the lower classes is not merely the impression of scarcity of economic resources, as the respondent 03 had repeatedly stressed that “I do disagree with that, you should know, maybe some groups I have seen are in a poor living level, but we mustn’t separate people into different levels by their economic conditions. Once I saw a poor man, his only possession was a folding bed in the corridor of a residential building, having no money for treatment, but even then he insisted in reading an English dictionary and old newspapers. Can we say he is in a low level? I should say he has a more respectable spiritual pursuit than most white-collar workers”. The respondent 01 had also pointed out that the industrial workers had a very scientific and artistic program to ensure a healthy functioning family life in low-income circumstance – “they are not wealthy, but they can manage their money well, so they live a good life, not worse than those rich people. We should learn from them”.

Beyond the usual stereotypes as well as the blind sympathy or worship, this kind
of recognition returned to the reason and thus is easy to have conflicts with media campaigns.

However, in the interview, I also found that there was some excitement at the extreme isolation of the alien classes because of their nature of work. Such isolation occurred in the middle class members with highly specialized technical work. They are usually dealing with machines with long working hours and work intensity rather than communicating with people in normal times. The intensely busy work strongly inhibited the development of their social circle, so their awareness of the outside world mainly comes from the Internet and other media. If they themselves did not experience the strong class mobility, their recognition of alien classes are quite lacking in independence. The “comprehensive media-dependent type” as mentioned above are mainly from this group.

The second reason of passive communication is the overlap of the living space. It can found in the interview process that the middle class had clearly felt the stratification of the living space. If the members in the housing estate were in different classes from the respondents or in high heterogeneity degree, the respondents would show a strong perception of social stratification. The respondent 17 painted a picture of his understanding of the life of lower classes as:

“Where I used to live before had many rich people who came from Ningbo and worked in the textile factory in the 1950s and 1960s. There were a lot of textile factories which were established before the liberation offering high wages. And then, the old workers retired and passed away one by one. Their wages were very high at that time, but relatively low today. And if their children didn't have a good education, they could never move or afford a house. People who can afford a house moved out after they bought one. People who are finally left are the poor. They were so poor that they took drugs, laid-off, fought......and even become prostitutes. There were two brothers who fought for the house before it was removed around us. The elder brother was killed by his brother with a knife. That's all, the two brothers had no work and they played mahjong, took drugs, the things they did are a mess. So they grew
increasingly poor. In fact, it is needless for me to talk about my old house. There are also small houses which are very bad around my home now. There are also poor people of my colleagues. I can also see people who urinate when I walk through the road to go to work every day. Their lives are really hard, but the rich usually cannot see that.” (respondent 17)

Chinese scholars Liu Jingming and Li Lulu (2005) have pointed out that the class differentiation characteristics in the living space is not only a phenomenon of social stratification, but also an important mechanism that causes the social stratification and the dominance of the trend of social closure. The study of Liu Xin (2007) also confirmed this conclusion. Therefore, the segment in living space is an important incentive of the differentiation of the cognitive channels of alien classes for the middle class.

It can be found from the results of the entire interview that, the middle class with independent recognition of alien classes is still in a minority, and most of the middle class need to rely on the media to extend, complement and even build the recognition of alien classes. The generation of cognitive segment of alien classes described above indicates that the Chinese society has been gradually moving to a “structured” social formation.
CHAPTER 5 MEDIA CONTACTS AND MEDIA RESOURCES

The cognitive channels of middle class for alien classes transferred from the age of “personal communication era” into the age of “mass communication”. According to the “uses and gratifications” theory of communication, the process for the middle class to get the recognition of alien classes from mass media not only depends on the consequences of information contact of the audience themselves, but also depends on the spreading effect of the media (McQuail, 2010).

Starting from this chapter, I will discuss the characteristics of media information contact of middle class in Beijing from the point of audience, that is, their “media literacy” formation. According to the definition of media literacy, combined with the above-mentioned various types of evaluation systems (for details, see the second section “Media Contacts and Class Identification” in chapter 2), media literacy should be constituted by three aspects which are the ability of actively contacting the media resources, the ability of understanding and criticizing the media communicating process and the ability of utilizing media to self-publish and self-spread. In this chapter, I will firstly discuss the media contact behavior of the middle class in Beijing.

Some scholars (Zhou, 2005; Liu & Li, 2005) have got some achievements on the study of the mass media contact behavior of the middle class, such as “television alienation”, “close reading”, “network dependence”, and “clear channel dependence” and so on. However, the existing findings are on the basis of regarding the middle class as an entity rather than paying attention to the internal differentiation of the middle class.

In the interview process, I found that the age factor plays a significant role in the media contact habits of middle class. According to the different media contact habits,
the middle class can be divided into two types, while the age boundary between the two types is quiet close to the boundary of the acquisition model of middle class position previously discussed, which are both around 40 to 45 years old. This leads to a series of differences in the middle class’s interpretation of the media communication effect. Of course, as a new emerging class in the maturing process, there are also some common features gradually solidified in the differentiation process of the middle class.

SECTION 1 TYPES AND MEDIA RESOURCES

The middle class is a class that is fully exposed to the media environment. There have been many surveys showing that the middle class audience ranks at the forefront in various types of mass media consumption⁷, which is not only related to the high education level and consumption ability of the middle class that makes them have no significant obstacles in media consumption process, but is also related to their high demand of cultural information, favorable sense of social participation and even the potential willingness to invest in the media market (Bunton, Nettleton & Burrows, pp. 215-217).

Moreover, the same set of data also shows that the middle class are more willing to have contact with books and publications rather than the non-middle classes, and in contrast, the proportion of exposure to television of the middle class is smaller than that of the non-middle class. Researchers explained it from the perspective of “knowledge gap theory” that the meaning of books lies in that it provides a more closeness to the “knowledge” rather than a general sense of the information provided by the news media, not even entertainment. Therefore, with the situation that compulsory education has basically been popular, all kinds of knowledge emerges in an endless stream and the media information becomes increasingly popular in current

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days, the middle class make the “knowledge price scissors” with the non-middle classes become more obvious through a board and lasting books contact (Alexander, 2008, pp.2-3).

I also found in the interview that the media contact type of the middle class as an entity has its own uniqueness, but precisely because of the differentiation within the class that makes the media contact types of the middle class distinguish with the types of other non-middle-class.

1. The Traditional Media Contact

Here the traditional media refers to the mass media represented by papers, radio, television, magazines and books.

In the existing studies, it is generally considered that the phenomenon of being “close to books” and “alien to televisions” is the most prominent feature of the middle class. It cannot be denied that, comparing with non-middle classes, as an entity, the middle class indeed tends to have contact with the print media that has a large amount of text and tends to read the authoritative and in-depth reports in great length. However, as I found in the interview, even within the middle class, the enthusiasm of reading books of the members is different in that the young-aged middle class does not like to have contact with books as much as the old-aged middle class, and the key is that their acquisition mode of knowledge and information is significantly different from the old-aged middle class.

For the old-aged middle class, their way to have contact with the media is to clearly separate the “knowledge” and the “information”, corresponding them to different media that the knowledge is obtained from the books and the information can be obtained from the general mass media. They are not excluded from reading newspapers, watching television and listening to radio, and even the exposure rate of newspapers and television ranks far in front of the books. For the old-aged middle
class, the traditional and popular means of communication are the real sources of information.

“You mean books? Does the book belong to the mass media? Oh, I have never had any concern about them. For me, media should be radio, television, newspaper…So it is to say that, what I usually have contact with is newspaper, television, and books. No no, why does a book belong to the media? It never broadcast news. ” (respondent 13)

The television content they most commonly used is hard news. Taking the reports of another city in China-Beijing-as an example, according to Chinese TV News Program Market Report 2007-2008, among the audience of the TV news programs in China, 36.1% of which was a middle-aged audience with ages from 45 to 64, constituting the main audience groups. This proportion reached 73.6% among the groups with monthly income of more than 3000 Yuan. Their average daily viewing time was 23 minutes, precisely approaching the length of a complete evening news. It can be seen from the data that the old-aged middle class is not as far away from the television media as we imaged.

The demand patterns of young-aged middle class are different from the old-aged middle class that they would prefer to get the “knowledge” and “information” in a media. That is why magazines are more popular than books and newspapers among the young-aged middle class groups. The two features of the journals and magazines meet the demands of the young-aged middle class that one has a large amount of information and lengthy and another has wide distribution channels, short release circle and fast updating. According to the research data of Guangzhou Ark Marketing Research & Consulting Company, the readers of journals and magazines were mainly young people. The people under the age of 30 accounted for about 40 percent of the total, which were able to afford the magazines with prices between 7 to 10 Yuan. This section of readers preferred to read the magazines about comprehensive news,
economics, trade business and social science\textsuperscript{8}, which showed the preference of young people on such forms of media.

In addition, there are significant differences in the purpose of choosing media types between the young-aged middle class and the old-aged middle class. The main criteria for the old-aged middle class to chose the media is “psychological proximity” which requires a certain combination between the media content and their living conditions with the reflection of the state of the class and the people around. But for the young-aged middle class, the “learning” function of media is more important than the “psychological proximity”. They want to see the media image which is “higher” than them, and only in this way, they can be provided with the growth space of “new knowledge”. When being asked the question that “why do you like to read the “Sanlian Life Weekly”, the respondent 05 answered:

“I think “Sanlian Life Weekly” is higher than my normal life. Actually I do not focus too much on people’s livelihood… I often try something introduced by some fixed part of “Life Week”. Maybe the views it has expressed to me are just the things I like or the things I want to try to achieve. Sometimes it will also recommend some books or some articles. I will specially search in Google. I would like to spend a little time on understanding the contents. As for having time or not, at least I like to do this thing. But many other media I have known doesn’t impress me so much.” (respondent 05)

It can be seen that the young-aged middle class aspires to the media content that is slightly higher than their living state, which reflects the aspirations of upward mobility of the middle class. Because the young-aged middle class groups hold the reading interest of upward shifting, they have higher demands of the specialty of the media contents, and even “read the topic that is hard to understand for fun” (respondent 18). The professional contact preferences are not only reflected in the reading purpose of career pursuit such as reading magazines of one’s own profession, economics, management and foreign languages, but are also reflected in the reading

\textsuperscript{8} See http://www.ark-mr.com/CN/download/minfeibaogao/meiti/zhazhi.pdf
for leisure and artistic enjoyment, for example, they emphasized that the process of reading fashion magazines was familiarizing themselves with the cultural history of the brand rather than simply reading the shopping guide and they could sincerely express their favor and familiarity of some brand, or they emphasized that their interest on a sports magazine was because that it “can analyze each physical agility and technical indicators of the athletes as well as the commercial operation mode of the game” (respondent 20).

2. The New Media Contact

The “new media” here refers to the new digital mass media taking the Internet as the main type (including various types of portals, BBS and personal blogs), coupling with the electronic newspaper, electronic magazine (digital journal), mobile phone newspaper, building TV and so on.

