TO APPLAUD OR NOT TO APPLAUD:
GOVERNANCE AND THE (RE)PRODUCTION OF IDENTITY
THROUGH HIGH-CULTURAL CONSUMPTION

by

Fang Xu

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in
The Faculty of Graduate Studies
(Sociology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

April 2010
© Fang Xu, 2010
Abstract

This research investigates high-cultural consumption in urban China during the last decade, looking in particular at attendance of Western classical music concerts. By studying the audiences, I intend to explore the reasons behind the popularity of this cultural consuming practice in a market economy with Chinese characteristics. Situated in Shanghai, a 'global city' in making, I also view this phenomenon from a post-colonial perspective – given the city’s semi-colonial history in the early 20th century. In this paper, I try to bridge Foucaultian governmentality in the sense of self-cultivation and governmental intervention in the cultural market, with Bourdieu’s capital conversions by illustrating how urbanites in Shanghai appropriate high-cultural consumption in the process of their identity (re)production. I argue that Shanghairen’s attendance at, and interest in, Western classical music concerts is an epitome of the local’s response or coping mechanism when encountering the ‘modern’ global in its historical and contemporary forms. This cultural consumption practice promoted by the municipal government – based on its manipulation of Shanghairen’s aspiration towards the modern West – in reality contributes to the formation of both the local residents’ identities, and the urban culture. Furthermore, the appreciation of Western classical music concerts closes up the perceived distance between Shanghai and the advanced West, meanwhile, enlarges the ‘quality’ (suzhi) gap between Shanghairen and people from the rest of China.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii

Table of Contents .......................................................................................................... iii

List of Tables .................................................................................................................. v

List of Figures ................................................................................................................ vi

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ vii

Dedication ....................................................................................................................... viii

1. Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1

2. Previous Research and Theoretical Approach ....................................................... 8
   2.1 Re-emergence of a “Global City” ................................................................. 8
   2.2 Governing Western Cultural Consumption ............................................. 17
   2.3 Identity Negotiation through Consumption .............................................. 27

3. Methodology ........................................................................................................... 43
   3.1 In-depth Interview ...................................................................................... 43
   3.2 Participant Observation ............................................................................. 49
   3.3 Insider VS Outsider .................................................................................. 52

4. Research Findings ................................................................................................... 58
   4.1 Classical as a New Trend ........................................................................... 59
   4.2 Logical and Rational Conversion of Capitals ........................................... 66
      4.2.1 Whether it is preiswert? ................................................................. 67
      4.2.2 What adds up to the perceived value? ........................................... 73
      4.2.3 Revitalize conspicuous leisure as true distinction ....................... 84
   4.3 Shanghairen Identity: Sophisticated and Modern ..................................... 90
      4.3.1 Interplay between place-bound identity and suzhi ....................... 91
      4.3.2 Volume of cultural capital and Shanghairen identity .................. 102

5. Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 114

Bibliography ................................................................................................................. 121

Appendix A .................................................................................................................... 125

Interview Guide ............................................................................................................ 125
List of Tables

Table 2.1 Per Capita Annual Disposable Income and Consumption Expenditures of Urban Households………………………………………………………………………………………………………18
List of Figures

Figure 2.2.1: Shanghai Grand Theatre .................................................................24
Figure 2.2.2: Shanghai Concert Hall .................................................................24
Figure 4.3.1: Cafe Seeker on Wukang Road in the Former French Concession .......94
Figure 4.3.2: Cafe Seeker on Wukang Road in the Former French Concession ..........94
Figure 4.3.3: Wukang Apartment Building, Formerly Called Normandy Mansion ....94
Figure 4.3.4: Shanghai Concert Hall Building .....................................................100
Figure 4.3.5: Shanghai Concert Hall Lobby .........................................................100
Figure 4.3.6: Shanghai Concert Hall Interior ......................................................101
Figure 4.3.7: Shanghai Concert Hall Interior ......................................................101
Figure 4.3.8: Shanghai Concert Hall Interior ......................................................101
Acknowledgements

My wholehearted gratitude is given to my mother, Wei Long, for her continuous support for my lone journey from Shanghai to Vancouver, and throughout my Master’s study. I thank her for the tremendous amount of emotional support for me continuing this academic pursuit after my divorce decision, and also for her insights on the Western classical music listeners and concert-goers in Shanghai. I also want to take this opportunity to thank my step-father, R Austin McEntyre for his encouragement and support.

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Amy Hanser for her support in encouraging me to carry out this project, guiding me through the sociology literature, and inspiring my thesis composition with provoking questions, enlightening conversations and valuable comments and suggestions.

I thank Dr. Abidin Kusno for directing my interest into governmentality, imagined community and urban culture, and for invaluable encouragement and inspirations he has offered ever since I took his class “The City and the National Imagination”.

I also thank Dr. Renisa Mawani, Dr. Jennifer Chun, Dr. Thomas Kemple, and Dr. Wendy Roth for their comments and suggestions on my research project.

Many thanks to Bonar Buffam, Sophia Woodman, Andrea Hjálmsdóttir, Hélène Frohard-Dourlent, Mike Halpin, Sherrie Dilley, Justin Tse, my fellow graduate students at the University of British Columbia, and Chris Morrison at the University of Calgary, who all have been great friends and provided insights and inspirations for this research project and my thesis writing.

I express my gratitude to Ying Li, Wei Xue, Shaolu Ni, and Hao Wu, my former colleagues in the Shanghai Grand Theatre and the Shanghai Concert Hall, who made my fieldwork possible and provided so much help along the way. I am also very grateful to all the respondents participated in the interviews. Your frankness about personal experiences and valuable insights not only contribute to this research project, but also encourage me to go on the journey in academia for the PhD study.
Dedication

To my grandma, Sun Yucheng,

who planted the seed of nostalgia towards the “Old Shanghai” in me.
1. Introduction

This research will investigate cultural consumption in urban China during the last decade, looking in particular at attendance of Western classical music concerts. By studying the audiences, this project aims to explore the reasons behind the popularity of Western classical music appreciation in urban China, precisely Shanghai, from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, as well as to further our understanding of the changing lifestyles in contemporary Chinese metropolises in a global context. This project attempts to illustrate how urbanites in Shanghai appropriate high-cultural consumption in the process of their identity production and reproduction. Western high culture – in this context, classical music, ballet and opera – is diversely understood and consumed across broad socioeconomic and demographic spectrums.

Existing research on consumption in urban China mostly focuses on everyday necessities and household needs, for example, housing (Davis, 2006), food (Veeck, 2000), and clothes (Schein, 2001); very few studies have examined the new practices in the cultural arena. There is research on rock & roll music (Efird, 2001), and on discothèques (Farrer, 2000). But none of these studies examine the recently prospering market of classical music concerts. In mainland China, the high-culture market is a more complicated field than that of the everyday commodity, because it is a contested space of governmental ideological control, a WTO-granted “free-market”, and a practice requiring knowledge of the field for appreciation. As such, a study of the consumption of Western high-culture offers an opportunity to explore questions related to the dynamics of urban culture and of the consumption of Western products as a sphere in which social and
cultural hierarchies, government policies, and market mechanism converge.

Drawing on previous literatures of this social context as well as my one-and-a-half year working experience in the Shanghai Concert Hall, I argue that the reason a market for Western high-culture has prospered lies in urban audiences’ eagerness to identify their social status against the backdrop of drastic socioeconomic differentiation in contemporary China. Supported by governmental funding and promoted by state-owned major mass media, attending Western high-cultural performances is associated with “progressiveness,” “being highly-educated or high ‘quality’ (su\(zh\)ì),” “modernity,” “affluence,” and “cosmopolitanism.” Under these influences, better-off urbanites are willing to spend their leisure time and economic capital on Western high-cultural performances. They believe this practice serves as a yardstick of social standing, and as an indication of their newly-rising class identity. At the same time, working-class audiences regard it as a means to participate in the cultural globalization at their doorstep, to distinguish themselves in the cultural realm, to lay claim to a public space enabled by government-funded low-end performances. I am also interested in whether the ability to enjoy Western classical music is a way for some to demonstrate their better upbringing, or borrowing Bourdieu’s famous term, *habitus*, in order to acquire their social status despite the economic disadvantage; meanwhile those who recently become financially better-off primarily use their attendance at high-cultural events to acquire cultural and symbolic capital in order to affirm their higher social status.
Based on my research, I find that Western classical music concert-goers in metropolitan Shanghai can be categorized into two distinct groups. One group consists of recent migrants to Shanghai who are highly educated and hold white-collar jobs in the post economic reform era. The other consists of less-privileged, long-time city dwellers. Both groups tactically use Western cultural consumption as a way to negotiate their identities amid China’s market economy and neoliberal practices in Shanghai, a ‘global city’ (Sassen, 2006) in formation. In particular, I seek to understand how concert-goers come to develop an interest in attending Western high-cultural performances, and how they integrate this relatively new practice into their overall cultural consumption. Especially how much does this cultural consumption weigh in their identity formation or even transformation process against the big backdrop of Shanghai revitalization under Neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics (Harvey, 2005); does being Shanghairen (people of Shanghai) have something to do with the appreciation of Western classical music? The linkage between social status and diverse consuming patterns has been testified and theorized by cultural sociologists in the West, like Bourdieu (1984), Veblen (1899[1994]), Holt (2000), or Peterson & Simkus (1992).

However, the data collected during my two months’ fieldwork in Shanghai from May to June, 2009, suggest otherwise. By contrast, my research demonstrates a distinctive and more complex mapping of the connections between social standing and high-cultural consumption. In this context, more players are involved, besides consumers and market. The role of the Municipal Government of Shanghai, the selective nostalgia of the “Old Shanghai” and the perceived unique
identity of modern *Shanghairen*, all contribute to the popularity of Western classical music concerts. Though most of my data were collected through qualitative interviews, we can always project the conversion between economic, cultural and symbolic capitals of individuals to a bigger blueprint of governmentality decided on by the state and carried out by the municipal government. I argue that the joint-effort of governmental interventions and the urge to cultivate one self’s ‘quality’ (*suzhi*) realizes the profit-making dream of the international performing arts business, fuels *Shanghairen*’s aspiration to be included in a global community, and add one more highlight to the promising market of China amidst current economical and cultural globalization.

The effects of the Chinese Communist Party’s cultural policies regarding the consumption of Western high-cultural products in the post-Cultural Revolution and economic reform era were also studied. In contrast to the radical egalitarianism of the Maoist era, which discouraged distinction between the masses, today Shanghai’s municipal government strives to find new identities for both the city and its dwellers, and it seeks to distinguish the city itself and its residents from the rest of the country on both a national and a global scale. One effective way that urban governance mobilizes is to cultivate a ‘cultural identity’ and enhance the ‘cultural quality’ (*wenhua suzhi*) of its population through the consumption of Western high-culture.

At the municipal government level, cultural policy, along with funding the construction of arts venues, serves as an indicator of the encouragement and directing towards cultural consumption. What is not so apparent is the veiled governance of the cultural market. State-owned arts venues
and other private performance organizers and presenters are operated as corporations, financially independent and market oriented. However, “openness” to Western high-culture, expressed by a prosperous cultural industry, is strategically controlled by the government’s ideological surveillance and manipulation. High-cultural consumption is regulated to serve an instructional role in forming new identities for urbanites in the socialist market economy in China. Furthermore, with the aim of winning-back a cosmopolitan, first-tier city status on a global scale, the Shanghai Municipal Government is self-motivated to remind its people of the image of Shanghai being a metropolis during the 1930s-40s; and it encourages the urbanites to cultivate a cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and modern ‘quality’ (suzhi) through consuming the ‘advanced’ Western high-culture. This selectively evoked memory of the city’s past facilitates the city dwellers’ journey through its identity and social status seeking in a time of domestic social upheaval and the swelling of global ideological, cultural and financial tides.

Taking on a Foucaultian approach, I contend that what Shanghai Municipal Government executes is a type of governmentality in the field of high-cultural consumption. The targets of power are two things – on the one hand, the territory, and, on the other, its inhabitants (2003[1994]:235). The Shanghai municipal government’s strategies in upgrading and beautifying the performing arts venues, and its urge to enhance the ‘cultural quality’ of its residents have exemplified this type of power exercise. The population comes to appear above all else as the ultimate end of government…it is the population itself on which government will act either directly or indirectly, through techniques that will make possible, without the full awareness of
the people, the directing of the flow of population into certain activities (Foucault 2003[1994]:241). As stressed by Rabinow and Rose, in Neoliberalism, there emerges a power that not only postulates, but also seeks to create, certain forms and spaces of self government, self-regulation, and self-responsibility (2003: xxx). In Shanghai, this motivation was initiated by the municipal or even central government, to emulate the West while keeping Chinese characteristics. Individuals have been assigned the responsibility, or suggested the interest in learning and in fashioning themselves towards civility or ‘high quality’, so that they being ‘modern’ Chinese urbanites could be compatible with the social, and economic progress of the country. This task upon themselves is carried out in the very real everyday practices within which they are simultaneously embracing the current ‘openness’ of the cultural market, but agile enough to know where the landmine and boundaries are, e.g. pro-Tibet, Falun Gong etc., and the unavailable internet access to YouTube, or Wikipedia.

This research employs qualitative methods to explore Shanghai classical music concert-goers’ experience in Western classical music appreciation. By investigating the attendance to Western classical music concerts, I want to reveal the tension created by the chaotic urban reconstruction, migration flows, and the uncertainty of people’s identities amidst socio-cultural and socioeconomic changes in contemporary Shanghai. Thanks to my former colleagues and acquaintances still working in the performing arts industry in Shanghai, I successfully recruited sixteen interview respondents at the Shanghai Concert Hall. And in total, I participant observed seven classical music concerts taking place in either the Shanghai Concert Hall, or the Shanghai
Oriental Art Center in May and June, 2009.