Firstly, the overall degree of media exposure of the middle class is quite high. In accordance with the educational background, the Internet users with a college degree or higher degree accounted for 30.5% of the total. In accordance with their occupations, the size of the white-collar users is the largest at 180 million, accounting for 46.1% of the total users. The middle class group is also the group with the largest consumption power of the Internet products.9

Secondly, in can be found in the interview that there was a certain but not obvious show of a “digital divide” emerging on the basis of digital media development. As the people with “high risk” on the “digital divide”, the old-aged middle class was not isolated from the digital media like the old-aged audience of the non-middle classes. They usually had the Internet contact experiences. With the Internet device at home or in the office, they were able to accurately navigate all kinds of news and information of Chinese portals. However, the Internet is definitely not the

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main choice in their sources of information. The mass media they most commonly used did not include the Internet. Their average online time of a week is also much lower than that of the young-aged middle class. For the old-aged middle class, the Internet is a supplement information source in addition to the mainstream media with questionable credibility.

The old-aged middle class was used to have knowledge of the new media through the manner of reading the traditional print media. The content type of their exposure to new media is relatively homogeneous, mainly obtaining news and information. The websites they contacted were limited to Xinhua Net, Sina, Sohu, People Net and other mainstream portals. Moreover, the old-aged middle class had less interaction with new media. Their use of BBS and blog stayed more in the browser with little participation in the discussion and writing of blogs, even less contact with online shopping, network chatting and other content. They regarded the mobile phone newspaper as a rubbish message and resisted. Therefore, they were less involved in the interactive new media. There was still a certain degree of risk for them to get involved in the network.

“I rarely do so. You know the internet is such thing that can tell a truth or a lie on it. Maybe someone would like to help you sincerely while someone means to harm you. It’s better to keep silent rather than worrying about being harmed when you go shopping or speak carelessly. Undertone can make me safe all the time.” (respondent 06)

In contrast, there is a distinctive characteristic of the young-aged middle class that, in their Internet contacts, the search engine ranked the first. Many people said that their first thing at the work every day was to open Google (respondent 04), or a lot of people have installed a Baidu and Google toolbar to facilitate their search at any time. This case is consistent with the data released in the Chinese Search Engine Market Research Report of 2011\(^\text{10}\), that the main uses of the Internet search engine in

\(^\text{10}\) Cited and translated fromwww.cnnic.net.cn/dtygg/dtgg/201112/W020111221365015052932.pdf
China focused on the people aged from 26 to 35, accounting for 24.2%, the users with ages from 19 to 35 enveloped 50% of the total users, while the users over the age of 50 only occupied 11.4%. It shows that the active search and accurate screening of information has become an important part of media exposure of the young-aged middle class, which also indicates that they are less limited by the main features of the information releasers and their information sources will not be dominated by the large mainstream sites. Although search engines are not the mass media in the strict sense, it reflects the great difference in the initiative of media contact between the young-aged middle class and the old-aged middle class.

Finally, in the contact with the new media, both the young-aged and old-aged middle class have one thing in common, that is the cautious attitude about online speech. Although the young-aged middle class itself owns a quite broad Internet resource and strong viability on network, their expression on network is relatively conservative. The most common websites they visited are search engines (Google, Baidu), professional sites (various finance sites, Soufun, Douban, industrial forums), consuming sites (Taobao, Molife), and entertainment sites (ent. sina, ent. tianya), without including the forums of discussing public affairs. They used to wander through technical or consuming websites with rarely speaking. Many of them have opened blog, but then turned off (respondent 01), or had to set permission to avoid misunderstanding from the irrelevant visitors (respondent 03). These all show that the “political conservative” attitude is a common characteristic of the middle class.

3. The Overseas Media Contact

The overseas media here refers to the mass media having qualifications of lawful publishing and distributing outside of Mainland of China, including the foreign, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan media.

Due to the strict examining and approving process of the introduction and usage of newsletters, radio, movies and television programs produced and broadcasted by
overseas media and due to the rules of forbidding individuals to install and use the satellite ground receiving facilities, it is a bit difficult for individuals to make contact with overseas media.

The main form of overseas media contacts of the middle class is to visit overseas websites with the main types of news (such as ABC, BBC) and reviews (such as ECONOMIST). Their purpose of contact with overseas media is to practice English and access to news and information, followed by enjoying reading foreign magazines. A section of the respondents expressed they could come into contact with overseas magazines and journals though the work unit, in which most were newspaper and journals about business and finance. Another section of the respondents claimed that they (respondent 20) had unique treasure places to search for foreign magazines which mainly focused on documentary, art and fashion contents. The third section of respondents is used to watching Hong Kong television programs such as Phoenix Satellite TV, Hong Kong TVB drama, Taiwan CTI entertainment and so on. Because there is still not yet any overseas television station ratified to locate in the city of Beijing, these programs are usually watched through online live telecast or through downloading. “The video download is really a good thing. It is so fast and wide” (respondent 09)

Similarly, on the type of overseas media contacts, the channel for old-aged middle class is relatively single, mainly focusing on foreign magazines. And the assessing to overseas media of the young-aged middle class depending on the Internet is relatively diverse.

In conclusion, the ways of middle class to contact with media reflected that they have the needs of information in large amounts, in depth, complex types and a wide range of monitoring the environment. At the same time, they could meet their needs by their own abilities including their wide range of social interaction, the ability to search for information and the media literacy of initiatively contacting with media.

As the mainstream mass media, the television still continues to affect the old-aged middle class, so the “television alienation” is not sufficient to be the criteria for the members of middle class to distinguish themselves with others of the same class. However, the Internet has a far-reaching impact on the media contact behavior within the middle class. According to the 29th China Internet Development Statistics Report released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in 2012, the changes in the Internet usage rate of the population over 40 years old is very little. The Internet usage rate of the population between 30 to 39 years old is increasingly rising with a certain space for growth, and this group will become the major group in the growth of the Internet users in the next stage. The boundary line of the age of 40 years old is slightly lower than the age derived from my interview. In terms of the interview results, the educational attainment and income level of the middle class is higher than the average level of ordinary Internet users, which partially relieved the disadvantages of the old-aged audience in the contact with the new media, and thus the dividing line is 45 years old.

With the growth on ages of the young-aged middle class and more new middle class members coming up, the media contact habits of the existing old-aged middle class will further be replaced by the young-aged middle class, and then the differentiation of the media contact channels and reading tastes between the entire middle class and non-middle class will be more significant.

SECTION 2 MEDIA CONTENT

The middle class shows a clear preference in the choice of media content, and the preference changes with age.

Firstly, through the shaping of mainstream media, the old-aged middle class maintained the traditional rating (reading) fun of being enthusiastic about the news of the Party and Government affairs, paying attention to the people’s livelihood and

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12 Cited and translated fromwww.cnnic.net.cn/dtygg/dtgg/201201/W020120116337628870651.pdf
holding weak interest in fashion, leisure and consuming contents. Although the “political conservative” attitude of middle class had been frequently put forward in some research, the old-aged middle class above 45 years old still maintained a deep collective memory of the severe effects of the universal social movements in the past, and thus they were extremely concerned about the changes in politics and macro-policy. Each of them had a systemic view of national development and used to comment on the social changes in their own life experiences. Their answers to the ambitious proposition tended to start with “it can be known just by looking at me …” (respondent 06). Meanwhile, the most common topics they discussed when participating in certain social circles are “national events”. But even so, their concern for political policies and the national economy were limited to a small scope of discussion without publishing on the Internet.

Secondly, there is obvious “political alienation” occurring in the young-aged middle class. In my view, the emergence of this feature is related to the way of access to information mentioned above. The upward knowledge-based reading promotes them to interpret the news and information in a professional and knowledge-based way, leading to some information contents which are difficult to understand are excluded from the professional interpretation, resulting in the imbalance of media content such as knowledge-based industry information, knowledge-based economic information, knowledge-based political commentary, knowledge-based fashion information, knowledge-based cultural and artistic information, knowledge-based consuming marker information….For example, the words of “domestic important news” (Zhou, 2005, p. 204) with a high contact rate in the previous audience research reports was repeatedly questioned by the respondent in the interview.

“Domestic important news? Do you mean the information about economic, culture, technology, sports or entertainment? This topic is a bit wide, and I do not know how to understand. ” (respondent 21)

“For the new policies from the government, we have internal references, so we normally do
not find them from Media. For news about finance and economics, I refer to “The first finance newspaper”, which has precise analysis. I normally check out NETEASE for entertainment news. However, I don’t care much about this kind of news. I relatively like “Revolution daily newspaper” because it really has deep topics.” (respondent 08)

It can be seen that they tend to classify the news and information in accordance with their careers and fields, which facilitates them to achieve further specialized recognition.

Two categories of information are difficult to be made “knowledgeable”, one is social news about the Party, and the other is entertainment news. So the two categories of information are excluded from the scope of the professional interpretation of the middle class. Meanwhile, because young people themselves born after 1970 have not experienced large-scale political movements, gradually and generally losing interest on politics, they will not take the initiative to seek professional interpretation of political information. When being asked “what is your main purpose in contacting the programs just mentioned”, none of the young-aged respondents (44 years and below) referred to learning about the principles and policies of the party and state, while the old-aged middle class (45 years and above) all took it as the main purpose. When the interviewer reminded them of the option of the contact purpose of learning about the politics, the reflections of the young-aged middle class were in agreement that they would care about the policies related to economic life and would resort to the professional media (such as The Economic Observer, China Securities Journal, and China Business News), but with little interest in purely political policy.

Another phenomenon also reflected this feature from one aspect that, in the opinion of the young-aged middle class, the backstage in-depth news in the current affairs field was collectively referred to as “gossip”, and be mentioned in the same breath with entertainment information. Thus, part of the information of party and government news was aliened and entered the channel of the dissemination of
entertainment information (such as the Internet). While the mainstream party and
government news that had not been made as “entertainment” could come into the
audience with few channels, only relying on the television news to maintain the
relationship with the audience.

“Party and social news…I don’t really care about it. The social news online is most likely to
be murder or salaciousness. Sometimes I can see a little bit from East News, but more about
eulogizing virtues and achievements. Isn’t that just a way of publicity routine after all? It
doesn’t mean much. I mean, wasting time on these kinds of news is not meaningful, therefore
I seldom watch them.” (respondent 07)

It can be seen that the process of the young-aged middle class contact with the
mass media is affected by both the information dissemination behavior of the mass
media and the information searching behavior of the audience, which the former is
called the “communication effect” in communication and the latter is called
“communication result” (Baran & Davis, pp.241-246). The knowledge-based
characteristic of the dissemination mode of information can be regarded as the
requirements for the “communication effects” of the young-aged middle class, and
this effect can be seen in the current media market that the knowledgeable information
can bring the effects of being deeply interpreted by the middle class while the
interpretation level of the contrary is shallow. The taste preference of the media
content is a concrete manifestation for the “communication results” of the young-aged
middle class which has stronger active selectivity that the young-aged middle class
will take multi-channel to contact the media content they have preferred while taking
a signal channel or even avoiding the contact with the media content they are less
interested in. The relationship between these two is shown as following.

The young-aged middle class has the lowest passion in contacting with the party
and government news among all the media content. As the mainstream media
communication pattern, the television is the medium that the young-aged middle class
can most conveniently contact with party and government news. Thus in the aspect of
the dissemination of party and government news, the dependence of the young-aged middle class on the television medium is very high. For the other media information except for party and government news, the dependence of the young-aged middle class on television is lower because of their in-depth criticalness and multi-channels in contacting with the media content.
CHAPTER 6 MEDIA INTERPRETATION AND CRITICISM

It can be seen from the analysis of the previous chapter that the mass media has served much of the responsibilities of education in the life of middle class and has penetrated into all aspects of social life of the middle class. Whether the middle class will lose themselves in the information when facing such a huge knowledge database or not depends on their capacity of critical interpretation of the media information.

The American scholar Stanley J. Baran has put forward that reasonable and effective media interpretation should be based on several characteristics of being able to understand the impact of the media, being able to understand the process of mass communication, possessing the strategy of analyzing and discussing the media information, understanding that media can bring wisdom to our culture and life as the text, being able to enjoy and appreciate the media, understanding the morality and ethical obligation of the media professional workers, developing the appropriate and effective producing ability (Baran, 2001). In the following, I will analyze the media interpretation ability of the middle class.

SECTION 1 THE DEGREE OF THE RECOGNITION ABILITY ON VARIOUS MEDIA INFORMATION

The development of the media literacy movements has experienced several stages. Each stage focused on different fields according to the capacities of the audience. At the beginning, the media literacy focused on the prevention of encroachment of violence, pornography and prejudice discrimination against youth (Macedo & Steinberg, p.14); since then, as part of the National Pan-democratization movement, the media literacy movement in the United Kingdom focused prominently on the interpretation capacity of political propaganda with the purpose of eliminating the incorrect beliefs and ideas of the audience (Macedo & Steinberg, p.8); finally, the
media literacy study in the United States pioneered the research in the aspect of the function of media (especially advertising programs) in stimulating consumerism and materialism (Macedo & Steinberg, p.6). So until now the capacities emphasized by media literacy generally include three parts of unhealthy information literacy, advertising literacy and political literacy.

1. Unhealthy Information Literacy

The so-called unhealthy information literacy refers to the presentation of content of violence, sexually explicit scenes, biased and discriminatory description of some groups on the mass media (Macedo & Steinberg, p.14).

For the contents of violence and pornography, the middle class was able to take a critical but relatively objective attitude. The middle class can clearly distinguish media content with violent means and sexual hints, and they expressed a clear aversion to the wide dissemination of this kind of content on the mass media. But on the issue of “whether the media has the right to publish such content”, they usually held a relatively neutral attitude. The answer of the respondent 01 is representative.

“I agree with some people’s points that these things should not appear on newspapers and TV. But to turn it around, I think these things should be divided into different levels and fitted into some specific channels. I don’t think it is necessary to forbid it completely. In one way it is not necessary and on the other it lacks legality. These things have practical meaning to their target customers. Some people sometimes want to talk with others, some people need a sex service, some people do like to watch violent movies, then why can they not make a call (phone sex)? Of course they can make a call like that or watch a violent movie. But if you are a man who sells newspapers to others, you should be constrained by both morality and law. If it has been published on a mass media to entice a kid to make a call (erotic lines), or let a kid watch it directly, that would be a problem. But in China people still cannot do it right now.”

(respondent 01)
The balanced view of the middle class on the media content of violence and pornography demonstrates that they have a relatively high level of media literacy in this regard. However, they are lacking in judgment on the media content of biased and discriminatory description. In this issue, they showed little discrimination on the vulnerable groups (such as migrants from villages and towns and the disabled) with sympathy. But blind sympathy can also be regarded as a kind of prejudice, because it comes with a color of authority rather than from their own judgment (Gadamer, 2004, p.280). They have more prejudice of the powerful groups. Many respondents linked the media image of “senior officials” with “corruption” and linked the “new rich class” with “upstart”, “low taste”, “tax evasion” and “luxury consumption”. This shows that the middle class has been impacted by media communication to a large extent due to the lack of personal contact with certain groups.

2. Advertising Literacy

The middle class is the most valuable groups in the eyes of the advertisers (Goodman, 2008, pp.48-49), which is not only related to their big economic strength, but also related to their open consuming mentality. So these people are frequently besieged by advertising. In terms of the interview results, the middle class of Beijing has cultivated a mature advertising literacy after dealing with advertising for many years.

Firstly, they were able to realize that there was a driver of commercial interests behind most of mass media, and thus no matter whether advertising came up in the form of “hard advertising”, any dissemination of content was possible with the factor of “consumption persuading”. Secondly, they had established a clear awareness of advertising ethics and could clearly pointed out how the media “plays the edge ball” in avoiding the media ethics to earn economic benefits. Meanwhile, they showed great resentment to the constant violations of advertising to individual areas (such as building TV, SMS advertising etc). Thirdly, they gradually alienated “hard advertising” and turned to the soft advertising of personal communication. Comparing
with the informational advertising on the television or magazines, they tended to trust the “reputation” and “public debate” of the shopping forum.

In the sense of “brand consuming” conveyed by advertising, the middle class fell into a “dilemma” situation. On one hand, they could say that the wording of “the so-called brands can represent your lifestyle” was only a dream made for commercial purposes and what really worked is your actual spending power; on the other hand, they could not resist the power of dreams.

“When you find 10 magazines all praising something, you will think: woo, this is a LV! This is a LV! On one hand, I know this is a business dream, on the other hand, I also agree. Why brand exists, because we all believe it. This is a wave of social forces. When I go out in HUGOBOSS, people will say: yo, this is HUGOBOSS! But in fact, I also know that this stuff is not worth much. I know very well, but I need this thing because others believe it represents something. On the other hand others may not believe this thing is nothing……So now it’s a lot of fun, you know? Everyone knows it costs little, everyone knows! Many people are aware that it is the behavior of a commercial speculation, but they are willing to enter the commercial speculation. This is very powerful.” (Respondent 13)

This dilemma mentality reflects that the middle class has realized that advertising has achieved the practical possession of the life time of a person in an implicit level, that is, forcing to agglutinate the direct satisfaction of the material enjoyment of people with the life meaning and survival value of people, constituting the mental condition of the entire world in the form of occupying the material (p.128). It also reflects the pursuit of a certain lifestyle of the middle class and the mentality of being eager to be recognized. But on the problem of who is the subject that recognizes them, they cannot answer clearly. They have more opportunities than the lower classes to come into contact with some media limited to high-end consumers, such as magazines that only put in slap-up consuming sites, foreign satellite TV, cabin magazines and so on, through which they can only learn the lifestyle of the upper classes. But such a sense of distance made them feel uncomfortable.
“I think they are all too far away from me. The brands they are publicizing are too expensive. They will tell you to keep buying these luxuries and you deserve to own them. They always say you will become totally different from others, and you will become someone…. They try to give me such a feeling.” (Respondent 05)

Therefore, the lifestyle of the upper classes, especially the consuming style, strongly impresses the middle class, and this impression has the trend of gradually replacing the entire class image.

3. Political Literacy

There is always close ties between the mass media and politics, reflecting a complementary interaction relationship. But for middle class, their political literacy in contacting with media reflects a receding trend. The political literacy of the young-aged middle class is gradually weakened.

The level of interest and awareness of the young-aged middle class for various elements of political information – such as the state, pattern and results of the affairs of the political person, class, nation and political party system – is weakening. In the interview, most of the respondents expressed that they had no concern about the reports of the National People’s Congress (NPC) and Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). On the acquisition mode and way of guarding of political information, they generally expressed little understanding. They could feel the control of politics on the mass media, but could not point out the specific control practices. And they usually only emphasized the negative effects of political control, while ignoring its positive factors.

Compared with the old-aged middle class, the young-aged middle class relatively ignores the socialized process of politics without clear understanding of their political values. They generally thought they did not have any political attitude and considered that their alienation of politics has resulted from too many distant political images
shaped by the media.

“It seems that politics are far away from us…….The only way I can think of is possibly people’s congress on TV? Anyway, it is difficult for us to contact these. There is seldom a discussion about politics between our co-workers.” (respondent 07)

It can be said that the alienation of current political information of the young-aged middle class is a result of having little contact with historical and political information. What the groups born after the 1970 experienced was a social development process that economic information gradually dominated the communication field while the political information gradually weakened. Since the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee held in 1978, the socialist construction in China has entered a new historical stage. The press also abandoned the traditional view that the newspaper was a tool of class struggle and affirmed that journalism was a communication media turning towards the community on the basis of publishing current affairs (Price, Rozumilowicz & Verhulst, pp.28-30), thereby reducing the dominance of the political attributes of the mass media and upgrading its information attributes, cultural attributes and commodity attributes. With the transformation of the guiding ideology, media reports became gradually diverse and the reporting atmosphere became gradually relaxed, making the young-aged groups have more choices without the pressure of must having political sensitivity.

Relatively speaking, the media literacy of the old-aged middle class is high. Firstly, they have a high contact depth of political news to be able to read and understand the lengthy political commentary and special coverage. Secondly, they are able to identify the interests of the state and political parties behind the political news and can interpret the sublime words with deep meaning in the media reports. Thirdly, the old-aged middle class can sensitively link the important politics news with the status of their own life. For example, the respondent 14 was very concerned about the reforms in large departments and institutions that would be discussed in the coming “two sessions” of National People’s Congress (NPC) and Chinese People’s Political
Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in the autumn of 2012. Because his daughter was working in the law enforcement agencies about the water affairs, the reorganization of the ministry of water conversation might be related to the vital interests of his daughter. While also as a middle class, his daughter herself paid no special attention to the recognition.

It is worth mentioning that the old-aged middle class on one side criticized that China’s press system was too conservative, on the other side they accepted and inherited the political values of the current mainstream media, thinking the fact could not be changed in the short time.

“Politics must rank first. Media must obey our national interests. The state cannot be arbitrary. Otherwise it will decrease the speed of our development. So no matter how loudly the foreign media is screaming, we should always stay harmonious, this is very reasonable.” (respondent 17)

“Is media freedom so good? If so, why did President Bush not disclose the facts of the Iraq War to the world? Total freedom is impossible and there are no countries that can achieve absolute freedom of speech in the world. The media cannot be indifferent to national interests, cannot say whatever they want to, otherwise they must end with death, no matter where they are.” (Respondent 15)

The mass media gradually loses influence on the political attitudes of the young-aged middle class, indicating that the socialized process of the politics in China is facing a certain resistance. At present, the young-aged middle class has lost its wish of imitation and obedience, which makes the young-aged middle class lose the foundation on the formation of the overall unified political attitude, leading them to make improper comments about the assimilation and internalization of the political subject. And the political enthusiasm of the young-aged middle class that’s transferred away has not formed public discussion in other areas, which is extremely ineffective for the maintenance and reform of the entire political system. Although the old-aged
middle class still maintained a relatively high attention of politics, the entire middle class is always to be continuously expanded by young forces, leaving the original media political effect gradually being diluted.

SECTION 2 THE SOURCES OF THE RECOGNITION ABILITY OF MEDIA INFORMATION

I found through interviewing that the reason of different degrees of interpretation ability within the middle class is that the different sources of their recognition abilities can be divided into the three types of multi-contrasting of a large amount of information, their own experience and professional media knowledge.

While the three sources of abilities also reflect the different social mobility experience and age characteristics of the middle class members, as well as making a tremendous impact on their recognition of alien classes.