The government policies regarding Western cultural performances and my previous working experience in the Programme Department at the Shanghai Concert Hall regarding practices responding to the regulations issued by the Ministry of Culture of People’s Republic of China, and by Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture, Radio, Film & TV will serve as a background in my argument. Mass media narratives about the attendance at Western classical music concerts, the texts of the performance promotional materials, and the public debates regarding concert ticket prices are also investigated, because combined they serve as a backdrop to my research respondents’ attitudes and reactions to my research questions. In this thesis, my articulation will focus more on the narratives provided by my research subjects centred on their personal experiences. Thus my interpretation of their understanding of the bigger picture of Western classical music appreciation in contemporary Shanghai will be deductive and hopefully illustrative. Through their strong opinions and description of vivid scenarios, I demonstrate the knowledge- and identity-seeking journeys of the music-lovers I studied in Shanghai last summer. They are such a group of interesting and lovely people in a fascinating metropolis!
2. Previous Research and Theoretical Approach

2.1 Re-emergence of a “Global City”

The economic reform policies issued in 1979 boosted the economy throughout China at the expense of socioeconomic equality. Efforts to enlarge the cash nexus and increase efficiency virtually guaranteed that gains would be unevenly distributed (Davis, 2000:17), especially along the rural-urban axis. The decentralization of taxation authority and control of foreign funds has favoured large coastal cities and their surrounding regions (Chen & Parish, 1996:67). As for the field site of this research, Shanghai, after more than a decade of concentrated foreign-funded development and heightened focus by state officials, it has regained its pre-1949 cosmopolitan reputation (Davis, 2000:9). Shanghai has re-emerged as a focal point in the global economy, an important node in the network of ‘global cities’ (Sassen, 2006). Although Sassen deemed it problematic to use the concentration of major company headquarters as an indication of a city’s status as an international business center in the context of global economy (2006:107), the huge amounts of direct foreign investment¹, and the headquarters of Fortune 500 companies moving to Shanghai, indeed has enhanced the city’s status in the world, and made it a more strategic and important place in the global economy.

Furthermore, current-day Shanghai qualifies as a ‘global city’ according to Sassen’s view concerning the human flows into urban areas. The two streams that she identifies as characteristic of global cities are: 1) Highly-educated elite and foreign capitalists, and 2) A

¹ There are 3,160 million USD of Foreign Investment Actually Absorbed in the year of 2000, 7,920 million USD in the year 2006, and 10,084 million USD in the year of 2008. This foreign investment has more than doubled in a mere 8 years is stunning and unprecedented. (http://www.stats-sh.gov.cn/2003shj/tjnj/nje09.htm?dl=2009tjnje/E0710.htm)
“working-class” doing manual work, either in transportation, housekeeping or construction, and both streams can be found in Shanghai today (Sassen 2006[2001]). Besides the demographic characteristics, Shanghai’s large share of the financial sector in China, and the importance of its port and airports for global logistics qualify it as one of the ‘global cities,’ with mutual economic and transportation connections.

Shanghai’s contemporary status as a global city can be viewed as its reclaiming of an earlier, globally significant status. By the 1930s, Shanghai was the cosmopolitan city par-excellence, which had earned the label of the “Paris of the Orient”. The name underscored Shanghai’s international significance, and connected it, in Western popular imagination, to other metropolises in Europe and America (Lee 1999:315). No matter whether one was a refugee or a capitalist, each could try his luck in Shanghai because of the loose and divided political and judicial control over large parts of the city (Gamble 2003:65), and business-minded operations (Lu 2004:264). Already, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the colonial concessions in Shanghai had the “infrastructure” of a modern city, even by Western standards. Massive global capital and migrant flows swarmed into Shanghai in the pre-liberation era, making it the epitome of east-west encounters visualized in urban landscape and demography. It is hard to imagine a place of more juxtapositions and more cultural heterogeneity than inter-World War II Shanghai, with its Qing dynasty wooden houses, art deco experiments, classical-style public buildings, mock-Tudor cottages, and assemblages of migrants from all over China, not to mention the White Russians, European missionaries, Jewish refugees, ‘underground-Communist’ activists,

But, for over three decades after the Communist Party took power in 1949, Shanghai was at the heart of China’s centrally-planned, socialist economy. China’s diplomatic isolation vis-à-vis the West, and the relative closure of China’s borders to foreign trade, altered Shanghai’s previous role as an entrepôt and international financial and commercial centre, recasting the city’s primary role as a domestic industrial producer (Gamble 2003:8-18). One fundamental goal of the Chinese Communists in this urban reform effort was to eliminate foreign control and influence (Parish & Whyte 1984:16); thus, foreign companies were taken-over, foreigners left the city and even those with foreign-kin relations were often under suspicion as possible spies. In the Maoist era, along with the shift of attention from coastal big cities to inland, the development or even maintenance of the urban environment of Shanghai were neglected by the central government, which required the city to contribute more than 80% of its annual revenue to the central government’s coffers (Lee 1999:322). The decayed urban built environment still bears its Western-look from the pre-liberation times, which renders the place-bonded identity among the Shanghainese, and serves as the background for the municipal government’s beautification projects, such as the construction or renovation of performing arts venues in this case.

The “Open Door” policy issued in 1979 brought about a rapid development of southern Chinese provinces, which surpassed Shanghai by great bounds. The Special Economic Zone established
in Southern China at the beginning of the economic reform period, and other parts of the country, made profits and progress with amazing dispatch in the 1980s (Yan 2002:20), and engendered unprecedented pressure and crisis on the position and status of Shanghai as an economic center, whose degree of change was minimal until after Deng Xiaoping’s southern tour in the Spring of 1992. It was not until the mid-1990s, with the policy to develop the Pudong New District – an area located on the east side of the Huangpu River in Shanghai – the city began to catch-up, all the while hoping for an opportunity to restore its status as a world-class metropolis. Step-by-step, Shanghai has rejoined the global economy; at the same time, its boundaries with other parts of China have become far more permeable due to the relaxation of the household registration system, and a much greater flow of people, capital, and technology has rushed in (Gamble 2003:64).

Global capitalism remains dependent upon a relatively fixed and immobile territorial infrastructure to operate and to generate massive profit (Harvey 2001:360). This provides an opportunity for China, a “Third World” country, to participate in the various global flows by constructing a ‘global city’ – a node of the global networks of finance, transportation, technology, information and human resources (Sassen, 2006). Although constructing a Chinese ‘global city’ seems to be an act of the state, after the desire was initiated by the central government, the autonomy of the city government is required because a market-oriented economy needs to be accompanied by the decentralization of state power. In order to achieve the role of a ‘global city,’ the task of urban governance is to lure into its space highly-mobile, flexible production, financial,
and consumption flows (Harvey 1989:359).

All the city’s past glories in pre-1949 times were rediscovered and memorialized in the official rhetoric to encourage great changes in Shanghai in the early 1990s. This nostalgia for the past served to justify the city’s ambition, or to say China’s ambition, to participate in globalization, and to play a bigger role in the global economy than as a huge, notorious sweatshop. A ‘global’ city is a national means of ‘plugging in’ to global political, economic and social networks (Bunnel 2002: 287). In order to re-seize Shanghai’s pre-eminent global position and its “elder brother” status nationally, a metropolitan and modern identity needed to be re-cultivated to distinguish the city from other Chinese coastal cities. The world-class fame of cosmopolitan “Old Shanghai” would serve as the root of the city identity, accompanied by an emphasis upon the availability of Western branded commodities, the openness to European and Hollywood cultural influence in the early 20th century, and a Western-looking urban built environment, rather than a humiliating facet of under semi-colonialism that had been selectively commemorated, praised and longed-for. Material possessions in long-time Shanghainese’ family collections, and in the urban landscape, have for decades constructed a continuous and underlying environment in which ordinary Shanghainese may cultivate their “cultural capital” outside the official pedagogic system, which is made uniform across the country.

History reactivates itself also in the migrant groups entering Shanghai. The demographic resonance between the pre-liberation Shanghai and the current post-Open Policy Shanghai lies in
the migration status of the urbanites. After all, Shanghai is a migrant city, hardly anyone in their 30s can say their grandparents were born and grew up in Shanghai. But the tension between the descendants of the earlier migrants and the recent migrants from other parts of China after the loosening of the household registration system in the post-Open Policy era has been predominantly fostered by the urban-superiority institutionalized in the Maoist era. Shanghai— no matter what kind of class or social status their family once enjoyed – now once again face the privileged overseas, highly-educated or affluent counterparts from other provinces, and labourers originated from rural China.

For urban Shanghai—ese frequently assert their urban sophistication and superiority against a rural presence – negative perceptions of the rural Chinese, in Shanghai—ese minds, portray them as dirty, stupid, ignorant, backward and poor (Gamble 2003:80) – and against urban Chinese from other regions attached with the image of uncivilized and tu (not modern). The people with whom urban Shanghai—ese tend to identify, or seek to emulate, are elites with wealthy, metropolitan lifestyles and flexible citizenship (Ong, 1999). The Shanghai—ese regard their contemporaries to be successful migrants (or their descendants) during the Chinese diaspora in Hong Kong, Taipei, and other ‘modern’ metropolises in Europe and North America. (Gamble 2003:108). This is largely due to the history of the Treaty of Nanjing, which in 1842 between British Empire and China, simultaneously forced upon open-treaty, port cities such as Shanghai, Canton, and leased Hong Kong – resulting the establishment of foreign jurisdictions like the “international settlement” in Shanghai, allowing global goods and migrants entering the city –
thus residents in treaty ports ‘shared analogous and specific cultures and economics’ and had more in common with overseas Chinese communities than with rural, inland provinces still under Chinese (Qing Dynasty) governance (Bergère 1989:28, 43).

However, another group of “new Shanghainese” – highly educated graduates from universities both in China and abroad, whose birth origin is elsewhere – has also grown rapidly and stirs controversies among their local counterparts, who believe themselves to be “true” Shanghainese possessing more cultural capital, and therefore with more entitlement to urban space and a metropolitan status. And yet, Shanghai is a ‘migrant’ city; the city government has actively encouraged the arrival of newcomers: In 1994, the Shanghai municipal government issued a “Bluestamp residency permit” to those who had sought employment in Shanghai enterprises, or had invested in Shanghai by purchasing housing; thus, these “bluestamp” residents became the first group of “new Shanghainese” (Yan 2002:61). A development strategy for shaping Shanghai as a ‘high ground for talented personnel,’ aims to draw those Chinese, from all over the world, who fit into the category of ‘two-high and one low’ (high academic qualifications, high professional rank, and low age). Such policies serve as an additional means to realize the promise of Shanghai’s openness to the world (Yan 2002:438-39). The changing population is the subject of needs, of aspirations, but it is also an object in the hands of the government, of what it wants (Foucault 2003[1994]:242). The interest in enhancing one’s cultural ‘quality’ or civility has been injected by the state-owned mass media. This interest resides in the consciousness of each individual who makes up the population – no matter where their origins, or their current
socioeconomic status – and this interest is considered to be in the interest of the population as a whole. In other words, ‘modern’ Shanghainese are the target and the fundamental instrument of the government of population.

The flexibility of the city government’s measures on internal migration – enabled by the decentralization of state power – in the reform era notwithstanding, this flow of people indicates the passions and dreams of the non-Shanghainese for this Chinese metropolis. That is to say, Shanghai is a place people go to live out their dreams and ambitions; in this respect, the imagination projected onto Shanghai makes it on par with other ‘global cities’ like New York City. Meanwhile, starting from the onset of the “Open Door” policy, and intensified by China’s acceptance into the World Trade Organization, direct foreign investment, tourism and cultural exchanges have brought more foreigners into Shanghai’s industries, and into Shanghai’s streets and people’s daily lives. Demographically, Shanghai indeed is approaching its pre-liberation cosmopolitan status.

In both the pre-liberation era and the “Open Door” policy era, migration, as a characteristic of Shanghai’s demography has produced and reproduced the identity of the city – the locality. As Appadurai has stressed, the production of neighbourhoods is always historically grounded and contextual. The central dilemma is that neighbourhoods are contexts themselves, while both requiring and producing contexts (1996:182-84). Without its cosmopolitan status, Shanghai would not attract people from all across the country to try their luck, or to seek opportunity for
success. At the same time, without those human resources, it is impossible to reconstruct such a Chinese metropolis in less than 20 years. As local subjects carry on the continuing task of reproducing the city, the contingencies of history, environment, and imagination contain the potential for new contexts (material, social, and imaginative) to be produced (Appadurai 1996:185). Therefore, even Zhu Rongji, a former mayor of Shanghai, and later China’s prime minister, engaged in such an act of imagination when he emphasised that ‘Shanghai will be China’s New York’ (Economist 14 August 1999:64) to the world at the turning of the new millennium. The appeal to New York City was not solely for the Chinese diaspora but a more general attraction to New York City as an appropriate metropolitan model (Gamble 2003:103), and a ‘global city’ with its Chinese characteristics.

From the demographic dynamics, and the impact of institutional shifts, it is obvious that Shanghai’s identity is constituted by its connectedness to the rest of the country, and to the larger world. It is literally situated on the frontier facing the West, nourished by the flow from the nation’s inland along the Yangtze River. A traditional saying frequently used to describe Shanghai’s development strategy is: “the sea receives a hundred rivers”, indicating ambitiousness, as well as comprehensiveness. However, institutional changes both enable and restrain Shanghai’s urban development; ordinary people can only enjoy autonomy in a political, economic and social sphere within the framework designed by the Chinese Communist Party’s development strategies.
2.2 Governing Western Cultural Consumption

In the past three decades of the socialist market economy, China has fuelled its economy by serving as a well-known manufacturing site for global, low-priced commodities; however, another increasingly significant aspect of China’s participation in the global economy is as a consumer of Western goods and cultural products. Capacity to consume, rather than to produce, grants a country more attention and importance in the global economy. To fight the effects of an economic downturn during the current crisis, China announced a $586 billion economic stimulus plan. It was surprisingly huge, and at its core was the desire to incite country-wide consumer spending\(^2\).

In the last two decades, we have not only seen a consumer revolution (Davis, 2000) in everyday commodities, but also prosperity in the marketing of cultural products. Once believed to be capitalist practices – in opposition to Communist ideology, and defined as backwards and decadent by Chinese Communist Party propaganda during the Maoist era – Western high-culture (here classical music, opera and ballet) has gained a different connotation and today is believed to facilitate the advancement of the population’s ‘cultural quality’(wenhua suzhi).

Academic literature on China’s consumer revolution shows that the sudden, massive availability of consumer goods in the market parallels the financial inequality brought about by actions of the Chinese Communist Party (Davis 2000:17). The pronounced income disparity between the newly

affluent and the poor in China is especially intense in the urban centers where there is a marked concentration of financial, technological and human resources.

According to the *Shanghai Statistical Yearbook 2009*, in 2008, while the annual average per-capita disposable income was 26,675 yuan, the annual average per-capita amount spent on culture and recreation services was only 874 yuan, accounted merely 3.3%. Despite that, its shockingly increase from 147 yuan in 2000 to 874 yuan in 2008 is worth our attention. Though there are no subcategories in the *Shanghai Statistical Yearbook* indicating the types of culture and the recreation services Shanghainese paid for, this nearly six-fold – comparing to a bit more than doubled amount of per-capita consumption expenditures – suggests a very interesting phenomenon for further investigation. There also exists a sharp disparity between expenditures of the low-income groups and the high-income groups on culture and recreation services; for the low-income group in the year 2008 is 277 yuan, while for the high income group it increases to almost a tenfold 2,029 yuan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average per Capita Disposable Income</td>
<td>11,718</td>
<td>18,645</td>
<td>20,668</td>
<td>26,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average per Capita Consumption Expenditures</td>
<td>8,868</td>
<td>13,773</td>
<td>14,762</td>
<td>19,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Culture and Recreation Services</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>874</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 Per Capita Annual Disposable Income and Consumption Expenditures of Urban Households

(Produced from *Shanghai Statistical Yearbook 2007, 2009*)

Contrary to Mao’s anti-urbanism, the role of cities, especially coastal cities, has been a vital part in China’s economic development strategy. It resonates with the strategies used by other industrializing countries in the Asia-Pacific region under the ideology of neo-liberalism (Bunnel 2002: 287). As proposed in 1992 at the 14th Party National Congress, Shanghai is to play the role of “Dragon’s Head” (long tou) leading the Yangtze River economic belt (envisioned as a dragon due to its geographical shape). Within a span of about 20 years, Shanghai should become one of the international economic, financial and trade centres of the world (Yan 2002:122).

Participation in globalization entails attracting direct foreign investment, as well as opening-up the domestic market. The embrace of happy consumerism appears at both the everyday commodity market and the cultural market. Side by side with Western popular culture – fashion magazines, TV shows and Hollywood movies – Western high-culture, defined as “high-standard, elegant arts” (gao ya yishu) in governmental and state-owned mass media’s narratives, has been strategically promoted in Shanghai and regarded as an important indicator of economic and cultural progress. Learning to consume or appreciate classical music, ballet or opera is considered to be a way for city dwellers to construct a cosmopolitan identity and for the city to catch up with the standard of a world-class metropolis by Shanghai Municipal Government.

Along with the diminished role of the central government in deciding local, economic issues, Shanghai’s reintegration into the world economy is paralleled by an increase in the power and influence of its city authorities in local economic and cultural issues. The attention paid by city
authorities to the cultural industry started as early as 1996, years before income disparities became so sharply defined and consumerism had spread so widely. During the month of December, 1996, in “Opinions of the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Chinese Communist Party regarding Strengthening the Socialist Spiritual Civilization Building,” Party municipal committee secretary Huang Ju made a speech in which enormous emphasis was placed upon the future role of Shanghai both globally and nationally. Huang argued that in order for Shanghai to become an international metropolis, ‘culture-building’ (*wenhua jianshe*) must keep pace with its economic development, and its cultural development must progress consistently with its social development (Yan 2002: 482-83).

The reasons for the municipal government’s interest in cultural industries, and especially in promoting high culture (*gao ya yishu*) in Shanghai, are considered to be threefold. First is the erosion of Party power and influence upon social norms and morality, which is alarming to the city government, with its concerns about social stability and people’s morality or ‘quality’ (*suzhi*). In the Maoist era, although there was limited social mobility, shortages of consumer products and lower living standards, people shared a relatively stable and egalitarian social status, along with collective moral standards and norms. Society, then, at least provided clearly-defined boundaries and certainties. In the economic reform era, certainty and stability is being drained away, leaving behind a residue of unpredictability, anxiety, short-termism, and a reckless pursuit of economic gain (Gamble 2003:48-49). This has given rise to a notion of ‘worshipping money,’ and ‘progress/forward to money’ (*xiang qian kan*) regardless of the means. These developments are
considered to be evidence of ‘moral degeneration,’ and threaten China’s development in the long term by Party leaders and municipal governors. Under these circumstances, ‘cultural-building’ (wenhua jianshe) has been granted the same importance as that given to economic development. When there is less and less motivation to become a Party member, and the norms and beliefs held by Communist Party propaganda conflicts with the reality of the market economy, for the sake of national solidarity and social stability, Party leaders believe that the mental void should be filled with something positive and constructive – high culture.

Hobsbawm argues that when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which ‘old’ traditions have been designed, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible to the new social factors for its audience or practitioners, instant formations of new traditions are required to foster new order (1997: 4-5). In China, the main purpose of this sort of invented tradition has been socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour (Hobsbawm 1997:9) involved in the breakdown of the previous socialist, egalitarian society. Although high cultural consumption is sufficient only to fill a small part of the space left by the decline of old beliefs and cultural practices, it is indeed expected to bring about new direction, or to suggest a model for people in the new era. This casts light on the governmental encouragement of, and support for, this Western high-cultural consumption, and provides us insight into how the municipal government regulates or guides the shaping of the Shanghainese’ identities in the socialist market economy.
cultural capital accumulation together with the population’s economic capital, in a way to facilitate the overall development of the country and of the population. In his report to the 15th Party National Congress, the former Mayor of Shanghai, and former General Secretary of State, Jiang Zemin, explicitly proposed, “Our country’s cultural development must be linked to the common achievements of human civilization. We must uphold the principle of self-focus and self-utilization as we develop foreign, cultural exchange in all its various forms, widely select from the superior aspects of the cultures\(^4\) from various countries, and demonstrate to the outside world the achievements of China’s cultural-building… Considering things from an international perspective, economic opening to the outside world will inevitably lead to a profound transformation of society’s economic system and national culture” (cited in Yan 2002: 518).

Second, ‘cultural building’ in its physical form should be compatible with its progress in people’s competence in appreciation; specifically, this physical form takes shape as a new urban built environment with magnificent arts venues as city symbols. Renovating and constructing arts venues was highlighted in the municipal government’s agenda for “making Shanghai a key city for international culture” (cited in Yan 2002: 514). Architecture and urban design have always performed important roles in the clarification of spatial and social order, especially after massive social upheaval; and a new self-consciousness about building city symbols has prevailed in Shanghai’s urban planning during the last decade (Vale 1999: 391). To justify construction of a series of arts venues, an occurrence in 1993 regarding the disparity between the high quality of

---

\(^4\) Emphasis added by the author.
Shanghai audiences and the low quality of Shanghai’s arts venues has been most frequently cited: America’s Philadelphia Orchestra, one of the top ten symphony orchestras in the world, visited Shanghai and only could perform in the Shanghai Gymnasium, using the stadium’s sound amplification system. Another face-losing incident for Shanghai’s city government came in the form of a comment from the master violinist of world prestige, Itzhak Perlman, who stated, “Shanghai has the best audience, but that stage, I am afraid, is terrible,” after his performance with the Israel Philharmonic during its premiere in China.

In December, 1993, the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the Shanghai Municipal Government decided to construct the Shanghai Grand Theatre at the west side of the People’s Square, located at the city centre, next door to the Shanghai Municipal Government building (Le 2005:i). The Shanghai Grand Theatre opened to the public in August, 1998 (Figure 2.2.1); the Shanghai Concert Hall (Figure 2.2.2) was renovated and then reopened in October, 2004, also at the city centre, just a 15-minute walk away from the Shanghai Grand Theatre. The Shanghai Oriental Art Centre, funded by the Shanghai Municipal Government and the Pudong New District\(^5\) local administration, was officially opened in July, 2005. It is located at the heart of this new district, and is composed of a performance hall, a concert hall, an exhibition gallery and an opera hall. These three major arts venues have drawn global attention through their staging of prestigious, world-renowned symphony orchestras, ballet troupes and

---

\(^5\) Pudong district locates at the eastside of Huangpu River, which cuts across the jurisdiction of Shanghai. It has been developed into a manufacturing, technological and financial centre in the last decade under the “Open-up Shanghai and Develop Pudong Policy” issued by the central government.
opera companies for their premieres in China.

Figure 2.2.1: Shanghai Grand Theatre
Figure 2.2.2: Shanghai Concert Hall

(Photos by author)

An upgrading of the city’s image, through construction of cultural centres, can cast a seemingly beneficial ray of sunlight over the entire metropolitan region (Harvey 1989: 353). It benefits Shanghai as if it were being reborn in the forefront of a new China encountering the West, and again as a superstar on the world map. With such effort, and the amount of investment in ‘cultural-building,’ the city government hopes that the people of Shanghai will have chance to appreciate the virtuosity of world-class artists without having to travel abroad (Yan 2002: 515).

Governing high-cultural consumption is to realize part of the goal of building Shanghai into a center for international cultural exchange at the level of both city image and the ‘openness’ of the cultural policies.

The seeming withdrawal of governmental interference from cultural exchange has been emphasized and embraced in governmental reports and the mass media as evidence of the
reversal of the strict censorship of Western cultural products in the pre-reform era. It expresses the freedom enjoyed by Shanghai residents in consuming ‘the West’, which in the past was, in its form and content, viewed as pure capitalism. However, this freedom for all residents to consume all forms of art is plausible, or rather is an illusion, worked on by the third facet of the urban governance on cultural consumption. Despite the lifting of censorship, the control and regulation of cultural exchange remains, only on a smaller scale. The denial of Western culture, as a whole, is now replaced by denial, and warning of peril to be found in the obscenity, pessimism and anti-authoritarian menace of Western popular culture, for example, pro-Tibet or advocacy for equal-rights for homosexuality.

The governmentality in the sphere of cultural consumption in current-day Shanghai aims at establishing Shanghai as a first-tier ‘global city’ by strengthening its connection with the West. Or, to put it another way, Shanghai’s openness to Western culture completes its identity as a Chinese ‘global city.’ In the era of globalization, a competitive war is now being waged among cities; styles of life visualized and represented in spaces of conspicuous consumption become an important asset that cities proudly display (Boyer 1995:88). This welcomes a “Third World” city to the global circuit of capitals, as long as it can cope with the requirements and accommodate the flows of direct investment and elite migrants. It suggests the distinctive role and identity embraced by a metropolitan city, in contradiction to its counterparts in the country, and also an imagined community constructed by a network of ‘global cities.’ This trend has been quickly picked-up by Shanghainese because it legitimates their decades-long nostalgia for the glorious
“Old Shanghai” of the 1930s and 1940s.

Whereas Harvey argues that the urban ‘governance’ lies somewhere other than with urban government, leaving the local state with only a facilitative and coordinative role to play, instead of reorganizing urban life (2001:351), the Shanghai Municipal Government and the local Communist Party Committee have intentionally shifted their role to provide a seeming freedom, and to illustrate an “openness to the West.” Their governance is no longer carried out directly through explicit censorship and state-owned performance presenters, in fact is curtained by the selective staging of high-cultural performances organized by private-owned companies and institutions, and the encouragement and interest-generation among urban population to consume the ‘advanced’ West. The increased consumption of Western high-cultural products in the last decade incarnates the city government’s successful cultivation of the identity of the city with its dwellers’ newly risen consuming pattern. The new identity of Shanghai is its globally-oriented urban development and Western high culture-centered consumption, but, after all, it is an expression, even an extension, of state power (Bunnel 2002: 290). A similar point appears in Harvey (2005)’s later argument on “Neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics”. The reform since 1978 towards ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ managed to construct a form of state-manipulated market economy that delivered spectacular economic growth and rising standards of living for a significant proportion of the population for more than twenty years, but at the meantime, the reform also led to the uncomfortable reconstitution of capitalist class power (2005:122). Then on the significance of Shanghai, he stresses that postmodern culture has arrived
in Shanghai in a big way. All of the trappings of Westernization could be found there, which has formed at an astonishing rate to create exaggerated versions, even to the point of parody, of New York, London, and Paris (Harvey 2005:147). On top of that, I would like to argue, is the status of the “Old Shanghai” on a global scale in people’s imagination.

2.3 Identity Negotiation through Consumption
The abundance of commodities and cultural products made available by the “Open Policy” inevitably brings with it the capitalist, consumerist idea “you are what you consume” in urban China. The breakdown of close, “work unit” communities, a reordering of the class hierarchy in which the working-class once sat at the top, the increasingly porous rural-urban boundaries, and the loosening of the household registration system all contribute to anonymity and identity-chaos in Chinese metropolises, especially in a city like Shanghai. Against the backdrop of a displaced social class and a displaced population, consumption steps in to produce, to facilitate, and to mark-out new divisions in Shanghai. The person in a big city consumes in a way to articulate a sense of identity, of who they wish to be seen as (Bocock 1993:17). Baudrillard’s argument on the necessity of consumption for people’s everyday life stresses that individuals no longer compete for the possession of goods, they actualize themselves in consumption, each on his own; consumption becomes a form of self-actualization (2001:15). In this sense, consumption is used to make sense of the existence of a particular individual in a given society. The capacity to choose, to utilize goods realizes the type of person this individual is, or wishes to be. Consumption also illustrates an imagined community which is bounded by awareness of one’s
unknown peers doing the same thing, and sharing the same emotions simultaneously (Anderson 1991:33), or, a mutual sense of belonging. Furthermore, consumption habits, deemed natural as skin, are criteria for group membership, and become weapons of exclusion (Douglas & Isherwood 1978:85).

Under the socialist market economy, long-time Shanghai residents have witnessed a dramatic change in commodity consumption – from almost everything provided by the work unit (danwei) on a ration-ticket basis, to Western supermarkets, wholesale warehouses and chain department stores scattered in five main downtown shopping areas, as well as in large-scale residential areas, along with the opening of global, luxury-brand flagship-stores along Nanking and Huai’hai Roads. Generally speaking, consumption of Western cultural goods began in the mid 1990s, especially in the sphere of the performing arts. Before the time of consumer revolution, the work unit organized leisure recreation for its workers, such as films, performance watching, and sports competitions (Whyte & Parish 1984:121). People often received free performance tickets from the danwei, but the transformation from a “planned economy” to a “market economy” gradually changed this mode of cultural activity provision and consumption. State (party) policy determined that arts venues were to be market-orientated and profit-driven; thus they could not survive in China’s market economy without audiences paying for performances (Le, 2005:119).