1. Multi-contrasting of a Large Amount of Information

As mentioned above, the members adopting this source are concentrated in the young-aged middle class, including the individuals with intergenerational mobility or inner generational mobility and the individuals without class mobility experience. This part of middle class members can check and compare different sources of information and adopt as much as possible of media technology to access information for the evaluation of the reliability, validity and reliability, accuracy, authority and objectivity of the information. They verified whether there was clear contradiction within the information through the integration of the old and new knowledge:

“How to judge the truth of news reports? I will read news from different resources to compare, like the mainstream media, websites and media from other countries. We shouldn’t
listen to the statement of only one media. I usually watch the news section at 9 p.m., I think this show can be trusted to some degree. But sometimes it gives comments that lean to one side, and it sometimes can be misleading. Then I think there will be a problem.” (respondent 01)

They considered that the most important issue of the media reports of domestic mainstream media was the single point of view of the reports with the concealing of some content. So they were eager to get knowledge of the reports through other channels. This group usually had a strong imagination of foreign media, regarding the cross-border communication as a supplementary source of domestic mainstream media, sometimes even as the main basis of the “falsification”. In interview, when being asked about the question “which are you more willing to believe when a large conflict on the report of an event happened among your daily contacting media”, almost all the young-aged middle class chose the “overseas authority media”. However, when I went on to mention the false reports on the Tiber violence event of CNN in 2008, the respondent generally expressed great disappointment on foreign media reports, and showed the symptoms of a certain degree of information lost.

It has to be admitted that the biggest drawback of this way is that, no matter how diverse the source channels are, it cannot get rid of the influence of the media instrumental characteristic on the recognition, which is because that the middle class can only access secondary disseminated information through media and can only rely on speculative forces without entering the practice. Even the respondents themselves had been aware of this problem.

“I can say that I have lots of authoritative information sources which I can fully trust. But is it really like that? I am not quite sure now. Sometimes the information is not from your field, so your sense of judgment will decrease. Especially when you don’t have knowledge in that field, you will tend to trust it. So sometimes a reason that I agree with it is not because it is really true, but I don’t know anything about that. If I am not familiar with this field, I cannot judge.” (respondent 01)
2. The Personal Experience of the Middle Class

The group that takes its own experience as the main judgment basis is the members who have experienced a relatively complex social mobility. This section of people includes the young-aged and old-aged people who have experienced class mobility, which refers to the middle class members that have experienced the intergenerational and inner generational mobility or have had personally contact with the alien class members in their daily work and life. The most prominent feature of them is the ability to integrate the results between the media content and their own practice, in order to judge the logicality and limitations of narrative structure, the pros and cons of debate, and the survey and interview methods of the media, obtaining the familiarity with the expression style of the media through the multiple comparison between the media description and the reality.

“I am opposed to some reports that describe the low-income people as one same looking--poor and in need of sympathy. Some people who enjoy basic living allowance are wearing luxury jewelry and keeping a pet dog, but at the same time, they claim they are in a poor life. Maybe he doesn't have his own house and a stable job, but he could live happily and get married someday just like the others, and this is the way he chooses. He is always ‘smart’. He will quickly become a poor man when he needs the relief of the government. As I know the inside story, it is a very difficult problem to define, not as simple as the TV saying”.
(Respondent 03)

It should be said that most of the young-aged middle class members without the experience of social mobility are lacking this ability to judge the media content by their own experience. Their blind trust on the foreign media and the shattered trust in the CNN event was also mostly a result of the lack of this ability. But for the middle class members who have this ability, the imagination of the foreign media was not so obvious.

“It should be said that our domestic news report is relatively true, though sometimes they
need to consider the interests of our country, the news they choose to report is worth believing. I rarely pay attention to overseas media, but I am quite aware that the news they have reported cannot be true completely. They also have their own purposes with some of their distorted reports. It is normal, and it is always the law of media campaigns. All the domestic media nearly report the same news with certain credibility. The key is they can still tell us some credible news. I think I can accept this form of reporting.” (Respondent 17)

3. Professional Media Knowledge

This section of people is usually insiders of the media industry or some people with a media educational background. They are able to judge the bias and persuasive trend of the media from its capital nature; being able to analyze the formation of the information text from all aspects of the media production; being able to understand the professional ethics of the reporters; being able to accurately grasp the current political, cultural and material forms of environment, knowing the influence of the environment on the media reports; moreover, they can jump out of the scope of the role of the audience to examine and learn other audience groups in the same communication environment, judging the communication effects from the reactions of other audiences.

“Yes, that is how the media production has been made out. Why I never watch TV? Although my job is making TV, I don’t have it in my room. I know it very hard to create a very positive visual space. One meaning expressed by one pattern may be denied, but by another pattern might be passed; How advertisers promote profit as much as possible within the law; how to adjust the profit between producers themselves and each department; how to adjust the profit between department and the whole station…… all these things are shown on this program. " (respondent 20)

“There are actually two contradictions when I read reports. The first one is between myself and media, the other is between media and media. I used to manage some reporters and have a deep understanding of their difficulties and pursuits. No matter how many views and
possibilities society has put forward, we can always find a common law. I could not easily believe only one aspect of a media report, it is important for me to have my own judgment. If the mass media and I have some ideas in common, that is just by chance." (respondent 05)

It should be said that, in the current social conditions, most of the audience in China still rely on the first two ways to judge media information. The proportion of people who can really apply media professional knowledge is still very low. Thus the media literacy education in China still needs to be improved.

SECTION 3 MEDIA UTILIZATION AND SELF-PUBLISHING

The audience with media literacy, no matter if an individual or a member of a group, should be able to effectively utilize the mass media to express their voice to achieve a certain purpose.

However, this literacy of the middle class members is still weak. When being asked the question “What would you do if you were stopped and questioned by reporters on the street”, most of the respondents said that they would politely decline it because of the fear of their comments being misused. Moreover, the respondents generally said that they rarely expressed their opinions in online forums. Even for the young-aged middle class with a relatively high rate of network contact, their main contact with the network was also reflected in the discussion of soft information such as online shopping, entertainment and cultural circles, with rarely expressing their own views on the topics of people’s livelihood and political news. Similarly, the old-aged middle class with a high rate of contact with political news held the attitude of just watching media content without expressing their own views. For them, the discussion on political events could only be private talking between friends, which was difficult to become a public discussion on a public platform. The middle class also excluded the way of writing to the media to reflect something and were doubtful
of the efficiency of the interactive channels opened up by the mainstream media.

“You mean letters? Have they read one? There are so many hot issues appearing online without any response from authority. Is writing letters useful? I don’t think so. ” (respondent 11)

The middle class rarely used the channels of media to express their voice and kept in a silent state. The widespread situation that the social elites take the primary responsibilities of media monitoring and media criticism in the Western society has not appeared in China.

In addition, the middle class is also relatively conservative in the use of personal web space. Many respondents indicated that they had opened a blog. However, the excessively open browsing manner as well as the click rate which is difficult to control makes them feel apprehensive. So many of them stop blogging after having kept it for a period of time or they set permissions for visitors. The respondents who were still writing a blog also guided a pass of the content on the blog.

“Sooner or later, the things that have been posted online will be seen by the people concerned, and some day those things might become evidence against you. Therefore, it is good to just write something about the joys of spring! Problems will never show up.”(respondent 07)

The conservative situation of the middle class on the media utilization is related to their attitude to political conservatism. Many respondents have expressed that the current political status they lived in did not ask for their responsibilities of democratic supervision.

“Because there are always some people who have more rights and money than me and their voices can play more roles in those arguments. I should just do my own business, which is the most responsible thing I can do for our society, rather than chip away on the BBS. There is a view that empty words can ruin a country while action helps a country to flourish.” (Respondent 04)
The middle class members generally hoped that political participation could be distinct with daily life, as far as possible to avoid being over-involved in social movements. The statement by respondent 14 is representative.

“I am neither lacking social justice nor afraid of the possible risk. Actually, I have provided legal assistance to many cases. I know how powerful the media is and by them, we can gain more support from all respects. But I hope to deal with these cases from the view of a professional, not only to highlight myself.” (Respondent 14)

The middle class are more willing to show their career characteristics and to hide their life attributes, which is inseparable with their high expectations of a career. As almost all respondents promoted into the status of high-income through career, their attention on career development is much more than the attention on political participation. This characteristic is particularly conspicuous in the young-aged middle class.
CHAPTER 7 THE IMAGE OF ALIEN CLASSES AND THE SELF CLASSIFICATION OF MIDDLE CLASS

It can be seen from the analysis from the fifth Chapter to the sixth Chapter that the differentiation of media literacy within the middle class is mainly caused by two factors. Firstly, the difference in interests due to age determines the differentiation of the types of media content contacted with by the middle class. Secondly, the social mobility determines the sources of the media criticism ability. Through these two factors, the current middle class can be roughly divided into four types of old-aged members with class mobility experience, old-aged members without class mobility experience, young-aged members with class mobility experience and young-aged members without class mobility experience. They have different performances when recognizing the upper and lower social strata.

SECTION 1 THE IMAGE OF ALIEN CLASSES OF THE OLD-AGED MIDDLE CLASS

Firstly, since 1978, the Chinese society has witnessed the process of a trend of becoming high-grade of the entire occupational structure (Iredale, Bilik & Su, 2001, pp. 167-170). Thus, most of the middle class who had gained their first job before 1978 followed the trajectory of bottom-up flow or parallel flow, with only a handful of people descending from the upper social strata into the middle social strata. And with people born before 1952 gradually retiring from the incumbent population coverage, the rest of the old-aged middle class were basically forced to leave school education with the Cultural Revolution, and thus the starting point of their first job was low and their parallel flow was reduced in scale. Therefore, the class mobility experience brought the old-aged middle class more personal communication with the lower classes, which partly reduced their dependence on the lower class media, but it did not reduce their dependence on the upper class media.
Secondly, as I have discussed above, the main source of the recognition of the lower class image of the old-aged middle class is still the party and government news with the channels of mainstream newspapers, local television and CCTV. However, they usually had doubts on the lower class image shaped by the mainstream media because there were often conflicts between such image and their actual class mobility experience. On one hand, they admitted that the current mainstream media gave full coverage of the lower class members because they “could often see the reports of the leadership sending warmth to the lower classes”, but at the same time, they also considered that the real living conditions of the lower class had not been shown a lot on the media which was suspected of being deliberately landscaped by the media.

“If you only read the news reports, you will wonder why the poor are living better a life than us. People give them money on the double ninth festival, the hospitals treat them for free and they can also see films for free on their street. It seems that they have been given a lot of care. But can you imagine what a poor life the low class people are living in Beijing now? You can never know the truth unless you live together with them. Who can imagine the life of the poor around my old house I have said just now. They will never appear on the television because there are only two words about their lives, low-income groups. The poor live the hard life while the rich usually cannot see that. But now how many people have known the life of poor people like me? The media always repeats that the per capita GDP has created another record', and "being taken care of" when they refer to the low-income groups. But I think Beijing citizens rarely know what low income really means.” (respondent 17)

Their strategy in facing this case is reverse interpretation.

“The more the government emphasizes that our leaders have visited the low-income groups in some place, it may mean that a great strike had happened there. Or it said an introduction of the employment guidance for the university graduate is released, it may mean that it's not optimistic of the employment this year.” (Respondent 11)
This is a recognition experience that the old-aged middle class accumulated in the unified environment of public opinion for a long time. They used this way to make up the information asymmetry caused by the simplification and immobilization of the media channel.

In the situation of information asymmetry, the old-aged middle class often took the lower class groups as the reference in measuring their own class status. And the measurable indicators were not only income levels, but more importantly, the social prestige. When describing the self class status, they usually used the sentence “I neither need…nor need…” to indicate that they had got rid of the life stages of lacking security, such as the following words.