Starting from the early 1990s, the ‘openness’ of the cultural sphere at the policy level and the availability of the Western cultural products has provided urbanites another platform on which to
participate in cultural globalization, and to obtain membership in an imagined community of cosmopolitan elites, after decades of ideological constraint and censorship. The cosmopolitan elites Chinese urbanites have tried to emulate are generally understood to be the upper-middle class in the developed West. The perception of a homogenous consuming pattern in their community, though probably an illusion, clearly influences the consuming practice in urban China, especially Shanghai, given its increasing exposure to the Westerners’ manner of life, which supports the reputability for this community (Veblen 1994[1899]:52). Thanks to cultural globalization, the cosmopolitan elites in the developed West even hold this disposition in an imagined community across national borders. When consuming commodities is not enough for a sense of participation in globalization, ordinary Shanghai urbanites try to acquire their ‘modern’ and ‘open’ identity through Western high-cultural consumption in public. The only practicable means of impressing one’s pecuniary ability among urban strangers in one’s everyday life is an unremitting demonstration of ability to pay. Wealth has become a key component in the judgement of a person’s worth, while at the same time imported goods from the West serve as symbols of success in contemporary Shanghai (Gamble 2003:159). Shanghai can be considered a typical setting for Veblen’s argument that individuals are exposed frequently at large gatherings of people to whom one’s everyday life is unknown (1994[1899]: 54).

Only when the hierarchical feature of the system of objects is widely recognized among the population in a particular setting, the purpose of paying for the object as a way to express one’s pecuniary ability could be realized. As Baudrillard argued that the object system constitutes a
system of signification...it does not structure social relations: it demarcates them in a hierarchical repertoire. It is formalized in a universal system of recognition of social statutes: a code of “social standing” (2001: 22). To a certain extent, the symbolic meanings attached to the objects being consumed represent the social hierarchies in the mind of the consumers. The practice of consuming high-culture in a public setting, in this case attendance at Western classical music concerts, is generalized into signs of recognition, which facilitate the reciprocation of status among people (Baudrillard 2002:23). The experience of attending Western classical music concerts thus bears the connotation of one’s economical and social status, which is more and more differentiated in China’s market economy.

Since the early 90s, the repetitive messages from the state-owned mass media on the merit of consuming Western classical music or other forms of high-culture has injected and socialized this hierarchy to the general public. Meanwhile, the encouragement of consuming Western culture has its bias, and is obviously selective and strategic, for example the government’s censorship on homosexuality, pessimism, and anti-authority messages in Western popular culture. Thus, current Shanghai residents have enjoyed the ‘freedom’ to consume Western high-culture within the governmental framework of “building up Shanghainese’ cultural quality (wenhua suzhi)” on the path towards a market economy with Chinese characteristics.

Actual access to prestigious forms of consumption remains restricted by economic means, however. Even though, by the late 1990s, rising personal incomes and a growing abundance of
material goods and commercial services meant that Shanghai households had radically improved their standard of living and quality of life (Lu 2000:131), ordinary Shanghainese living on a salary still could not compete with professionals and successful entrepreneurs from other towns and provinces, not to mention those from abroad. For much of the populace, higher prestige items, no longer restricted by state regulation, or distributed by work units, remained out of reach, due mostly to economic reasons (Schein 2001:225).

With the diminishing power of the Communist Party cadres in resource allocation, ordinary people have more means to mobilize social resources and enjoy more autonomy to constitute their identity through consumption. This is similar to the behaviour pattern of the leisure class in Veblen’s depiction more than a century ago in the West, who communicate the possession of riches through visible expenditures for some widely recognizable line of conspicuous consumption (1994[1899]:68). But, the phenomenon of “trickle-down”, which states that the more ostentatious and newer consumer trends appear first at the top, and then trickle-down to consumers in a lower social position who then emulate such practices, is debatable for Shanghai’s performing arts consumption. Undoubtedly, attending Western high-cultural performance is not necessarily luxurious, considering the range of ticket prices of any concert. The nature of this consuming pattern nevertheless distinguishes itself from the everyday commodity consumption. In the case of Shanghai, after three decades of economic reform, the consumption pattern has shifted from one focused on meeting survival needs to one that considers the pleasure-needs and personal development of the majority of Shanghainese (Lu
For Veblen, consuming is a means of social communication between people of different socioeconomic status within a society, in which the valuation of goods is widely shared (Holt et al. 2000: xv-xvi). This argument was also echoed by Baudrillard, as I have shown above. The promotion of Western high-culture by the state has fuelled the proliferation of the knowledge of the conspicuous nature of attending Western classical music concerts and opera, especially in Shanghai, a city embodied with century-old trace of Western, colonial cultural influences. The symbolic meaning of consuming Western high-culture is therefore widely recognized.

Total-exclusiveness is not characteristic of the performing-arts sector in Shanghai because a cheaper-grade ticket provides the opportunity for lower-income groups to fulfill their desire for connection to the modern, developed West. But this may simply enhance the significance of these events for communicating status and identity aspirations: Veblen argues, for example, that audiences belonging to different income groups or social strata who appear at the same consumption setting further heighten the communicative feature of the consumption. In a chaotic and anonymous urban-life, acting is the norm. No wonder performing, and the perception of others’ responses, becomes an integrated part of one’s conspicuous, cultural consumption. This showing-off of social status enjoys a broader spectrum of receivers. It is no longer a horizontal one among affluent people, but is now a vertical one that epitomizes the social hierarchy in the form of a one-thousand-seat audience hall with a seating plan tagged with prices.

It should be mentioned that “leisure class,” “taste,” and “lifestyle,” along with the associated
consuming practices and goods, became widely-possessed knowledge and daily vocabularies in Shanghai through fashion magazines and best-seller-type books\(^6\). The consumption patterns they suggest depict a standard lifestyle of the Western middle-class or upper-middle class for Chinese urbanites; or rather, these idealized lifestyles serve as status building-blocks for long-time Shanghainese with nostalgia for pre-liberation times, and for affluent “new Shanghainese” with a metropolitan dream. The ‘Western-ness,” or foreignness, of classical-music concerts, ballet and opera caters to what I call the assimilating desire of Shanghai urbanites. As Schein argues, this ‘imagined cosmopolitanism’ serves as a sense of participation in the global commodity culture (2001:226). I would further argue that it even represents participation in the global, metropolitan lifestyle. High cultural consumption brings about the awareness of an imagined community, a group of elites, despite their race, ethnicity, or nationality, consuming the same performance presented by world-renowned artists. Global cultural flows, along with rising prosperity, provide an increasing repertoire of, and a greater scope for conscious-choice in possible identities, and communities to belong to. Individuals’ identities in Shanghai are increasingly contingent and contextual under urban governance and the seeming ‘democratization’ suggested by consumerism, less bound to physical place, more fluid, and, perhaps, more ephemeral. Imported high-cultural products can facilitate the development of de-territorialized consumer identities; they may also contribute to, and cross-cut with, notions of Shanghainese cosmopolitanism and sophistication, enhancing senses of differentiation from China’s rural poor and urbanites in other regions, and at the same time cultivating identification with affluent overseas Chinese (Gamble

\(^6\) E.g. ELLE, Vogue; Peter Mayle’s Expensive Habits (1992) and Acquired Tastes (1993), etc.
In a city where millions of strangers encounter each other daily in the streets, the code of “social standing” fulfills an essential social function, while it satisfies the vital need of people to be always informed about one another (Baudrillard 2001: 23). What connects the information-gathering and “social standing” identification is comparison. The comparison made in this respect is in vogue today, and it is commonly and inextricably bound up with financial capacity. Therefore, what we frequently interpret as aesthetic or intellectual difference in substance is pecuniary only (Veblen 1994[1899]:60). The odious expression or comment from Shanghainese to outsiders regarding their vulgarity and lack of certain cultural capital is in essence a naked discrimination of the outsiders’ pecuniary state. This in return explains Shanghainese’ anxiety and uneasiness when seeing the newcomers make claims on this city’s cultural consumption and participations in Western consuming practices. The outsiders’ attempts for or realizations of upward social mobility undoubtedly shake the “social standing” of the Shanghai locals.

The research subjects of my thesis project are classical music concert-goers in Shanghai.Unlike ballet or opera, classical music provides very limited visual content or story lines for entertainment. Its abstract quality requires knowledge about the musical piece and even instrument playing skills. I apply Bourdieu’s notion of capital conversion (1986) as the framework to analyze the motivations of Shanghai’s classical-music concert-goers. On capital
conversions, Bourdieu asserted that the convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis of the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital (1986:253). The conversion between different types of capitals in a particular setting embedded in a particular event can eventually alter the long-term reproduction of this set of capitals. This is how Shanghairen identity could be transformed and reproduced through attendance at Western classical music concerts, or high-cultural consumption in general.

The conversion between cultural, symbolic capital, and economic capital in consuming Western classical music at a concert-setting illustrates that the fundamental element, the universal equivalent in this market economy with Chinese characteristics is labour time, both the labour-time accumulated in the form of either capital – e.g. embodiment of cultural capital requires long-time education in order to decipher a classical music piece, and the labour-time needed to transform it from one type into another – e.g. the time and money spent for concert attendance (Bourdieu 1986:253). To put it in a nutshell, the economic capital one spends on the attendance at a concert – the sum of the labour-time he worked to earn the money to pay for the ticket, and the two hours he stays in the audience hall appreciating the music – converted into embodied cultural, social and symbolic capital.

For Bourdieu, the embodied state of cultural capital implies competence as a premise to appreciate music. In the case of Western classical music, its production implies very strict conventions of a heavily stereotyped genre, leading composers to demonstrate their highly
professionalized and technical virtuosity by continually referring back to previous solutions; they are continually bordering on pastiche, or a parody of previous producers, against whom they measure themselves (Bourdieu 1993b:128). The highly condensed and layered meanings of a Western classical music piece set a high threshold for consumers, who then are supposed to possess the proper, embodied cultural capital that enables them to understand and appreciate the music. The incompatibility of economic and cultural capital embodied in the individual leads to differentiation among the audience, and different outcomes in their experiences of concert attendance. With the seating plan separating an audience hall into sections according to ticket prices, the well-learned may not afford to sit in the most expensive section, which usually enjoys the best view and acoustic effects. Meanwhile, those who do possess economic capital may not be knowledgeable about classical music. Ironically, whereas wealthy elites are viewed as legitimate and appropriate recipients of esteem, respect, and deference in the retail sector (Hanser 2008:119), their status may be challenged in luxury, high-culture-consumption settings because of their possible lack of embodied cultural capital. Ignorance of the concentrated, meditative poses and postures that listeners feel called upon to adopt at public performances of music, and an ‘indifference to music,’ are particularly shameful forms of barbarism, distinguishing the ‘elite’ from the ‘mass’ (Bourdieu 1993a:103), the sophisticated, cosmopolitan Shanghairen from outsiders.

The way to acquire cultural capital, the process of embodiment, implies a labour of inculcation and assimilation, costs above all time, which must be invested personally by the investor
The work of acquisition is work on oneself, that is to say, self-improvement, and the length of the labour-time spent in acquisition was the measurement of one’s cultural capital, hence the basis for its convertibility (ibid). Bourdieu further stressed that domestic transmission of cultural capital was the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment, bore more significance than the academic one in formal school system (ibid). In this context, outside of the state regulated pedagogic system, consumption of Western high-cultural products, namely, attendance at Western classical music concerts becomes the means of cultural capital embodiment. Interestingly, cultural capital’s diffuse, continuous transmission mostly within the family or neighbourhood, to a certain extent, escapes observation and control from the state; thus the possession of embodied cultural capital regarding Western classical music appreciation can easily be attributed to natural qualities (Bourdieu 1986:254), or to ‘quality (suzhi)’! Given time, the embodied cultural capital gradually converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus, cannot be transmitted instantaneously like money, or property rights (Bourdieu 1986:244-45). Therefore, it can be used by Shanghairen to secure their “social standing” confronting the new riches originated from other parts of China.

Unlike the domestic education in French families Bourdieu generated his arguments from, Shanghai’s public arts institutions – outside of the formal school system no less – play a bigger role in the local’s acquisition of cultural capital. A mutual understanding between the cultural capital seekers and providers on the process of cultural capital embodiment or cultivation is that besides time, wealth is another prerequisite. Music conservatories, and the mechanism of private
tutors, establish themselves not only as the center for reproducing musicians, but also as institutions which ensure the production of competent consumers (Bourdieu 1993b:120). In Shanghai, this monetary motivation from the private sector resonates with the municipal government’s intention to enhance the “cultural quality (wenhua suzhi)” of the masses. There is no wonder then that arts venues are so enthusiastic about organizing community-based, music-training workshops, or intro-level, inexpensive, bi-weekly concerts for potential long-term audiences. An apt marketing term for those series is to ‘educate the consumers.’

What the performing arts venues are really aiming at is the enhancement of musical taste, and the need for and belief in live music (Bourdieu 1993a: 106). It may or may not result in a certificate of musical competence, but it provides the means for those potential listeners to decipher a musical piece and for them to perform accepted and expected audience rituals in concert halls. The performing arts venues are institutionalized form of cultural capital no less. Besides, their fame representing the objectified cultural and symbolic capital from its architecture and staging history provides a bonus set of cultural and symbolic capital in the conversion between economic capital spent by the concert-goer and other capitals in exchange at a concert setting.

Mandatory rituals aim to testify the volume of the consumers’ cultural capital in public – “No applause between movements” is usually rotated on LED screens in Chinese concert halls.

---

7 There is a specific term “Pu Ji”, meaning dissemination to reach the general public, for these workshops and short-piece concerts in formal governmental reports, as well as across the three main performing arts venues in Shanghai – the Shanghai Grand Theatre, the Shanghai Concert Hall, and the Shanghai Oriental Arts Centre.
staging Western classical music. Stage managers in Shanghai believe that it is in their job-description to open slightly an exit stage-door after each piece, so that they can lead the applause after the last note. Bourdieu argues that in constructing the distinctions, what really matters is how, rather than simply what, one consumes (Holt et al. 2000: xvi). My research question that emerges here is, in highly-commercialized, classical-music concerts, how much this artistic appreciation in public weighs in the whole concert-attendance experience, and in the overall Western classical music appreciation. As well, how much does the audience consider this practice different from listening to classical music by CD or iPod at home?

Music appreciation in concert halls transcends mere listening; audiences who are practising in a public space indicate their perception of being observed, and their intention of distancing themselves from incompetence. Audiences expect to acquire symbolic capital by attending high cultural performances as well, that is, ‘distinction’ or ‘prestige’. Thus, if we look at the equation of capital conversion, for the same amount of economic capital in the form of money spent on a concert ticket and labour-time spent in the audience hall, the audience embodied with less cultural capital, a.k.a. the knowledge to appreciate the virtuosity, presumably would receive less pleasure and enjoyment from the understanding of classical music pieces – a new layer of embodied cultural capital, so in order to maintain the balance, s/he is supposed to receive something else for the paid amount of time and money. This is where social and symbolic capital in the form of ‘sociability’ and ‘prestige’ steps in. In this way, we can explain why people as lay persons still would attend classical music concerts because they anticipate receiving another set
of capitals in return.