“I neither need to rely on the government for the welfare nor need to worry that some illness one day would put my family in trouble. We could go shopping as we wish. No burden to the government and maybe make some slight contribution to the State. It is not easy for the people of my age. Yes? That’s it. It can be called ‘middle’.” (Respondent 19)

Therefore, they often evaluated their own social class position based on such a feeling of security. And such evaluation often showed the trend of attaching the upper classes due to taking the lower classes as a reference.

Secondly, with difference from the young-aged middle class, the old-aged middle class had more obvious perception of the power stratification. When describing the upper social strata, they were more inclined to describe the upper classes from the perspective of power rather than from the perspective of income, which is related with their experience of undergoing the market transformation and the witness of the transformation process of the organizational resources to the marker resources. They were aware of the existence of a power advantage in addition to the wealth advantage shaped by the media.

“Are the rich men definitely in the high class? I do not think so. Can they stay at the intensive
care unit of the Central Hospital? Of course, they can go to the Maldives. But in this country, there still exists something that they cannot do or they have to ask for others’ help to achieve.” (respondent 06)

Although the current media has been trying to play down the image of the power elites, for the old-aged middle class, the existence of privilege was still a deep collective memory. In the command of the recognition of privilege and non-privilege, the old-aged middle class generally attributed themselves to the group of people with non-privilege.

Meanwhile, they fell into the predicament of having no way to recognize the image of the upper classes from the aspect of income. Due to the lack of their own experience or personal contact, their awareness of this group also mainly relied on the media impression of the description of consumption patterns and lifestyles.

“I know them mainly from the external information, most time through the media. I also have seen the living areas for nobility in Beijing several times. Wow, for heaven's sake! There are prosperous markets, parties, salon and all kinds of luxury goods you can imagine. Such as LV bags, Italian leather shoes, Swiss watches….And they are all have the same point: sky-high price labels. Hahaha… we salaried people seldom see them.” (Respondent 15)

On the basis of the recognition of alien classes built on media reality instead of objective reality, the old-age middle class made the evaluation that their income was always very low in comparison with the income of the upper classes. Such evaluation was even lower than the self-evaluation of the young-aged middle class who were in the same income level as the old-aged middle class.

Therefore, in the aspect of the income stratification and power stratification, the old-aged middle class all had the mental tendency of positing themselves as the lower classes. While in the aspect of prestige stratification, the old-aged middle class all had the mental tendency of attaching with the upper classes, which reflects that the
old-aged middle class still kept the class consciousness of a period with dramatic social changes, and the social transformation and market transformation had a great radiation effect on their class mobility.

SECTION 2 THE IMAGE OF ALIEN CLASSES OF THE YOUNG-AGED MIDDLE CLASS

It can be found through the above analysis that the young-aged middle class have two significant characteristics of media literacy. Firstly, they have serious interest preferences of media contact with the apparent lack of contact with party, government and social news. Secondly, the basis for their identification of media information is mainly from the multi-channel strategy. These two characteristics seriously affect their access to the recognition of alien classes.

1. Two Extremes on the Recognition of the Young-aged Middle Class.

The alienation of media content of the party, government and social news resulted in the two extremes of recognition of the lower social strata for the young-aged middle class.

A small number of young-age middle class members with class mobility experience (i.e. the intergenerational or inner generational of the bottom-up mobility) would question the image of the lower classes presented by the media.

“For the old state-owned enterprise workers, I think it’s a bit…how to say…blackened their image? Not so exactly…The media gives them the image that they do not have good skill, with low incomes, have to struggle at the bottom of this society, the instability factor of the society….Certainly, the media doesn’t always say these words, the reports are mainly about the care given by the government to these people. But you know, now people can reversely interpret the media. The more the media has praised the care given by government for these people, the worse conditions these people are facing. Is it? Although I do not watch TV too
often, every time I watch it, the news is expressing similar meaning. This is the media report caliber. I think there is always something wrong with it." (respondent 05)

In their mind, the tired calf reports of the media played a role in concern about the lower classes as well as made a simplified treatment on their image, one-sided positioning of the lower classes as the recipients, which was the performance of bias to a certain extent.

Most of the young-aged middle class completely relied on the image of lower social strata presented by the mainstream media. They did not completely avoid contact with the party and government news and they only contacted with the most convenient channel without verification of the media content. It can be found through the interview that the main information source for them to learn the lower classes was television news, and through which, they vaguely felt that there were still many “poor people” in China with the reason that “there was always an aid policy to the lower classes in the television news” (respondent 04). However, the media image of the lower classes that they could describe was very blurred, or even incomplete.

2. The Diminuendo Recognition of the Young-aged Middle Class.

The alienation of the media content of the party, government and social news also resulted in the diminuendo recognition of the upper classes with power for the young-aged middle class.

The image of the young-aged middle class on the upper classes is relatively unified. They generally considered that social classes should be divided according to income standards. They did not think the element of power was the most important in the current social formation.

“After all, there are small numbers of senior officials. Now the trend is that people place great emphasis on institutional improvement and senior officials cannot have absolute power
any more. It means nothing if we only talk about several people sitting at the top. After all, we are talking about the main class difference here, and only a few people can not constitute a class, do you think so?” (Respondent 10)

This kind of view has greatly related their media contact channels. It can be found in the interview that their description of the upper social strata was mostly formed on the basis of consumption patterns and lifestyles such as housing types, leisure styles, brand preference, investment styles, entrepreneurship history, family value…All of this content is more related with revenue or in other words the economic status, representing not so much of the power status. On the issue of stratification in power, most of the young-aged middle class considered it was difficult to define, which was closed related with their low political participation and low media utilization.

3. The young-aged middle class relied more on the strategy of multi-channel sources.

The young-aged middle class relied more on the strategy of multi-channel sources. They had less opportunity to put the media content into practice to examine it and were not familiar with the means of operation and communication strategies. Thus in the current situation of relatively concentrated media coverage caliber, the strategy of multi-channel source is easy to fail.

This failure was extremely obvious during the process when they accepted the media image of the upper social strata. The middle class did not have a lot more opportunities to personally contact with the upper classes than the lower classes, so they still needed to learn the upper classes though media, although the media channels they contacted with were more than the lower classes. When being asked about the media they used to learn the upper classes, the majority of respondents referred to their unique sources such as bulletins from the club, flight magazines, online meeting
rooms, Sina blog…Although they could list the interpretation of the various programs of the upper social strata, the final effects of interpretation was still more or less the same. This was because the media image itself of the upper social strata was too single, or in other words, the mass media deliberately highlighted a part of the image of the upper social strata – the consumption behavior – for certain purposes.

Meanwhile, utilizing the reports on luxury consumer goods to do reverse reasoning of the classes had become a reading strategy of the audience to contact with the consumption content. This reading (viewing) strategy was also widely used in the media exposure of the middle class. And as the middle class had the economic ability and social ability to come into contact with more types of consumer media, they could see much more media text with the consumption implication than the majority of the lower classes members, which had also become strong evidence for the middle class to determine the existence of the upper social strata.

“Is it difficult to know them? Just look at the thousands of dollars of shoes and windbreakers in fashion magazines, they are so expensive. But why do they still sell well? And the fabulous sports cars are even reserved on exhibition, or villas are sold out before opening. Who bought them? They are the upper class, of course. They needn't appear on camera, just in newspaper. Then we all know. Wow, there are so many rich people around us.’ (Respondent 02)

The firm impression on the upper social strata, coupled with the cognitive vacuum of the lower social strata, led the young-aged middle class to be more inclined to take the upper classes as the reference in their self-position and take the income as the standard of stratification. It can be seen clearly from the interview that when answering the question “which class do you belong to in your mind”, the most common used sentence was “I think I do not have…, and do not have…, so I am…”. They used the sentence with the meaning of unsatisfied needs to indicate that they had not yet reached the upper social strata, which also reflected the strong aspirations of the young-aged middle class to move upward.
This cognitive process led the young-aged middle class to argue on the stratification standard at the beginning, such as the example of some respondents mentioning the lifestyle as the stratification standard, but in the end, they invariably returned to the stratification standard of income or consumption level.

Meanwhile, the young-aged middle class considered that it was difficult for them to touch with the indicator of “reputation”. It is because that, in their mind, the “reputation” was closely related with the upward social mobility process rather than the current economic or authority position. Accord to their own performance, the young-aged middle class generally considered that they still had not possessed the social prestige and they mentioned the important role of age on the reputation that “if you give me five or ten years, I think I should be able to achieve the standard of possessing the reputation, at this stage, I still have no way to change it” (respondent 13). It also reflected that, in the relatively stable social formation with a high degree of openness, the middle class held an optimistic attitude on the possibility to move upward.

The situation that young-aged middle class took income as the stratification criteria and positioned themselves with the trend of condescending to the lower classes on the income status and reputation status is greatly different from the situation of the old-aged middle class, which reflects that, in current China with the social transformation in a smooth trend, there has come out new forms of class consciousness of class members.

SECTION 3 THE DIFFERENTIATION OF MEDIA COMMUNICATION AND SEGMENTATION OF COGNITION ON ALIEN CLASSES

Two prominent phenomenons can be found from the above analysis. Firstly, the old-aged middle class in depth of contact with the media content of party, government
and social news programs could obtain the class awareness of positioning their prestigious status with the trend of clinging with the upper classes. Secondly, the young-aged middle class in depth of contact with life and consumer programs could obtain the class awareness of positioning their income status with the trend of condescending to the lower classes. These two phenomenon are mentioned so frequently that we have to admit that the media image of the social upper classes and lower classes and its transmission channels have been solidified to a certain extent, and a certain class differentiation has emerged on the communication pattern of mass communication in China. In turn, this communication differentiation has promoted social differentiation and social transformation. Certainly, this view cannot be carried out to the detailed quantitative studies to be verified in this research, but I think the answers of the respondents could truly reflect the reconstruction of the social space by the communication tools, and the specialty of the construction process also reflects the specialty of the social transformation in China.

It cannot be denied that the current communication differentiation in China is firstly the result of “Chinese social transformation model” (Li, 2007). There are three main features of the social transformation. First is that the progressive reform becomes a general rule. Second is that the economic structure transition and the transformation of social structure carried out simultaneously. Third is the principle of giving priority to social stability and cautious democratization exploration. The characteristics represented in the field of mass media are as follows.

Firstly, gradually relaxing the regulation of some media content (such as the programs about life and consumption) with the reflection of the progressive system reform, allowing the market-oriented operation pattern of the media in this field, actively promoting the media industry, and accepting the representation of capital in the programs production, in order to pursue the maximization of economic efficiency.
Secondly, carrying out the cautious democratization exploration with the principle of giving priority to social stability, adhering a rigorous review and management system on some media content (such as party and government news, comments on current events, livelihood information), emphasizing the direction of the public opinion, in order to present a highly consistent and positive media image in the programs.

Thirdly, based on the above reasons, there is still existed the game between the market and the government in the introduction of overseas media productions and cross-border cooperation (Cheng, 2011, pp. 41-49).

Therefore, the issue about the curing of the class image and the curing of media channels mentioned above is in fact a unique phenomenon of the Chinese media in the “double-track pricing system” (the co-existence of the state fixed price and the market price) (Cheng, 2011, p. 50).

A dilemma came out accompanying the media market tide rolling in. In the situation of the double-track running, on one side, the media content is monitored by the government, and on the other side, the media operation has to take the marker-oriented path. So in this case, the founders of the media usually seek the maximization of the economic benefits in the exchange with the minimization of the political risk. There are also many difficulties in achieving the harmony of these two factors (economic benefits and political risk).