A successful concert has the underlying indication that there is a full house and that the audience responded enthusiastically. If the mutual communication built on embodied cultural capital between performers and listeners fails, the latter would face a slight reflexivity crisis about his or her own competence. To avoid this awkward situation, two possible strategies are usually employed by concert-goers. The first entails only attending concerts compatible with one’s own knowledge, i.e., musical pieces that one familiar with. The second is to act as if one possesses adequate cultural capital, while aiming to receive other capitals in return, i.e. social and symbolic capital. To express distinction through embodied tastes, cultural elites emphasize the distinctiveness of consumption practices in themselves, apart from the cultural contents to which they are applied (Holt 2000: 221). The rarity of performances by world-renowned musicians in Shanghai implies a high ticket price and intensive media coverage. Thus it would presumably generate more embodied symbolic capital of the people attending these expensive concerts. Bourdieu called it a field of restricted production, which generated a specifically cultural legitimacy of scarcity… a restricted performance confers properly cultural value on the musicians by endowing them with distinction recognized as such within the historically available cultural taxonomies (1993b:117). In this case, the degree of affordability and accessibility of the tickets infers exclusiveness, and furthermore, economic and social status. No wonder, the persons seeking surplus outcome more than aesthetic enjoyment through attending classical music concerts would opt for this type of performance. Therefore, we can suppose that it is the status,
the social and symbolic capital rather than the virtuosity that some audiences are after in attending high-end concerts.

Attendance at classical music concerts represents both conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption. The leisure time spent in concert suggests that the person does not need to work over time, or to take a second job, or devote the time for childcare – they are either single or can afford babysitting, apart from the concert ticket. Further, the embodied, pre-requisite knowledge to understand, or using Bourdieu’s term, ‘decipher’ the music piece demonstrates the tremendous amount of leisure time and effort invested in this practice. Music is the art of time, and the performance of it has no concrete, physical form, nor does its enjoyment. But one’s presence at a concert does represent conspicuous consumption, consuming the space, and the musicians’ labour.

Although cultural capital is articulated in all social fields as an important status resource, it operates in consumption fields through a particular conversion into tastes and consumption practices (Holt 2000: 217). While ordinary urbanites are usually excluded from economic elites’ consumption settings, and can only window shop for luxury commodities, classical-music concerts provide them with the opportunity to compete for cultural capital with the affluent, and to negotiate their social status, which in other realms is largely based on one’s economic capital. How, then, are Western performing arts integrated into Chinese urbanites’ overall cultural consumption? To study the consumption of Western performing-arts at the level of individuals,
this research takes on Bourdieu’s argument that the readability of a work of art for a particular individual varies according to the divergence between the more or less complex and subtle code required by the work, and the competence of the individual (1993b:224). He also argues that all cultural practices, like concert going, are closely linked to educational level and secondarily to social origin (1984:1). How much this argument applies to the case of classical music audience in contemporary Shanghai will be addressed in this research.

Hence, to understand how and what instruments Chinese urban consumers possess to decode Western performing-arts will be crucial. But early studies of the Chinese consumer revolution have not explained much about how contemporary Chinese consumers were influenced and trained to pursue Western cultural goods. Besides, few literatures reveal the motivations of Chinese cultural consumers, and how they perceive the Western performing arts. How do they perceive themselves attending the performances? How does the distance between the origin of the Western cultural products and the local affect this type of consumption? These questions have been tackled through my qualitative research on classical music audiences in Shanghai in the summer of 2009.
3. Methodology

In-depth interviews and participant observation techniques were used to collect first-hand data to answer my research questions. Qualitative interviews provided me opportunities to learn about the previous experiences of the respondents and to explore the individuals’ impulses behind certain behaviours. The concrete descriptions obtained through interviews provide a fuller understanding of the respondents’ family and arts-related educational background, as well as from where their interests to listen to classical music stem. On-the-spot participant observation in performing arts venues worked as a complement to illustrate the picture of the whole consuming process. Besides observing the interactions between staff and audiences, and between audiences before and in-between performances in the lobby and in the audience hall, I paid special attention to the ‘proper’ rituals carried out by audience members during the concert, for example, when to applaud.

3.1 In-depth Interview

Apart from the first several research participants recruited by snowball technique, most of the subjects were recruited in the lobby of the Shanghai Concert Hall before the beginning of the concerts. Interviews were then arranged by email or phone to set up a time and place to meet the respondents in person. I explained the background and objectives of this research, the consent form, and the procedures to ensure the participants’ privacy and confidentiality before started the interview. The potential subjects who agreed to participate would sign the consent form and would be informed that they can choose to withdraw from the participation at any time or choose
not to answer any question(s) during the interview. They were all given a copy of the consent form to keep, with contact information for the UBC Office of Research Services and me (See Appendix C). Both of the consent forms are in Mandarin, since all my respondents are Chinese natives. The interviews were conducted based on the Interview Guide (see Appendix A) with spontaneous probes according to the interviewee’s responses. The interviews were digitally recorded upon the participants’ consent. Among the 16 interviews I conducted, the longest was with a female respondent in her late thirties that went beyond three hours; the shortest was with another female respondent in a neighbourhood park that lasted only 40 minutes.

The interviews covered three topics, demographic information, cultural consumption and social interaction. Educational background, family composition, and occupation were collected in the first part to provide variables for further analysis. The cultural consumption section recalled their past experiences of Western classical music appreciation and recent concerts attended. The social interaction section explored their motivation and self-perception in a larger cultural, social, and historical context. All in-depth interviews were conducted in a mixture of Mandarin and Shanghai dialect, whatever the research respondents felt more comfortable with. I digitally-recorded all the interviews while taking notes about the things they emphasized and their body language. Even they were aware of the digital recording, they felt their input was of more importance if I was jotting down some phrases. I discovered that during the short periods of time when I was writing, respondents would continue thinking about my question and more often than not, provided further insights and examples. The later coding and analysis were based
on the Mandarin and Shanghai dialect transcriptions, which I worked on from July to September, 2009. I translated the interview excerpts leading to the three key research findings and supplemented these with the notes I took during the interviews.

In total, I conducted 16 interviews and observed seven classical music concerts in Shanghai. A number of the interview respondents were recruited using snowball technique, starting from a former colleague of mine, a Shanghai native and also long-time Western classical music lover, who works for the magazine of the Shanghai Grand Theatre, *Friends of the Grand Theatre* (*Dajuyuan zhi you*). He also serves an editorial role in a free monthly newspaper circulated among classical music lovers in Shanghai, “Love of Music News” (*Aiyue Bao*). Through him, I interviewed two other long-time music lovers in Shanghai, who are also registered as members of the music lover association under the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. One has a managerial job in the marketing department of a publishing house, volunteering to serve as the chief editor for the above mentioned newspaper. The other is a Shanghai native as well, a retiree in his early 70s. He started to listen to Western classical music prior to the time of liberation.

Besides the three convenient respondents, the recruitment of interview respondents took place in the lobby of the Shanghai Concert Hall prior to two concerts. One was the Zurich Chamber Orchestra and Boys Choir concert on May 28th, 2009; and the other was a weekend Radio Concert two days later. I dressed in black shirt – looked similar to the custom service staff in black suit uniform – with a “staff” tag clipped to the left sleeve in both occasions. I used two
different strategies to distribute the Advertisement of Interview Respondent’s Recruitment (Appendix B). On May 28th, I was provided by the Concert Hall a table with its standard tablecloth, placed on the right side of the lobby. There was another table on the left side of the lobby, on which the staff piled free performance flyers and calendars, and to sell that day’s house programmes. I also had free promotion materials for future Shanghai Concert Hall performances on my table. So upon entrance, the audience assumed that I was also staff, providing the same service as those standing on the opposite side of the entrance hall. But when they approached my table, I started to show them the recruitment form and introduce my research project, which confused them. Most of them paused and listened for several sentences. After figuring out that I was trying to recruit them into a joint-study of the University of British Columbia and the Shanghai Concert Hall, some of them refused to take the blank recruitment form, but asked where could they get the house programme, while some others pretended not to be listening and just took the free performance calendars and left. Nevertheless, some concert-goers expressed interest in my project and provided their contact information, so that I could contact them later to schedule a time for an interview.

The majority of the time I had planned to recruit research subjects was spent on talking to two or three audience members who already showed interest to this project and wrote down their contact information. Though building a good rapport at the beginning or at the first communication is crucial for a successful interview in later time, it certainly limited my chances for approaching more potential interview respondents in the precious 30 minutes between the
door opening of the Concert Hall and the performance. With only a handful of affirmative responses, I altered the recruiting strategy on the following weekend, which was a matinee performance and took place 10:30 AM on Sunday, May 30th. Instead of using a table, I stood side-by-side with the ticket-checker and another staff distributing free house programmes – it might be more proper to call it a playbill, which is a booklet containing only several pages of programme notes and introduction of the ensemble, while all the rest was advertisement. As the audience swarmed it, people did not have time to read the brief introduction about my research project on the recruitment form. They just grabbed a recruitment form and a free ball pen, together with the house programme and their ticket-stubs, rushing into the audience hall. The only words I repeated when handing out the recruitment forms were: “The Concert Hall and the University of British Columbia are conducting a joint research project, studying classical music concert audiences. If you have interest in participating, please take a look at this form and leave your contact information, thanks!” The feedback was not as good as that of the strategy I used at the Zurich concert. Only several audience members returned the filled-out recruitment form to me after the concert, meaning most of them tossed it away.

In the middle of June, I was still short of three interview respondents to fulfill the requirement in the research design. Fortunately, I met an old acquaintance of my teenage years at a concert I observed, whom I had lost contact with for more than a decade! He later introduced me to two music lover friends, one of whom is the only non-Shanghainese in my entire study. That interesting encounter coincided with me bumping into a university acquaintance in my cohort, at
the last concert I observed, Russian Legends – Maestro Fedoseyev with Shanghai Symphony Orchestra on June 19th, 2009. She is now a lawyer and also a sponsor of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. Running into two acquaintances, each at one of the total four ‘formal’ night concerts I observed made me ponder the demographic characteristics of my research subjects, precisely the most common age group, educational level, and of course, being Shanghai native. It became apparent later in the interviews that they both belong to the audience group that frequently go to classical music concerts, and also in favour of the Shanghai Concert Hall as the ideal location for Western classical music concert. The Shanghai Concert Hall is based on a Western-looking architecture that dates back to the 1930s, the golden days of the ‘Old Shanghai’. The similarity of the demographical characteristics shared between me and my research subjects provides me convenience to approach and build rapport with those participants, meanwhile, suggests the connection between listening to Western classical music and being *Shanghairen*.

The length of my interviews varies from 40 minutes to three hours, and more often than not, my interview respondents told me stories about their friends’ or relatives’ experiences of listening to classical music or attending concerts, as well as their knowledge of particular music pieces or musicians. They engaged in constant presentations of their embodied cultural capital, and sometimes seemed to be in a competition with me, or evaluating my own cultural capital to identify whether I belong to his or her group. The volume of cultural and symbolic capital embodied in my research respondents by their listening to Western classical music potentially challenges and redefines the power relations between researchers and respondents. I will discuss
more about the positioning of the researcher in the field in the third section of this chapter.

3.2 Participant Observation

In my research design, four types of Western classical music concerts were observed during my fieldwork to cover a more demographically and socioeconomically diverse audience group. The four types are: 1) weekend daytime concert performed by local ensemble on Sunday morning; 2) local resident symphony orchestra with a famous Western conductor or soloist; 3) second-tier foreign symphony orchestra; and 4) world prestigious symphony orchestra with superstar conductor or soloist. During the two months in the field, all four types of concerts were observed, as well as a piano recital played by a prestigious Chinese musician in his mid-70s. I observed the audiences’ behaviour over the whole performance time, from ticket-examination until the staff locked the exit doors. The observation conducted in the entrance hall focused on audiences’ behaviour before the concert starts and during the 20 minutes of intermission: a) Communication with staff and/or acquaintance; b) wandering or taking photos in the lobby; c) Purchase house programme and merchandise. And the observation during the performance looked in particular at the response, or the practice of “suitable behaviour” required by this high-cultural consumption, for example the proper time to applause.

The fieldwork for this study commenced in May, 2009, amidst the annual Shanghai Spring International Music Festival. Though unable to re-connect to my former colleagues and acquaintances soon enough to observe concerts in the festival, the festival did provide concert
cases for my later interview respondents to talk about, when we reached the interview topic of their recent concert-going experiences. Among those festival concerts, two took place in the concert hall of the Shanghai Oriental Art Center had been mentioned by several respondents, one was by the Dresden National Symphony Orchestra (Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden) on May 6th, and the other by Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra on May 16th. Both were world-renowned arts troupe charging first-tier ticket price higher than RMB 1,000 yuan.

Before entering the master program in the Department of Sociology at the University of British Columbia, I worked as a program executive in the Programme Department at the Shanghai Concert Hall from October, 2004 till February, 2006. Despite the personnel change, the current manager of its Programme Department was an acquaintance of mine back three years ago. With his support, I was able to wander around in the Concert Hall without being questioned by any security staff before and during concerts, and to obtain free tickets or entrance to any concert I was interested in during my stay in Shanghai.

With this privilege and free access to concerts organized or taking place in the Shanghai Concert Hall, I observed three weekend low-priced Radio Concerts, one a piano recital by a prestigious Chinese pianist, Fou Tsong, whose father was a well-known intellectual in the early and mid-20th century China. I also observed the concert by the Zurich Chamber Orchestra and Zurich Boys Choir with the conductor Muhai Tang, who is regarded as a Shanghai musician made his name in the West. The last concert I attended in the Shanghai Concert Hall was performed by the
Shanghai Symphony Orchestra with the guest conductor Vladimir Fedoseyev from Russia. Thus, except for the fourth type of concerts I was interested in observing: world prestigious symphony orchestra with superstar conductor or soloist, I covered most of the concert types staged in Shanghai in the Shanghai Concert Hall.