On one hand, the party and government still hold the publicity function of the media ideology and keep the strict management and regulation of certain media content. Specifically, the current control means are reflected in three aspects\textsuperscript{13}.

First is the control of the ownership of information. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the report and publishing of the significant events and

news about the party and the state have always been in compliance with the system of being unifyingly released by the Xinhua News Agency. Meanwhile, all the local newspapers and magazines are not allowed to publish the telecommunications of news agencies of western countries. All the international news can only be issued according to the broadcast of the Xinhua headquarters. Moreover, the government implements the examination and approval system on the introduction of foreign radio, film and television programs and the imports and subscriptions of foreign newspapers and books.

Second is the utilization of the regulations in many administrative departments and local governments, such as the “Internet Sites in the Interim Measures for the Administration of the Business of News Publication” and the “On Defining Obscene and Pornographic Publications Interim Provisions” in regulating the media operation, and the “News Collecting and Editing Staff Management Scheme” in regulating the behavior of the media staff. Although there is still no news legislation in China, these administrative rules and regulations can achieve the purpose of in-depth monitoring of the information dissemination and the editing behavior of the practitioners.

Third is the “Publicity Advice” issued aperiodically by each provincial propaganda department on various important party and government news or social news. These advices can not only provide administrative management and guidance for reporting work, but can also be specific to the formulation of the report view, report caliber and planning scheme of a single news event, which is an effective and powerful means of control.

This top-down regulatory system with layer upon layer determines that there is no absolute autonomy on the content of part of the layout or time interval of the media. They must be subordinated to the unified media coverage caliber to reflect the core values of the party. This control of the content and public opinion is particularly prominent in the report of the politics news. As the main form of positive propaganda, the reports reflecting the achievements obtained by the working class and peasant
class in the socialist construction and the reports reflecting aid to the vulnerable
groups must occupy an important position in mainstream media. While as the
consideration of the intensification of the social contradictions, the appearance of the
image of the affluent is generally controlled in the political and social news with
strong credibility and persuasiveness, avoiding the reference to millionaires and high
officials. The publicity and supervision department even issued internal documents to
prohibit the formulation of “middle class”. All the description referring to class
stratification and the image of specific class members must be expressed in the
criterion of the formulation of the meeting documents (such as the 17th CPC National
Congress report) (Li, 2010, p.141). Therefore, it is difficult for the public to get a
glimpse of the image of the upper social strata in the “hard news” of the mainstream
media, while have more opportunities to contact with the reports of the lower social
strata, which has resulted in an image of the lower classes members as being the
laggard of social development and the main objects rescued by the social security
system, and thus causing the audience to give a judgment of low social prestige to the
lower social strata and positioned their own reputation with the trend of attaching with
the upper social strata.

On the other hand, the media must be involved in market competition and its
management subject must try to obtain the maximization of the economic benefits in
the limited layout or session resources which are not controlled by the party and
government. In this situation, most of the media have to fuss in the media content
with relatively weak effects of control of the party and government, implementing the
strategy of the dominant of purchasing power, which is trying to cater to the taste of
the groups with high spending power in the programs of life and consumption.
According to the “Survey of Media to Report” published in “Modern Advertising” in
2005, the advertising revenues accounted for 72.5% of the total income of the whole
media in China14, and the advertising revenues accounted for as much as 95%-98%
of the total income in most of the domestic media groups (Cheng, 2003), which

reflects that the over-reliance on the advertising business has become a reality in Chinese media. At present, the media all takes the target profits as the pricing and positioning strategy, so the media communication has to take greater effort to fix their own position in order to meet the taste and intension of the advertisers, that is the reason why the number of varieties of high-end magazines with a price of more than 10 Yuan increased in successive years with the annual growth rate in more than 20%\textsuperscript{15}. In such competitive conditions, fully displaying the picture of high-end life has become a means to win. So the audience will find that their daily life is filled with the reports of the words “mansion”, “yacht” and “collection” which reflects the extraordinary purchasing power of the persuasion and guidance information of “how to eat”, “how to wear” and “how to leisure”. And the awareness of the audience on the upper social strata is also bundled with the “consumer superman”.

In summary, the double squeeze of the mass media in the political and market field is the main reason that leads to the solidification of the image of the upper and lower social strata. With the beginning of 2012, the pace of foreign capital to enter the Chinese media market is becoming more frequent, which will bring much more pressure on the domestic media, and the image of the upper and lower social strata presented by the media reality will also be further polarized. With the increasingly deep class segment in current China, it is difficult for the existing media literacy of the middle class to abate the constructed image to restore its authenticity.

CHAPTER 8 THE DILEMA OF THE SELF CLASS
IDENTIFICATION

After learning about the relationship between the recognition of the alien classes in the mind of the middle class and the impact of the media, we can come back to answer the questions raised at the beginning of this article:

Why did the middle class members still feel the social stratification without the case of falling into the status of relative deprivation themselves?

Why did the middle class members resist the economic status as the criteria for social stratification? Why did so many middle class members find it difficult to confirm their identity as “middle class”?

SECTION 1 THE SENSE OF RELATIVE DEPRIVATION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

It can found from interview results that the self class identification of the middle class is the objective reality, while their recognition of the alien classes has to go through the media reality. The dependence of the recognition of alien classes on the media comes from the increasingly serious segment between the various strata of the society in China.

The two distinct characteristics of transition in the field of media communication in China will widen the distance between the media reality and the objective reality, causing the middle class to make erroneous judgments of the image of alien classes. The two characteristics are the control of ideology of the hard news by the government and the strong dominance of life and entertainment information by the capital power. The former characteristic leads to the disappearance of the image of the upper social strata in the public sphere and the materialization of the image of the
lower social strata. The latter characteristic leads to the disappearance of the image of the lower social strata in the consumer area and the materialization of the image of the upper social strata. For the middle class audience, the reference of reputation and power is the lower social strata, while the reference of income status is the upper social strata.

In this situation, the media literacy of the middle class has to play a role to help them get rid of the false consciousness. According to existing research, the media literacy of the middle class reflects the pattern of age differentiation. This differentiation is caused by their various experiences of class mobility and the reform and openness on the mass media in China.

For the old-aged middle class (the middle class members who got their first job before 1978), their scope of media exposure is limited while their depth of media exposure is deep. Their demands for “information” and “knowledge” are separate. Their reading (viewing) channels concentrate on the traditional mainstream media types such as newspaper, television and books, and the mainstream media brands such as various types of party newspapers, local comprehensive news television channel and socio-cultural books. Their reading (viewing) content concentrate on the political and social news, and thus they have more exposure to the mainstream values and ideological propaganda. They are more familiar with the image of the lower social strata and their image of the upper social strata is mainly from their imagination. Their ability to identify the information comes from their own class mobility experience, making a judgment of the validity and reliability, integrity and oriented type of information on the basis of their life experience, and thus they have a certain ability of reducing the ideological construction. But they often have a conflict psychology on the consumer persuasion, so they usually take the lower social strata as the reference to do the self class classification with the trend of attaching with the upper social strata in the reputation and power status and the trend of condescending to the lower social strata in the economic status.
For the young-aged middle class (the middle class members who got their first job after 1978), their scope of media exposure is wide and their depth of media exposure is deep. Their demands for “information” and “knowledge” are united. They have strong preference on the interests of the reading (viewing) with general lack of contact with political and social information. Their reading (viewing) channels include both traditional and new media and both the domestic and foreign media with the purpose of obtaining professional knowledge, entertainment, and consumer information. In their cognitive system, the image of the lower social strata is vague and the image of the upper social strata is characterized by consumer behavior. Only a small part of them have the class mobility experience. They rely on the comparison of multi-channels to identity the information while rarely entering the practice areas. Therefore, they usually take the upper social strata as the reference to do the self class classification with the trend of condescending to the lower social strata in the reputation and economic status and apathy to the concept of authority.

The above process reflects that the media has expanded the reference groups of the social classes for the middle class, creating media reality that society is experiencing the dramatic changes and severe differentiation in the process of widening the image gap between the upper social strata and the lower social strata. Therefore, the sense of the relative deprivation of the middle class comes out of it. The propaganda authorities have tried to avoid the issue of the large image gap between the upper social strata and the lower social strata, but because of the tussle between the government and the market in the “double-track” running process, this issue is clearly revealed. Although the media literacy in an entity of the middle class is higher than the lower classes, with its main advantage reflecting in the resisting of the negative information of pornography, violence, bias and discrimination, the critical ability in the political field of the middle class still needs to be strengthened, and thus the promotion of media literacy education is necessary.
In addition, in the situation that the class segmentation becomes increasingly obvious and the situation that new emerging young-aged middle class group which grew up from a stable middle class family continues to grow, the middle class in China has gradually turned into the typical example of the mass cultural consumption described by Habermas (see Hahn, 2000, p.264). They gradually separate themselves from citizens who rational participate in public affairs, and comparing with the great mass of the labour class and vulnerable groups, they are more lacking in enthusiasm for participation in the public sphere of mass media. It can be said that the structure differentiation of the public sphere brought by the mass media has been revealed, which is an alarming signal for the development orientation of the ongoing issue of expanding the proportion of the middle class.

SECTION 2 “MIDDLE CLASS”: THE LOCAL ADAPTATION OF THE FOREIGN CULTURE

It can be found by interviewing that the respondents did not have high identification of their identity as “middle class”. Most of the respondents considered that the “middle class” was in the layer higher than them. Only 1/5 of the respondents agreed that they “barely belong to the middle class” and the respondents who had this recognition were all old-aged middle class. In the past, some scholars had discussed the issue of low self class classification (Li, 2004; Liu, 2001; Zhou, 2005), considering that it was due to two reasons. Firstly, the power distribution system in China is divided into two parts while the other social resources are stratified in gradient. Secondly, most members of society take the upper social classes or the life they look forward to as a reference rather than taking the lower social classes as a reference. These two reasons have already been discussed above and been given a detailed explanation. However, I think there is another reason that cannot be ignored, that is the issue of the legalization of the concept of “middle class” in the public discourse space.
It cannot be denied that, the concept of “middle class” is a foreign concept for the social members of China. There is a certain distance between this concept and the local culture in China. When being asked the question “in which way did you first hear the concept of ‘middle class’”, the answers of the respondents were usually differentiated into two types that one was “the mention of the living conditions and class nature of the ‘middle class’ or ‘petty bourgeois’ in the learning of the modern history of Europe at middle school” and the other was “the knowledge from the media and books in recent years”. When I made further inquiries that “through what other channels did you learn the concept after the first contact with it”, the respondent generally considered that the mass media publicity in recent years increased their knowledge of “middle class” life. When I continued to question their current understanding of the middle class, the respondents often gave a specific description from two aspects of income and living consumption patterns.