United States National Symphony Orchestra with Principal Conductor Ivan Fischer’s June.16th concert taking place in the concert hall of the Shanghai Oriental Art Center was the last and the most expensive concert I observed in my fieldwork. Through a previous colleague, who now works as the chief representative in the Shanghai office of a British artist and project management agency, I was introduced to the manager of the Programme Department in the Shanghai Oriental Art Center. So that even though it was a sold-out concert, I received an ‘all-through” pass at the concert day for my fieldwork. The Shanghai Oriental Art Center is located on the east bank of Huangpu River, and officially opened to the public as late as in the summer of 2005, the most recent comparing to the Shanghai Grand Theatre in the summer of 1998, and the Shanghai Concert Hall re-opened in Oct. 2004 after renovation. Though more expensive concerts played by prestigious musicians have been staged there, some classical music concert-goers feel that located in Pudong – a farmland before the “Open Policy” – and its lack of objectified cultural and symbolic capital deems a rupture between the status of the venue and the concerts it stages. To quote an interview respondent, “It just doesn’t feel right, the dazzling glass wall, the manner of the staff – they are very nice and polite for sure, but it is more like the attitude staff in grocery stores carry, not in a cultural venue, it is somehow fake, not suitable or
compatible with the classical music concert itself.” Apparently to some, the Shanghai Oriental Art Center is not an ‘authentic’ performing arts venue tightly associated with classical music appreciation to music lovers. Therefore, attendance at Western classical music concerts in Shanghai goes beyond the appreciation of music; it anchors as deep as to the nostalgia and imagination of the “Old Shanghai”, which is on the Puxi (west bank) of the city. This consumption in public is clearly associated with a geographically bounded, specific urban culture and physical setting.

3.3 Insider VS Outsider

The binary of me being both an insider and an outsider was apparent in the every phase of my fieldwork. Shanghainese identity and interest in Western classical music provide me advantages and convenience in undertaking this project. Upon the initial contact with the interview respondents, I was instantly accepted by my research subjects as an insider due to several other facts. Firstly, on the research subjects’ recruitment in the lobby of the Shanghai Concert Hall, my black shirt and dress pants looked similar to the uniforms worn by the staff in the Shanghai Concert Hall. There was even a research respondent who misunderstood that it was personnel in the Concert Hall, rather than I, handed out and later collected the research subjects recruitment forms. Secondly, after working in the programme department at the Shanghai Concert Hall from fall 2004 till early 2006, I became familiar with all the wings, halls, entrances, offices, and other facilities in the four-storey labyrinth-like building. Thirdly, I was born and grew up in Shanghai; more precisely, the house I lived in with my grandparents and parents was located in the former
French Concession in “Old Shanghai.” The embodied symbolic capital of the location adds more weight to me being a legitimate person to be interested in Western classical music – I will discuss this mentality of legitimization and justification in the third section of this chapter, the Shanghairen identity. And finally, and what amazed me most, is my features and lighter–coloured skin. There was a female research respondent in her late 40s who told me that the reason she decided to participate was my look reminded her of herself in the early 20s: “Skinny, and very fair skin tone, clearly we are from similar family background, so that I want to help you with your study, your research.”

Later at the interview setting, my insider status was shown through me speaking Shanghai dialect and my knowledge about Western classical music. After polite greetings and my brief introduction about this research project in Mandarin, usually the interview respondents would ask whether I was a Shanghairen, if so, the rapport was instantly built and the rest of the interview would be in Shanghai dialect. The tension between two strangers, the researcher and the research subject, eased due to this shared dialect and Shanghairen identity. Sometimes I tried to steer the conversation back to Mandarin, so that it could appear more formal; my respondents would quickly shift back to Shanghai dialect, a language they felt more comfortable with. Even on occasions when no explicit question about preferred-language was asked, my interview respondents would realize my Shanghairen identity from the small spoken words I use, which showed Shanghai accent and specific ways of pausing or ending a sentence. In this sense, dialect serves the role of a gate-keeper, as soon as I display my ‘ID card’ of being a Shanghairen, the
atmosphere lightened and they were ready to talk freely. Interestingly, the only non-Shanghainese interviewee I encountered spoke more Shanghai dialect than I did during the interview, even the setting was at her home, that is to say, without any other audience to eavesdrop on our conversation, and potentially judge her, like in a cafe setting. I regard this speaking-language tendency as assimilation to the local, urban culture, to a *Shanghairen* identity.

My knowledge of Western classical music in some occasions worked to my advantage, but in some others not. I was constantly anxious about how much I should tell about my own musical preferences when asked by my interview respondents. Generally, I was very honest and tried my best to minimize my opinions and preferences, in order to encourage them to talk more about themselves without any restraints or concerns. There were contrary cases, for one, the respondent being a long-time music lover who asked me about my favourite composer after declaring he had passed the ‘entrance’ level of listenership of Beethoven and Mozart, leaned more towards ‘sophisticated’ impressionism and contemporary composers like Richard Strauss, Mahler, and Shostakovich. It appeared to me that if I answered Mozart and Bach honestly, he might deem me incompetent or unsuitable for his further argument, but on the other hand, if I claimed to be a fan of Schoenberg or Stravinsky, I might not be able to handle further discussion on aesthetics. In the end, I provided a vague answer saying I listened to a lot without a particular favour. The aesthetic hierarchy in the types of classical music one listens to will be discussed further in the second section of this chapter, which elaborates my research subjects’ covert desire for distinction and the perceived value of particular concerts. Meanwhile the interviews with several new-comers to
the Western classical music listenership were the other way around. They felt shy and a bit intimidated when I asked them about this interest. Before answering my question, they stated with a very humble smile that they had not listened to Western classical music for a long time, and did not know much about pieces or musicians. There was even one man who mentioned that he would like to receive guidance on how and what to listen to from me. With absolutely no intention to compete with my research subjects on cultural capital, I was constantly put on the spot. The take-away message from this is that they are all aware of the potential symbolic violence that underlay and might arise during our conversions; it also points to the threshold of the economic and cultural capital to participate in this consuming practice. Nevertheless, they were ready to expose themselves in this contested space of music appreciation.

Even with this kind of cultural proximity to my research subjects, the nature of me being an outsider was unaltered. The photos I took at the concert settings were restricted to my viewpoint, and subject to my location at particular moments in the concert hall. I participated as an audience member at the concert, but I was more than a music-lover, I was a researcher at the same time. This positioning alienated me in various ways. First, I did not pay for the concert entrance, that is to say, I did not have a ticket and thus was not assigned to a specific seat with a price-tag hinted to other audience around me. Second, my purpose of attending the concerts was to observe audiences, not merely to listen to music. I did not choose to go to a particular concert for either performers, or musical pieces, I just went to any concert fitting my research objectives and I could have free access to during my stay in the field. Third, because I worked in the Shanghai
Concert Hall before, and received support from the management to conduct this research, I felt comfortable in the setting, and sometimes unconsciously acted like a staff, like I used to be. For example, I almost instinctively helped to close up the curtains behind the exit door when some audience went out to the washroom before music pieces, and no staff was around. Fourth, I jotted down my notes in English, rather than Mandarin during observing audience at concerts. If anyone did peak into my notes, they would instantly feel alienated from me and confused about my *Shanghairen* identity. After being trained at an English-speaking setting for two years in a discipline that was not my major, I found things of sociological sense to me in English. The intention to be transparent at the concert settings was never realized, and hopefully my behaviour did not affect or disturb other audience members when I looked around and jotted down notes during the concert.

During the interviews, despite the *Shanghairen* identity, I stood at a distance from the daily lives of my interview respondents. I am a graduate student in Sociology at the University of British Columbia, living in Vancouver, Canada, that is to say, away from their concerns about healthcare, childrearing, chaotic city life, contempt for migrants from other parts of the country, and the ambiguous attitudes towards the mass construction for 2010 Shanghai Expo, to name a few. No longer a resident in the city, I looked at Shanghai with nostalgia and confusion, not to mention the distancing from my research subjects in order to maintain an ‘objective’ understanding of their narratives and behaviours. Even with knowledge of the historical or cultural events some interview respondents mentioned, I was not old enough to experience them myself, and in the
end I was not a member of their Shanghai music-lovers community. My typical role during the interview was a female graduate student from a Western school, younger than them, and they were willing to help me to earn my master’s degree by talking about their Western classical music appreciation.
4. Research Findings

Though interesting insights about the shift in the Party and municipal government’s diplomatic and cultural policy, and the perceived entitlement to social space were present in the interviews, to address the research questions guiding this project, I streamline the data into three topics: 1) Classical as a new trend. Although the production and consumption of Western classical music have hundreds of years of history in the West, its introduction to ordinary Shanghainese only dates back to the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Its recent popularity and trendiness among the general public bourgeons since the last decade of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. 2) Logical and rational conversion of capitals. The willingness to pay for a concert ticket in a particular price range, the anticipation of the aesthetics and enjoyment in return and the authenticity of performances all affect the decision-making process among concert-goers. The controversies between my research respondents’ opinions illustrate a rich and intricate picture projected to the backdrop of the governmental promotion of Western high-culture. 3) Shanghairen Identity: Sophisticated and Modern. These characteristics were apparent in the ways my respondents listing their other interests and hobbies prerequisite large volume of embodied cultural capital. In their narratives, there is a circle of forces reinforce the Shanghairen identity: the semi-colonial history of Shanghai in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century provides elements for selective nostalgia towards a Western modernity in proximity; on a daily basis, the urban built-environment reminds Shanghainese of this city’s past fame, which fuels their imagination and aspiration to reclaim the status of metropolitan urbanites through consuming Western high-culture.
4.1 Classical as a New Trend

To most of my interview respondents, the practice of attending a Western classical music concert or listening to Western classical music in general is something new and bourgeoning. Their consumption of this “old” form of music from the West is ironically self-perceived to be a representation of being progressive, trendy and modern. Though the appreciation of Western classical music requires much knowledge for decipherment, which stands true in the Shanghai context as well, it connotes the open-mindedness of the concert-goers, rather than them being conservative and out-of-date. Different opinions regarding this practice do exist between my respondents, but isn’t this heterogeneity further indicates the new and unsettling nature of the appreciation of this ‘new’ genre of music? The “newness” of appreciating Western classical music echoes Shanghai’s understanding of themselves being modern, capable of embracing the ‘advanced’ West. The concert-goers’ “openness” to the ‘newly-encountered’ classical music exemplified the “openness” of the city to diverse global flows.

Appreciation of Western classical music is regarded as a newly-risen phenomenon, dating back no earlier than the end of the Cultural Revolution. One of my respondents, Mr. L, who is in his mid-40s, working in a state-owned publishing house, mentioned that:

“It was in the year 1978, or 79, that I started to be interested in classical music. You might not know well about the history of that period, which was the exact moment of the crushing of the Gang of Four. Before that, the whole country was culturally locked-down, where possibly could you learn about this type [of Western culture], this kind of music?! Totally impossible! At that time there was a term “feudalism-capitalism-revisionism” (feng zi xiu), right? So after the smashing of the Gang of Four, Western culture has been slowly and
continuously imported; I was in high school then.”

As apparent in Mr. L’s response, the younger generation I belong to, who was born and grew up in the post Cultural Revolution era, or in China’s economic reform era, has little knowledge of the history of censorship. Therefore, people in his age would appreciate and celebrate more about the availability of Western cultural products, and enjoys this freedom on a deeper level. To them, listening to Western classical music is associated more with the consumer revolution, a.k.a. China’s embracing of Western commodities and consumer culture post the “Open Policy”. When the Western contemporaries of the middle-aged Shanghai urbanites have developed diverse music tastes for decades and even grew tired of different new music genres, the Shanghainese are so excited about the newly-available musical performances, Western classical music concerts counted as a very important one.

This freshness of Western classical music concerts interests the Shanghainese across age-groups. Among my respondents, the oldest is in his early-70s, while the youngest is in his early 20s. The way they see other audiences in their cohorts, most of whom they believed not to be long time music lovers, further justifies my argument, that “newness” is the driving-force. Some concert-goers treat attendance at Western classical music concert as no different from other types of trendy leisure activity. A respondent in her late 20s commented:

“Newness, it’s merely a sense of freshness. Eh…I believe there is a portion of the Shanghai audience who are just like that! They act like looking into kaleidoscope for the first time, [laughs] especially on the occasion of the New Year’s concert. You can easily tell from the way they behave, for example, they would tear open a plastic bag and start eating snacks
during a concert. It's probably because they went there not, not to listen to the music, but for some social gathering fun.”

From the tone of the above Ms. Z’s comment, we can tell that the audience group is nowhere close to harmonious. There exists constant judgment towards each other, which ties back to the proper conduct in a public setting and the downside of this practice being ‘new’. Those possessing the knowledge of the rituals associated with attendance at a Western classical music concert hold this niche difference to secure their status of being a learned Shanghainese. In reality, they are merely several steps ahead of, or to be more precise, having accumulated more concert-attendance experiences than their peers. That is to say, they learned to consume Western classical music in public, this ‘new’ practice earlier than their snack-eating and chatting-aloud neighbours in the audience hall.

There is a clear effort to distinguish between audience groups, and people are constantly judging others and at the same time being judged. An awareness of this situation was revealed in the interviews when my respondents tried to explain to me why they are so unique – in the sense of modern and open-minded – that they are interested in Western classical music. Since attending Western classical music concerts bears the characteristics of the new and the trendy, several of my respondents self-interpret their fondness of this practice as having something to do with their personalities. In particular, they interpret concert attendance and a love of Western classical music as reflection of being open to new things and having a willingness to learn and to appreciate new genres or arts forms, an interpretation that is common across generations among
my respondents. When talking about the free students’ performance in the Shanghai Music Conservatory, which is within 5 minutes walk from his office, Mr. D in his early 20s stressed:

“As long as I have some leisure time, I will go for a concert. If I have time, I will say to myself: why not listen to a concert tonight? I don’t have much to do back home after work, so why not go and check it out! I go more often since I have more time lately…My personality is more extravagant…I have interest in everything. It is not necessary to delve into it further, but to have a taste of it, I will definitely do. I am the type of person incapable of idling.”

As a retiree in his early 70s and an active member in the Shanghai Music Lover Association, Mr. X’s response was full of comparison with music lovers in his cohort, arguing it's his personality and way of thinking, of approaching arts that makes him different from others. Apparently he is very proud of this:

“I enjoy trying out new things, this ‘new’ includes classical or traditional things, which I haven’t known before, I want to have a taste of them; it also includes contemporary things, for example, jazz and its sort; and I am not against popular music at all. In our association, a lot of the members are very conservative! They regard popular music, or jazz as devilish! … I am interested in learning new things. Unlike other people of my age, who are cynical or critical about things attracting the younger generation’s attention; I don’t think in that way; I am not one of them.”

But in the juxtaposition between one’s age and the age, or history, of the type of music, the argument that classical music or certain subgenre of it, being new serving as the key attraction is not constant. This opens up the first case of controversies regarding the appreciation of Western classical music and its concerts among my respondents. The non-existence of a homogenous audience group and a uniformed opinion among them further testifies the ‘newness’ and
‘bourgeoning’ characteristics of this practice. When trying to take a stand in appreciating classical music, rather than popular music, Mr. Z in his late 30s told me in a somehow lamenting tempus fugit tone:

“Like me myself, as soon as reaching the age of 35, I became less sensitive to new things, and feel less interested or fond of things that have emerged recently. The reason that Western classical music is able to be passed on is it being classic. Unlike popular music, which would rarely be remembered after twenty years, [classical music pieces] that have remained popular for several hundred years must be classics.”

To him, classical music means old, traditional type of music, “classics,” as opposed to popular music. This contradiction between the aesthetics of the instrumental melodies, symphonies testified along the years and that of popular songs also had a geographical aspect, specifically the Western origin of classical music and the Taiwan and Hong Kong origin – less advanced, or less modern – of popular music. Even classical music is better and higher in the sense of aesthetics to Mr. Z; he still stresses the importance of the openness to new genres:

“It is not right to listen to only classical music, despise popular music. People should be open to new things! Nevertheless, if one only listens to popular music, his cengei (knowledge, civility level) could not be enhanced.”

Therefore, the “open-mindedness” to new music genres is clearly associated with the self-cultivation through the appreciation of Western classical music; the different interpretation of this practice doesn’t undermine this connection.

Besides the widely acknowledged long history and aesthetics of Western classical music, the Western-ness itself is believed to attract the audience. Here the exotic feature of the Caucasian
musicians, of the instruments, and of the music pieces all contributes to audiences’ understanding of the concerts to be new and fascinating. A mother in her late 30s, Ms. C compared the interest in Western classical music to the one in Chinese traditional music:

“I feel that music is the kind of thing more attractive to people if it is from somewhere else…how to explain…ehm, it’s like an old saying that foreign monks are better at chanting scriptures. That is to say, good things in proximity are easily ignored.”

To Ms. C, Western classical music consumers intentionally pick the type of concert they are going to, in the mindset of pursuing an exotic type of arts or enjoyment, newly available to them. Being foreign or Western is the selling point of Western classical music concerts. No wonder, then, that there are always Caucasian features occupying the center position on posters or other promotional materials; the emphasis on the origin of the music ensemble, on the European or North American venues they once performed in, together with the ignorance or overlooking of its South-east Asian members are common practice in concert promotions. When reporting on the New York Philharmonic’s visit to Shanghai in February of 2008, the New York Times showed its surprise at the local media and general public’s indifference to Chinese musicians:

“The New York Philharmonic’s recently appointed principal oboist is a native of China. Its fast-rising associate conductor is too…Despite expectations that the oboist, Liang Wang, and the conductor, Xian Zhang, would return as conquering heroes on the mainland, neither was featured in concerts in Shanghai this week nor will they be in Beijing, where the orchestra plays this weekend…The lack of expected appearances ‘feels like…being rejected by your own people.’ Mr. Wang suspected that the Chinese presenters of the Philharmonic did not see him as a soloist attractive to Chinese audiences, as compared with Westerners.”

In this regard, Western-ness and foreignness are key features of this newly accessible type of

---

music and, by extension, of this type of consuming practice. Thus the discussion about how Shanghai audiences are intrigued by Western classical music, and their willingness to attend Western classical music concerts, extends beyond the realm of the aesthetic features of the music to the field of the audience’s identification and self-perception in a broader social context.

To conclude the discussion on the newness of classical music as a driving-force for its popularity in Shanghai, one final quote from an interview respondent in his early 30s, Mr. O, is provided below. Mr. O grew up in an intellectual family with mother who was a traditional Chinese water-ink painter. He listens to a wide range of music, and has a managerial job at an American company. Contrary to Ms. C’s argument about the exoticness-seeking mentality among concert-goers, Mr. O’s response provides us insight into a long-time music lover’s opinion about the appreciation of the ‘old’ Western classical music in nowadays Shanghai:

“Traditional Western music and contemporary Chinese society, if you approach this topic from this binary, the only thing to argue is that it is a delay, a lagging-behind of Chinese society accepting Western traditional culture, and contemporary culture. To the Westerners, a lot of things have already been regarded as classical, but to Chinese, everything [the exposure to Western culture, and everything related to it] started from the last hundred years, so this delay is at least one to two hundred years. Even if it is a lag, to me it doesn’t matter whether it is truly a delay or not, it is merely…it doesn’t really mean anything to music itself against the big historical or social backdrop. Music is music; if it is good, it is good. Music itself doesn’t necessarily bear any historical significance, or serve any social function; it is created for the human being, for people’s heart, for the soul, the spirit. In its rise, Western classical music is righteous; I believe it is against religious violence, against the so-called autarchy. It denies religious autarchy, feudal autarchy. It is an embracement of humanity, of equality, then of freedom, and of rationality.”

When Mr. O pointed out the irony of ‘classical’ deemed as ‘new’ in the context of contemporary
urban China attributed to the history of knowledge and practice dissemination, he also highly valued Western classical music itself. Interestingly, after stressing the pure aesthetics of it, he elaborated on its connotation of humanity, freedom, and even rationality. To him, it represents the spirit of the Enlightenment. To a certain extent, the sense of enlightenment Western classical music brought about can be understood as “newness” in the post-Cultural Revolution Chinese society. Despite the remaining governmental censorship on part of Western popular culture, the accessibility and availability of Western cultural products like classical music indicates a type of humanity and freedom, which were deprived of before.

I wish to carry on this ideal in the following thesis, but unfortunately on one hand, my research subjects acknowledge the pure aesthetic beauty of Western classical music, on the other hand, appreciating it with other audience in a splendid venue after paying high ticket price requires the answer of worthiness, and rationality of this consumption. I will approach this question in the next section, applying a Bourdieuan capital-conversion perspective.

4.2 Logical and Rational Conversion of Capitals
One important feature of attendance at Western classical music concerts is the live experience. It consists of at least three parts. First is the aesthetic appreciation of a live musical performance, the acoustic presentation in a particular venue by a particular ensemble. Second is the listener’s own state in appreciating music in a public setting, for consciously he or she needs to conform to certain social norms and ritual in public, and there will be sanctions upon any violation, at the
very least, annoyed stares or funny looks; at the meanwhile he or she is at the position to judge
the others surrounding them. The last part of the experience entails the second point, which is in
a public setting, for that period of time; the concert-goers need to devote themselves exclusively
to listening to music. Each member of the audience is being observed and simultaneously
observing and judging others – both performers and other audiences at any moment when
appreciating a concert. These three points distinguish music appreciation in public from listening
to the same music in one’s home, and I will show how my respondents use them to justify their
decision to purchase concert tickets, and to attend a Western classical music concert

4.3.1 Whether it is preiswert?
I use here the German word preiswert, meaning ‘worth the money’ or ‘good value for price,’ to
portray a key aspect of classical music consumption. As noted in the previous discussion on
Bourdieu’s capital conversions, the basic element to make the conversion possible is that
labour-time serving as the universal equivalent (1986:253). Thus the audiences’ opinion on
whether the amount they paid for the experience in the concert hall is preiswert is determined by
the labour-time they see in return. To my research respondents, the true value lies in the live
performance by talented musicians, rather than other elements in a production, for example,
grandiose and lavish stage setting for a musical. The labour-time embedded in the years-long
training of the musicians plus the two hours of their performance is the essence of this capital
conversion at a Western classical music concert. Mathematical calculation doesn’t apply in this
case, because the capital conversions differ from individual to individual, based on his/her
embodied cultural capital, that is, the ability to decipher, to appreciate the performance, and we cannot say the person paying RMB 400 yuan for a front-row seat receives double the amount of cultural, and symbolic capitals in return comparing to the capital amount received by a person paying RMB 200 yuan. Though the feeling of preiswert varies between my research respondents, it mostly generates from their understanding of the proportion of other costs of the production and the comparison between the expectation and the real experience.

I asked my interview respondents what was the usual ticket price range they chose and how worthwhile they feel it was (in Shanghai dialect, ge suan). Ms. Z, who had the experience of attending a Western classical music concert in Toronto, commented that:

R: “The ticket price range I usually choose is about RMB300 yuan (Approx. CDN $50). The tickets for foreign ensembles are usually very expensive; so I just feel it’s not necessary to [listen to their performance]. You know, not worth it. I once listened to a symphony orchestra concert in Toronto, the ticket was very cheap. And Toronto Symphony Orchestra, their virtuosity is very high as well! That’s why spending a lot of money to listen to a concert by a foreign ensemble in Shanghai to me is…just not worth it.”

I: “Ok, yeah, it makes sense. The cost for the performance includes international travel, freight, etc.”

R: “Yeah, exactly! It means you pay for those kinds of thing [rather than the musical performance].”

Another interviewee, Mr. C, ascertains one more component of the ticket price, which makes her feel uncomfortable: “I feel that the market for whatever concert…how to say…if only there is a performance, there are a lot of PR campaigns and advertisements, of course, it will cost [a lot].”

And her underlying her comments is the point that is we, the audience, are the ones who foot the
bills, of course.

As I previously mentioned, the lowest ticket price available is usually RMB 80 or 120 yuan, though in small quantities; for the Shanghai Concert Hall, about 80 seats in its 1,200 seats seating-plan would fall into this lowest price tier. The socioeconomic status of my interview respondents was nowhere close to homogenous, spanning from junior level office worker, to managers in big state-owned or fortune 500 foreign companies, and to retirees living on pensions. But interestingly, the consensus across these groups was that even when they could afford the concert, they felt the ticket price was too high, and that there were many hidden costs or dishonesty in the ticket. Ms. C’s complaint about her experience attending a Celtic music and dance performance shows this sentiment well:

“The last time I brought my daughter to a Celtic performance. Its traditional flavour was very strong, the rhythm was very impressive, sometimes you just felt carried away…But, how to say…it was not like what was described in its advertisement. Compared to the price I paid, the quality of the performance was just so-so. RMB 780 yuan per ticket, three persons, no discount for kids! So to me, I expected it to be more exciting, more magnificent! But no…that’s why I didn’t feel it was worth the price! I didn’t feel good at that moment. If it was cheaper, then I wouldn’t care that much. Nevertheless, it was not as good as I had anticipated, it’s bad, I felt disappointed and sort of cheated.”

Another of her experiences further justifies the belief in the discrepancy between the ticket price and the quality of the performance, or the amount of labour-time in the form of the talents of performers – embodied cultural capital – and the fame of an ensemble – institutionalized symbolic capital. The below comparison is between free concerts performed by students of the Shanghai Music Conservatory at school venues, and the “Swan Lake” ballet performed by
famous foreign troupes.

“It’s not necessary to be a big production, of huge cost; big things are not necessarily good things. Small productions sometimes can be very good too! Students can be very creative and diligent, on contrary, those purely commercialized performances are…for example, “Swan Lake,” again and again, it still performs without any innovation! Well, I can see it is because it sells. Everyone knows it, and is aware of its aesthetic value (gao ya, literally translates into high and elegant). Therefore, the presenters invite this or that ballet troupe to perform it. Sometimes the troupe is very famous, but the actual dancers are of the second or even third tier in the troupe, as a result, [you pay the price, but] you haven’t seen the best side of the troupe. It is like selling dog meat while hanging a goat head for promotion (gua yangtou, mai gourou; an old Chinese saying, meaning sell goods of inferior quality for the price of genuine ones).”

It is interesting to notice the same person paying RMB 780 yuan per ticket would go to free concerts as well. She said: “We live close to the Shanghai Music Conservatory. I often bring my daughter to the school’s Heluding Hall for students’ performances. They [their level or virtuosity] already suffice for us to listen to, no problem. The students are very serious about their performance, and sometimes the performance was quite good. Some of them will be future musicians.”

Apparently she is not the only one interested in going to free concerts performed by student ensembles among my interview respondents. They stressed the quality of the students’ performance, well, for free ones, without paying a cent, it’s like everything to gain, because if we look again at the equitation of capital conversions, at free concerts, the labour-time or economical capital concert-goers pay for is merely the two hours they spend in a concert hall. This can also applied to biweekly weekend daytime concert, the ticket price ranges from 30 to 50
For the price of a McDonald’s meal, one can expect the aesthetic enjoyment from appreciating Western classical music in return. This indeed is preiswert if one weighs the accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital higher than a fast-food meal. Not every music students’ performance is necessarily cheap and of very good quality. The unpredictable quality of the concerts actually adds more excitement if you attend one of that sort, because the amount of capitals you received in return exceed the little economical capital you paid for the ticket and the labour-time spent exclusively for the concert.

Before turning to people’s decision-making process on how they choose which concert to attend, I want to provide two quotes from a long-time concert-goer about his understanding of the high-ticket-price phenomenon, and how illogical and irrational it is to purchase such expensive tickets to listen to a famous foreign ensemble’s concert in Shanghai. His insights express the discontent of the pricing system used in current Chinese performing arts industry:

“Now the ticket price is high indeed, according to my analysis, this expensiveness has its Chinese characteristics. There are several advantages of the high ticket price: First, when the ticket prices are high, the visiting ensemble, the visiting musicians can earn more, right? Also, merely my understanding [he is very humble in this sense], when the ticket price is high – whether it is really the case, I haven’t done any research on it – nevertheless, the performing arts agency has more margin. Further, why I say it has Chinese characteristics is the sponsorship, there are always sponsors. The sponsors will be pleased if the ticket price is high. Why? Because they will give those tickets to their employees as gifts. It would appear to be a valuable gift if the price printed on the ticket is high. If the price is less than 100 yuan, people will feel that you don’t treat me well, or seriously, it’s like I am not worthy, right? After all, it’s a benefit to employees. Last but not least, the high ticket price makes those audiences feel like dilettantes [in the sense of consuming pricy high-culture].”  