“Keeping a stable income with an annual salary of 500 or 600 thousand RMB……And keeping some disposable financial products. They should have two or more real estate, one of them is self-occupied, and the other sets random…… Such a person should try for a ‘five-plus-two’ life with demand for travel and luxury goods, but not too much; They care about their quality of life and have cars, but the brands of those cars are not extremely famous, they should not be Mercedes-Benz or BMW. They may be just Volkswagen Beetle, or Mini, even a little lower than those. They may focus on their quality of life. It means they would pay more attention to leisure, health and education than working and they are willing to invest in their children for senior education.”(Respondent 13)

It is thus clear that the “middle class” was widely recognized by the people as a concept of class struggle, while the recognition of the “middle class” in recent years was completely included in the field of consumption by the media. The urban middle class in current China are the new emerging class in development. The standards of middle class they contacted with through media are all simplified and condensed into a lot of status symbols. The class image reflected by such status symbols makes them
quite anxious, because they cannot achieve some consumption patterns, which is the main reason that they cannot identify themselves as “middle class”.

In addition, to the views of “reputation”, the young-aged middle class and old-aged middle class cannot reach an agreement. In the view of the young-aged middle class, the “reputation” is the discourse power which is the ability of participating in social public opinion and affecting other social members. While in the view of the young-aged middle class, the “reputation” is the “social evaluation” that they regard the individuals who have got rid of the low income, low education level and the situation of relying on the government assistance as the people with the reputation “above the average”. Both of them did not think there were any inevitable relationship between reputation and occupation, which the reason I think is also related to the media communication. In the hard news dominated by the ideology of the government, it is difficult to hear and see the exact description of the “middle class”. Therefore, because the identity of the “middle class” cannot enter the public sphere for discussion, it is extremely difficult for the internal members of middle class to confirm this identity, and then the identity crisis arises. Many respondents would answer me by asking whether the standard of the definition of middle class had been laid down. When getting a negative answer, they would try to speak the standards of the middle class in their own minds.

“I think not everyone likes Toyota, villas or some famous clothing brands like ARMANI. It is typical to play tennis and have dinner in upmarket restaurants overseas, and in China, everyone is learning slowly. I do not care what others call me. Someone says I am petty bourgeois now. Maybe in years to come I will be called middle class, but I will not do the things they define. Just be myself.” (Respondent 05)

This is the typical mentality of the middle class in current China – a mentality of “slowly learning”. With the economic status above the average in the whole society, they regard themselves as the beneficiary in social transformation and hold great hope of upward social mobility. But at the same time, when constructing the self class
identification, they suffered the converging attack of the class segment, ideological control and the new media tide. In the socio-cultural system, they are not able to gain the opportunity and sufficient legality to discuss their own class identity. So now they have to slowly search for their position among the market, the government and culture, and to make an acquisition of the so-called “class image” of the middle class through a passive learning of the behavioral consistency.

In this case, the class consciousness of the middle class in China probably has only reached “the most undeveloped form of the class conscious” described by Giddens (1982, p.163), namely the simple perspective of class identification and the perspective of class differentiation arising from it, without the development of the class consciousness in higher level. Although the unique economic status, occupational identity and education degree of the middle class can provide the necessary social capital for them, the social integration of their class identification is difficult to accomplish. The primary reason for this predicament is probably the game puzzle of the triple power of the market, government and culture in the transition period of China.
CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION

SECTION 1 CONCLUSION DISCUSSION

With more than 30 years of the reform and openness in China, it can be clearly pointed out that whatever the overall appearance of the class structure is, the intensity of class stratification is already quite significant, which manifests in a great gap of recognition of alien classes from the members of various socio-economic classes. This gap also shows that the middle class has already become an independent and stabilized class in Chinese society and has occupied a position which cannot be ignored.

Due to the different years for social members to participate in social distribution, the social mobility processes experienced by the people who already have middle class status and identity are also different, which determine their understanding level of the social classes. While the changing process of social communication, consumption patterns and the segment of the living space brought by social stratification is also reflected in the their recognition of alien classes.

The middle class have a very different source of recognition between the upper classes and the lower classes. Accompanied by the structured process, the cognitive segment for alien classes is gradually deepened. The subdivision of occupation types have made a group of new middle class with stable class status and young ages gradually falling into the predicament fully isolated from the recognition of alien classes, and this group will continue to expand in the Chinese society.

In addition, in terms of psychological mechanism, although the description of social members for the social stratification structure is in gradient, the ways to define social classes is still built on the basis of “dichotomy” which determines the two basic classes of the “up” and “low” and then divides the diverse levels among them.
I also found that there is no absolutely causal relationship between the relative deprivation status and the sense of relative deprivation (the sense of relative deprivation also occurs in the social members who did not fall into the relative deprivation status), in which shows that the choice of “reference group” plays a role. And the choice of the reference group is built on the structural position mentioned above and the mobility experience.

Meanwhile, due to the continuous development of media power (especially the new media represented by the Internet), the proportion of the middle class that regard media as alternative channels of the recognition of alien classes is increasingly high and the dependence of middle class on the media is getting stronger, so the struggle in the field of media information screening becomes increasingly fierce. Starting from the fifth chapter, the media dependent intensity of the middle class and their ability to deal with the media dependence will be described and analyzed.

The unique way of media contact of the middle class is the result of the whole effects of its educational characteristics, economic characteristics and age characteristics. It can be drawn from the above analysis that the influence of age on the differentiation of the media contact ways within the middle class is significant. This is because, with the media environment and media market of China gradually opening up over time, the young-aged middle class grow up in a more relaxed information environment than their parents, and thus they have more freedom of choice of information. Relatively speaking, the main factor that restricts the old-aged middle class to contact with media is not the technical factor but the profound impact of the traditionally passive receiving mode of information.

In terms of the comprehensive point of communication effects and communication results, the media contents that the old-aged middle class most frequently contact with are the party and government news from newspapers and television and social scientific and cultural knowledge from books, while the media contents with the lowest contact rate is information about consumption, entertainment
and fashion. The media contents that the young-aged middle class most frequently contact with are the various kinds of professional knowledge (including the social scientific and cultural knowledge) from journals and magazines and information about entertainment and consumption from the Internet, while the media contents with the lowest contact rate of are party and government news, and television news is the main source of exposure of party and government news for the young-aged middle class.

In terms of the perspective of identification, the middle class have encountered obstacles in the parallel process of seeking “convergence” and “exclusion”. Both of these obstacles are rooted in structural factors along with the serious impact of the current media ecology in China.

Firstly, the differentiation of class structure has led to two consequences. One is that the middle class went on the stage of history as an independent and stable class. The other is that the mutual cognitive segmentation appeared among the various social classes. These two points directly correspond to the two processes of the self-identification mechanism of the middle class.

From the first point of view, although the middle class has emerged, it has not yet fully developed. The relatively small size and high heterogeneity within the members leads to its vague class features. Thus the class consciousness of the middle class is difficult to be concentrated. Meanwhile, the open discussion on the identity characteristics and the image of the “middle class” is apparently limited by the government so that it cannot obtain enough legitimacy, thus losing its necessary cultural capital. In the attack of these dual factors, the process of direct convergence of the middle class is difficult to accomplish.

From the second point of view, the cognitive segment between classes directly led to the members of society to obtain enough images of alien classes from the mass media to support the construction of their reference system. In the unique media management system of current China, the image of alien classes provided by the
media has been greatly simplified and immobilized, leading to the ineffectiveness of the media literacy and media interpretation approach (such as the wide channels of media exposure and the ability to actively seek and integrate the information) of the middle class which are originally in the higher level than those of the lower and upper social classes, aggravating the deviation of their recognition on alien classes and creating the differentiation of their reference system in the aspect of reputation and economic income, resulting in their strong sense of relative deprivation and the self-identification results with an overall downward trend. The means of publicity originally being used to reduce the stratification has engendered the effects that exacerbate the sense of stratification of the middle class members. So for middle class, the exclusion process (i.e. the process of selecting the reference of the changes of life experience) of alien classes is also hindered by media communication.

As mentioned above (Section 1 of Chapter 2), due to the particularity of the class status, the main source of the class identification of the middle class is the exclusion process of alien classes, and thus their erroneous perception of the image of alien classes in the propaganda of the media will dominate their entire mental process of recognition. It can be imaged that, with the gradual deepening of the openness of foreign capital in the media market, the balance of the power between the market and the government will be more matched and the image of alien classes will be increasingly shaped in polarization by the media. Then if the channel for middle class to speak has not been established, the self-identification of the middle class will be more difficult to achieve.

As Wright (1985) has put forward that the middle class are the people located in the contradictory position of the contradictory class relations. Their contradictions is not only reflected in the way of possession and payment of the means of production or knowledge, but is also reflected in the restriction they suffered in the field of subjective construction. In China, as a special kind of social resources and means of control, the media is exerting effects on the middle class groups in the subjective field.
So that even if the middle class has the attribute to form the “class for free”, they are difficult to become the “class for itself” with the full condensation of the class consciousness. Meanwhile, we also need to recognize that, although this control action occurs in the subjective field, its determinant is in the objective level in the final analysis. As a tool in inspiring, organizing and mobilizing the class consciousness, the mass media cannot be divorced from the process of social structure changes.

SECTION 2 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The biggest limitation of this research is that it is unable to use quantitative indicators to describe the level of media literacy of the respondents, and to make the validation of correlation degree of the relationship between age and the media literacy, and the relationship between the media literacy and the level of identification. Due to the lack of an authoritative analysis model and measurement, the current survey about media literacy stays more in the subjective level, which is a global issue in the field of media literacy research (Jensen & Jankowski, 2002).

Moreover, the unit of the research analysis is limited to individuals. Some scholars have pointed out that the level of class consciousness of the individuals is closely related with the position of their families (Coleman & Rainwater, 1978). It is slightly involved in this article that, for example, in the section about the acquisition model of the middle class status of the individuals, it has mentioned the relationship between marriage and the cognitive channels of alien classes. But due to limitation of the topic and the research effort, I have not discussed much in this area. In fact, the research orientation of family influence is more in line with Chinese society with much more practical significance. This article has showed that the inner generational mobility of the current Chinese society has tended to slow down, and with the opening up of high education, the intergenerational mobility will hold up its intense situation. Therefore, if the research can transform the point of view to examine the
integration degree of the class consciousness within the families, it may obtain more discoveries.
### APPENDIX 1 Current research situation of the middle class in China

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research methods</th>
<th>The main discoveries from the study</th>
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<tr>
<td>Li Qiang 2001</td>
<td>Secondary data analysis</td>
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</table>
|                  | 1. Explain the meaning of the Western middle class and the evolution trends.  
|                  | 2. Pointed out that the rise of the middle class in China is caused by the dual role of industry change and career change.  
|                  | 3. Pointed out that the middle class is the most important social force in maintaining social stability. |
| Zhang Wanli 2002 | Secondary data analysis            |
|                  | 1. Pointed out that the proportion of the middle class is around 15% according to the analysis of “Contemporary Chinese social structure changes”  
|                  | 2. Pointed out that the middle class has appeared different stratification. The upper and middle stratification of the middle class (18.49%) can quickly promote to the top class while the lower stratification (44.54%) may decrease to the bottom at any time.  
|                  | 3. The current middle class have 3 different values and behavior norms because of the ownership of the means of production, regions and their own qualities. |
| Lv Xinping Liu Jingming Guo Xinghua 2004 | Questionnaires (4738): 10 cities in China |
|                  | 1. Measured the scale of the middle class from the standards of income, level of education and profession.  
|                  | 2. Pointed out that the appearance of the middle class at this stage is due to the common role of industrialization and the market transformation. Our city middle class are divided into market middle class and administration middle class.  
|                  | 3. Described the economy, politics and human capital about the middle class. Pointed out that the human capital is the main factor for middle class to promote to higher class.  
|                  | 4. The values generated by the middle class from Chinese cities have been approved by various groups. But they are still in a period of exploration and collision.  
<p>|                  | 5. The market middle class will take a major role in the future. The current core groups will decrease to administration middle class. Many administrative level persons will become market-oriented. Others |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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</table>
| Li Chunling       | 2004   | Questionnaires (6093): 12 cities in China       | 1. Measured the scale of the middle class from the standards of income, consumption, lifestyle and profession.  
2. Described the age, gender and profession of each middle class from each standard.                                                                                          |
| Zhang Wanli       | 2004   | Questionnaires (6093): 31 provinces and autonomous religions in China | 1. China’s middle class is defined from the prospective of occupational structure: Knowledge capital and occupational prestige capital. / Brainwork. / Higher employability. / Professional rights. / Annual personal income 25000~30000RMB or annual household income 50000~70000RMB. / Non-subistence lifestyle. / Certain influence on the social affairs.  
2. Pointed out that Chinese middle class is generated by industrialization, market and urbanization. It mainly reflects on the different types of occupation. The consequence is to create a middle-class consumption pattern and social class identity.  
3. The current middle class have different nature, it is because of A: The administrative organization relationship, market exchange relationship and social network relationship. B: Lack of private ownership and private system culture. |
| Zhao Yandong       | 2005   | Questionnaires (11094): 31 provinces and autonomous religions in China | 1. Pointed out that China’s urban public subjective class identification is showing downward offset and lack of middle class identification. It explains the trend of polarization.  
2. The individual’s subjective class identification is the biggest reason of causing the sense of injustice, social conflict and conflict behavior. The lower class people belong to, the lower evaluation to the social equality. So lack of middle class identification has formed a negative impact on the social stability and development. |
| Shen Hui           | 2005   | 1. Questionnaires (More than 3000) and case interview (More than 100 persons). Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Nanjing and Wuhan. | 1. Described the identification standard from various classes to middle class with statistics.  
2. Pointed out that there is a deviation between middle-class social identification and self-identification.  
3. Pointed out that currently China does not have
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2</th>
<th>Secondary data analysis</th>
<th>correct understanding of middle-class and rational identification. It is caused by the social mechanism and psychology mechanism.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Liu Xin**  
2007 | CGSS2003Questionnaire 30 provinces and autonomous religions except Tibet, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. Four-stage unequal probability samples. There are 5894 valid questionnaires. | 1. There are five classes in current China. They are the upper social class, the upper middle class, the lower middle class, skilled workers and staffs, and non-skilled workers and individual workers.  
2. The CGSS2003 research data shows the proportion of upper social class of Chinese cities are 0.6%, the upper middle class are 7.6%, the lower middle class are 22.8%, the skilled workers and staffs are 25.7%, the non-skilled workers and individual workers are 43.4%. The structure is typically “pyramid”.  
3. The analysis above has a strong explanatory power about income, family housing area, class identification and happiness. It can reflect the status of the middle class in the specific social economic and political structure. |
| **Lu Xueyi**  
2010 | Questionnaires, more than 10 provinces and cities including Sichuan, Guangdong, Beijing, Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangsu. | 1. The middle class is increasingly expanding in China. The GDP in China has achieved 3000 dollars, which means that China is stepping into the countries with middle-level income.  
2. The middle class is about 23% of the whole society. It needs another 17 years to achieve the scale of the middle class of the developed countries.  
3. It suggests that the expansion of the middle class needs to be achieve through enhancing the threshold of the personal tax, strengthening the regulation and control in the field of people’s livelihood including the education, medical treatment, housing. |
## APPENDIX 2  Introductions of the respondents of Beijing middle class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Personal background</th>
<th>Family background</th>
<th>Occupation feature</th>
<th>Economic situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chen Ke</td>
<td>Male, 26, unmarried, born in Beijing, master from a British University, a member of the Communist Party of China.</td>
<td>Father: Level cadre. Mother: Private entrepreneurs. Living separately with parents, economic independence.</td>
<td>A section member, vice section-level cadre.</td>
<td>Disposable income of last month is 4000RMB. The average annual family total income is 56,000RMB. Car: No. Housing price: No. Loans: No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lu</td>
<td>Female, 26, unmarried, born in Beijing, MSW from the University of Hong Kong, a probationary member of the Communist Party of China.</td>
<td>Father: Manager of a state-owned enterprise. Mother: CAS researcher. Living with parents, supported by parents.</td>
<td>Practice lawyer.</td>
<td>Disposable income of last month is 3500RMB. The average annual family total income is 220,000RMB. Car: No. Housing price: No. Loans: No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lv</td>
<td>Female, 32, married, no children, 8 years in Beijing, master degree, a member of the Communist Party of China.</td>
<td>Father: Management of state-owned enterprise. Mother: Health care worker. Her parents are both working outside and her husband is sales manager, economic independence.</td>
<td>Beijing employment promotion centre director who is managing 10 staffs, vice section-level cadre.</td>
<td>Disposable income of last month is 8000RMB. The average annual family total income is 60,000RMB. Car: No. Housing price: 1 million RMB. Market value of shares: 100,000RMB.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male, 29,</td>
<td></td>
<td>IT engineer.</td>
<td>Disposable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 Coco</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 Qiu</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 JingJing</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Married/Status</td>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huang</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09 Wu</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>One son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife: Senior teacher with the income 5000RMB per month, economic independence.</td>
<td>The average annual family total income is 220,000RMB. Car: 150,000RMB Housing price: 2,400,000RMB Loans: No. Market value of fund is 50,000RMB.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Ye</td>
<td>Male, 46, married, one, born in Beijing, bachelor degree.</td>
<td>Father: Deceased. Mother: Doctor. Wife: Worker with the income 3000 per month. Director of brand culture, A class photographer of China. Title: Vice senior. Disposable income of last month is 8000RMB. The average annual family total income is 200,000RMB. Car: 120,000RMB. Housing price: 6,000,000RMB Loans: No.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Chen</td>
<td>Female, 28, unmarried, no children, 6 years in Beijing, bachelor degree, a member of the Communist Party of China.</td>
<td>Father: Doctor. Mother: Doctor. Program for state-owned enterprise, assistant engineer. Title: Junior. Disposable income of last month is 4000RMB. The average annual family total income is 40,000RMB. Car: No. Housing price: No. Loans: No.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Zou</td>
<td>Male, 29, married, no children, 10 years in Beijing, MBA</td>
<td>Father: Bureau-level cadre. Mother: Doctor. Wife: Administrative staff with unknown General manager of Joint venture real estate marketing company. No title. Disposable income of last month is a secret. The average annual family total income is a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender, Age, Married Status, Children, Education, Occupation, Income, Economic Independence</td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>Full-time lawyer of the law firm, director of the office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Wang</td>
<td>Male, 57, married, one daughter, born in Beijing, bachelor degree</td>
<td>Wife: Retired with the pension 1500RMB per month. Daughter: Secretary of the government department, economic independence.</td>
<td>Full-time lawyer of the law firm, director of the office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Title: Vice senior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marketable of shares is 500,000RMB.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Lin</td>
<td>Male, 59, married, one son, born in Beijing, college degree, a member of the Communist Party of China.</td>
<td>Wife: Retired with the pension 1500RMB per month. Son: Studying abroad. Economic independence. He used to do farming for 10 years.</td>
<td>Director of a district office. Section-level cadre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Miss wang</td>
<td>Female, 31, unmarried, 8 years in Beijing, Bachelor degree.</td>
<td>Father: Farmer. Mother: Farmer. Parents are both living outside. Economic independence.</td>
<td>Financial commissioner of a pharmaceutical company. Title: Business analysts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Mao</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Yang</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19A</td>
<td>Zhu</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table contains information on income, car ownership, housing price, and loans for individuals named Mao, Yang, and Zhu. The table also includes details about their educational and occupational backgrounds, as well as their family members and economic situations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age, Gender, Marital Status, Children, Education, Profession</th>
<th>Annual Family Total Income</th>
<th>Car</th>
<th>Housing Price</th>
<th>Loans</th>
<th>Market Value of Shares</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Huang</td>
<td>Female, 36, married, no children, 17 years in Beijing, Beijing Theatrical Institute.</td>
<td>500,000RMB</td>
<td>250,000RMB</td>
<td>9,200,000RMB</td>
<td>6,000RMB per month</td>
<td>400,000RMB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Xing</td>
<td>Male, 41, married, no children, born in Beijing, bachelor degree, a member of the Communist Party of China.</td>
<td>250,000RMB</td>
<td>150,000RMB</td>
<td>1,600,000RMB</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>100,000RMB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 3 Frequency distribution table of the respondents

#### 3.7.1 Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aggregate</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.7.2 Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18–30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41–50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51–60</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aggregate</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.7.3 Marriage situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aggregate</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.7.4 Number of children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aggregate</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.7.5 Outlander and native

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native in Beijing.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlander.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aggregate</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3.7.6 Highest level of education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school and below</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bachelor degree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Master degree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. MBA/MPA/MSW</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.7.7 Political landscape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communist Youth League</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No party</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Communist Party</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Probationary member of Communist Party</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.7.8 Nature of work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Party and government organs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. State-owned enterprises</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. State-owned institutions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Foreign funded enterprises</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Private enterprises</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.7.9 Personal income (one month)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Less than 1000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 1000–1999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 2000–3999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 4000–5999</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 6000–7999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 8000–9999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 10000–14999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. 15000–19999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. 20000 and above</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Not clear</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3.7.10 Annual household income of 2007 (Ten thousand RMB)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1~4.9</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5~9.9</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10~14.9</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15~19.9</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20~24.9</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25~29.9</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30~34.9</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35~39.9</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40~44.9</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45~49.9</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50~99.9</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 and above</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.7.11 Total market value of housing (Ten thousand RMB)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0~49.9</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50~99.9</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100~149.9</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150~199.9</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200~249.9</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250~499.9</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500~749.9</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 and above</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.7.12 Car value (Ten thousand RMB)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. No</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 0~14.9</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 15~19.9</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 20~24.9</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 25~29.9</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 30~34.9</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 35 and above</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3.7.13 Total market value of other investment (Ten thousand RMB)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–4.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–19.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>20–29.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>30–49.9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aggregate</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

All the 21 respondents are Beijing registered residents.
APPENDIX 4  A General List of The Interview Questions

1. Which way do you prefer to get information, through TV, newspapers and journals, or the Internet? Is there some other access to information?

2. What kind of programs do you prefer? And what is your purpose to come into contact with these programs?

3. Do you listen to, watch or browse foreign or Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan media?

4. Why are you interested in foreign media?

5. Do you have other channels of media to get information?

6. What do you think the credibility of the current mainstream media in China?

7. Do you think social stratification has emerged in current society in China?

8. What is the obvious stratification in your opinion? Or what is the standard to distinguish the different classes in your impression?

9. Which kind of people do you think are “higher” than you? Do you know anything about them?

10. Which kind of people do you think are “lower” than you? Do you know anything about them?

11. Under what circumstances did you first hear about the concept “middle class”?

12. After you knew the concept of middle class from the first time, is there any other way that you can learn more about this concept?

13. What kind of people can be called the middle class in China in your opinion?

14. Do you think you belong to the middle class?

15. How much and how do you come to know those people from the upper-class society/ lower-class society?

16. Do you think you have the possibility of moving upward to the upper classes?
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