9 Having worked for the Shanghai Concert Hall for one and half year, I disagree with part of his argument, basically about the intentional increase of the ticket price. As far as I can recall, the practice at the Programme Department in the Shanghai Concert
Clearly, he is still willing to pay for the concert he is interested in, despite all the thoughts and misgivings he has regarding the ticket price’s “Chinese characteristics.” To give me an example of how ridiculously high a concert ticket in Shanghai is, he did some calculation for me:

“I don’t remember which the ensemble was the last time; they also visited Hong Kong as another stop of their Asian tour, the ticket price for their Hong Kong performance was...way cheaper than it was here! To do some simple calculation, you will find traveling to Hong Kong (the flight tickets and accommodation) to listen to the concert is cheaper than listening to the same performance in Shanghai; think about it, plus a leisure trip! For example, a ticket costs 2,000, or 2,500 yuan (in Shanghai), it would be only 1,000 HK dollar\(^{10}\) in Hong Kong, which means you can enjoy a trip to Hong Kong with the 1,500 yuan difference!”\(^{11}\)

Concert-goers are undoubtedly aware of the ‘unreasonableness’ of shockingly high concert ticket prices, but the more expensive a ticket, the more worthiness the gift-receiver will feel – embodied symbolic capital recognized by others in this case – and more snobbishly people can act when attending this particular concert. When expecting a more transparent pricing system for Western classical music concerts, some concert-goers do acknowledge the symbolic capital embodied in world prestigious maestros, which legitimate the relatively high price and grant a concert attendance \textit{preiswert}.

\(^{10}\) The currency exchange rate between Renminbi yuan and Hong Kong dollar is about 1:0.9.

\(^{11}\) To end this section on ticket price, I want to point out that world-renowned music ensembles’ Asian tours are usually managed by one international artists’ agency’s Asian branch, for example, IMG. It means shared flight and freight costs between performance places on a per rata basis. Obviously with the same agent, the performance fee should not vary much, so what exactly makes concerts tickets so expensive in mainland China? The reason can be traced back to the tax system and the regulations on foreign currency exchange, as well as the lack of governmental subsidies for cultural events. These elements are beyond the scope of this paper, but do provide some background about the Western classical music market.
A young lawyer, Ms. J, mentioned the series of the Seiji Ozawa Music School, which is collaboration between this world-renowned maestro and Shanghai local music students. She said: “The highest ticket price for the concert in the Shanghai Grand Theatre on April 17th, 2009 was just 380 yuan. Think about it, if it was a famous ensemble, at the very, very least, the highest will be above one thousand yuan!” That is true; in the same venue, in September, 2007, when maestro Ozawa collaborated with Vienna State Opera for the performance “Mozart: Le Nozze di Figaro in Four Acts (Concert Version)”, the highest priced ticket was 3,200 yuan, while the lowest was 300 yuan. Her judgment of the labour-time embedded in the performance of the maestro and the music students briefly trained by him – naturally added embodied cultural and symbolic capital to those music students – further undermines the mathematical calculation of the capital conversion.

Obviously, the performance of maestro Seiji Ozawa was what Ms. J and her peer concert-goers willingly paid for, which exemplifies Bourdieu’s assertion that the artist’s capital is a symbolic capital (1998:111). But a tenfold ticket price cannot provide a tenfold aesthetic enjoyment of a concert. The taboo or impracticality of calculation in capital conversions (Bourdieu 1998:104-09) leads us to the next section of this chapter, the virtuosity and scarcity of a particular performance reincarnated in the value of concert attendance.

4.2.2 What adds up to the perceived value?

In concert-goers’ decision-making process, the combination of cultural and symbolic capitals
objectified in a two hours’ concert can take diverse forms. The fame of a conductor, the history of an ensemble, the authenticity of the musicians’ interpretation, and the rarity of collaboration of all the above mentioned, contribute to the concert-goers’ belief of the value of a performance. At this stage, the knowledge acquired by the concert-goers prior to their ticket purchase, either through years of interest or study on Western classical music, or from concert promotions, legitimates the value of the performance and triggers the act of purchasing.

Again and again, I was impressed by the enormous amounts of knowledge my interview respondents had regarding the history of ensembles, the fascination of the music itself, and the aesthetic analysis of music pieces, as represented in their answers to my question: “When deciding on purchasing ticket to a particular concert, what attracts you most? What is most important to you in making the decision?” A common notion expressed by my respondents is the long history of the music ensemble, which to them means prestige and quality. Mr. L showed his appreciation of a recent concert:

“Sächsische Staatskapelle (Symphony Orchestra) Dresden is an ensemble with a very long history. The time it was founded was equivalent to the Wanli period in our Ming Dynasty… it has a very, very long history. Besides, it has collaborated with some first tier maestros, for instance, Richard Strauss, Karl Bohm, and recently Bernstein; of course there are young (excellent) conductors now. It has formed this tradition…accumulated rich tradition, so we had anticipated it to be a fascinating performance. Furthermore, Dresden is an Eastern German symphony orchestra, geographically, what we have listened to before was from Western Germany, relatively more ensembles from West Germany, as for from East Germany, almost none.”

The rareness of an ensemble’s visit to Shanghai has roots in the previous censorship of Western
culture during the Cultural Revolution. The chance to attend their performance now is the realization of a longing dating back several decades. This kind of mind-set is common among my interview respondents in their 40s or older.

These older respondents also generally have more awareness about the political situation and the diplomatic meaning of cultural exchanges between countries. In another sense, attendance at certain concerts is their participation in history-making. For example, Mr. L stressed on several occasions during the interview that the visit of the Philadelphia Orchestra to Shanghai in 1994 was more political than cultural:

“In 1973, it was the very first American music ensemble visiting the People’s Republic of China after the ice-breaking of Sino-United States relations. Similar to the New York Philharmonic’s visit to Pyongyang last year [2008], it served the role of a ‘musical ambassador’. That’s why I remember that their 1994 visit was such a buzz, and I went for it too…it was such a sensational event…For their 1994 concert, it was a re-visit to China after 21 years, I understood it as political, rather than cultural. At that kind of sensitive moment, the tension between the United States and China was increasing; I remember it was the Clinton Administration then. There were setbacks. That’s why the Philadelphia Orchestra’s visit connoted its role as ‘cultural ambassador’…In the last couple of years, we have had the opportunity to listen to quite a few good ensembles’ performances, for example, the Berlin Philharmonic, the Vienna Philharmonic, the Munich Philharmonic, also the Kirov Theatre Orchestra from Russia. There have been many excellent concerts. So by comparison, for this time [2008], the performance by the Philadelphia Orchestra was just so-so.”

From his comparison of the two Philadelphia Orchestra’s concerts in Shanghai, it is apparent that its role as ‘cultural ambassador’ is no longer significant in current times because the cultural market\(^\text{12}\) has much changed. A rarity in the early 90s becomes commonplace after a short decade.

\(^{12}\) Barely a market in 1994 when all the presenters and arts venues were still state-owned under the direct supervisor of the municipal government.
The prevalence of foreign ensembles’ Western classical music concerts now sharply decreases the symbolic capital previously associated with the political realm. The symbolic capital in the later discussion refers more to the pecuniary strength one possesses to pay for the attendance, because in China’s market economy, wealth has become the ultimate determinant of one’s social standing.13

The decline of the political anchored symbolic capital suggests the gain from the aesthetic appreciation becomes forefront this time, so the quality of the music, rather than the political connotation, is now what listeners really evaluate. It can be considered a withdrawal, though not entirely, of the political and ideological intervention from the cultural realm acknowledged by the general public. That is to say, with the concept of embodied symbolic capital unchanged, in the capital convention of attending a Western classical music concert, the content of symbolic capital has shifted from political to financial power, in the era of Shanghai’s full-scaled immersion into ‘Neoliberalism with Chinese Characteristics’ (Harvey 2005:120-51).

But again, I would argue that there exists a generational difference. For those having no experience of the Cultural Revolution, and being less sensitive of the policy shift with regards to the availability and accessibility of Western cultural products, the notion of a “rare choice that one should cherish” doesn’t always apply to Western classical music. Whether they are attracted by or indifferent to a concert is based more on the perceived virtuosity of the musicians, and on

13 A common narrative is “forward/progress to money” (xiang qian kan).
the music pieces. An example provided by Mr. O regarding his friends’ disinterest in a concert, which he himself attended, is as follows:

“The concert by Zurich Chamber Orchestra… I feel that performance… I actually asked a lot of friends about their opinions regarding it. And most of them replied that they would not go, because they believe that now, firstly there is no real maestro alive in this world, you can only find maestros in recordings; secondly, they thought those musicians who came to China to perform were not [coming] solely to perform (professionally), for them it was half work, half vacation or something.”

His friend’s point leads us back to the worthiness of a concert, and the authenticity of a particular ensemble’s performance, whether the musicians are fully engaged with the performance, whether they are willing to show 100 percent of their virtuosity, and whether they take Shanghai audience seriously. The comment ‘no maestro alive in this world’ from his friends means they lift the bar of capital conversion to an unreachable height. To my understanding, the two hours’ labour-time of them spending at a concert requires unattainable aesthetic enjoyment for exchange. I wish them luck in finding something closer to that standard when listening to recordings from home stereo system.

Contrary to his friends, Mr. O enjoyed the above mentioned concert a lot:

“The Zurich concert was very…I felt the performance was already good enough; the level it achieved was already very good! Especially in Shanghai, it was rare to have chance to listen to a vocal performance. But there was one thing, because after all it was…how to say…it was a cantata. To fully understand it, you need to have very deep understanding about the tradition of German-Austrian classical music, very rich knowledge. A very deep understanding was a pre-requisite, in addition, it was sung in German, more precisely ancient German, so language was also a barrier. That’s why I felt…The music was very moving, and the voices of the singers were very good as well, but I still felt it was difficult, very difficult
“Like Zurich Chamber Orchestra, if it was solely ‘Zurich Chamber Orchestra Concert’ in the advertisement, I would feel just so-so. But [the title] this time was ‘The Creation,’ and a dash: Zurich Chamber Orchestra and Zurich Boys Choir. So it appeared to be more interesting to me, if there was someone singing. Besides, it was ‘The Creation,’ so it was a combination of oratorio and Haydn, meaning it should be more interesting than the usual symphony orchestra or chamber music performance. If it was purely symphony, “number whatever”…we can’t understand it well, right? Also you have no idea what exactly the music wants to express, so you need to look it up, to listen, still you probably can’t understand it. But here it was oratorio, telling the story of how God created humans, and created the world;
you have a basic idea about that and then the choir, their voice is worth listening to, even if you can’t fully understand.”

He later also mentioned the ancient German lyrics, which made understanding more difficult. But his ‘exceeding expectation’ stemmed more from the ‘bonus’ of the performance, not encore pieces, but the line-up of the performers: “In the advertisement there were only bass and soprano, two soloists, and of course, the chamber orchestra and the boys choir, but actually they added a tenor at the last minute, and a narrator! When this addition was shown on the LED screen, I was like ‘Neat! One more performer!’…And the entire line-up was very big! There were between 30 to 40 people in the choir, and another 30 to 40 something in the chamber orchestra, it added up to about 80 performers!”

His satisfaction with this concert has a labour-consuming component, which is usually hidden in discussions about arts appreciation. The hidden labour in performing a musical piece almost leads us to a Marxist understanding of this capital conversion. In other words, the ticket price of a concert has actually paid for the musicians’ labour, thus the more performers, the more services one receives at a concert setting, and the more worthwhile this performance is! This adds one more layer of the Bourdieuan labour-time, the universal equivalent when looking at the rationality of capital conversions. Besides the labour-time represented by the embodied cultural capital in musicians’ virtuosity, their labour exerted at the concert is another essential component in the value of a concert. This naked relation is even more obvious when we look at the box office of Western classical music concerts, except for world renowned soloists like Yo-Yo Ma,
Lang Lang or Renee Fleming – the symbolic capital their fame represents overshadows their labour, the sales for big symphony orchestra concerts are always better than for smaller chamber orchestra concerts and recitals. As my former colleague still working in the programme department at the Shanghai Concert Hall commented: “Audiences are more willing to pay for and happier at the concert if the stage is crowded by musicians.” So now when the left side of the equation remains the economic capital one paid for a concert ticket and his/her two hours’ labour-time spent at a concert, the right side turns out to be virtuosity plus labour, then multiply by the number of performers, not to mention virtuosity usually requires talent and years of training and practices, again more labour! Therefore, in the logic of most concert-goers, the more labour-time embedded in the live music they consume, the more value a concert holds. If we break down the value of concert attendance, it composes of the cultural and symbolic capital embodied in the musicians, institutionalized in the music ensembles, objectified in the arts venues. As I explained above, Bourdieu’s argument on labour-time still holds true here.

More scrutiny of the embodied cultural and symbolic capital of musicians is needed here because clearly there is a distinction surrounding ‘authenticity’ between Western and domestic players. The level of virtuosity is reflected in the level of the musicians’ understanding, or decipherment, of the music pieces, and how well they can interpret it in their performance. Clearly some of my interview respondents see this kind of virtuosity as the difference between domestic and foreign music ensembles, which leads to their tendency and desire to attend concerts performed by foreign music ensembles, which are believed to be more ‘authentic’, that is, closer to the music’s
Western origin. Below is a quote from Mr. X, who first attended Western classical music concerts in the 1950s:

“My favourites now are pieces by Richard Strauss and Mahler, and especially performed by foreign ensembles. Why must it be them? The reason is that Chinese ensembles are not capable of performing them well. For other composers’ music pieces, like Beethoven, a Chinese ensemble will be fine with that, and those by Tchaikovsky, will be ok too, but only these two composers…Oh, and Brahms, just these three. Besides them, composers like Debussy, impressionists, only foreign ensembles can perform properly, and well, none of the Chinese ones can, that’s my stand and way to choose concerts. If the programme consists of only small pieces, even Beethoven’s, I would not go, because I am so familiar with Beethoven’s pieces. If ever I go, I will go for a foreign ensemble performing Richard Strauss, and Mahler!”

Mr. X’s comment echoes Mr. O’s description of being a consumer of a niche-market, that is to say, concerts of Western classical music pieces that are more sophisticated and harder to appreciate. But again, there is no consensus among my interview respondents, a local music student’s performance could be grasping as well. This is the second case of controversies15 emerged between my research respondents’ experience. Mr. O gave me an example of choosing to stay at a music conservatory student’s performance of Shostakovich despite the pain of severe upset stomach:

“I just didn’t know why, the sudden upset stomach, so, so painful that I could barely sit straight! ...I could feel the sweat streaming down my back! I really wanted to leave, but I told myself to wait till the intermission. I really couldn’t bear it anymore! I was even wondering whether I could make it downstairs! But, he [the musician] didn’t pause [at the supposed intermission time], but started another piece without any break! From the very first bow, it was very intriguing, so moving!! Think about it, Shostakovich can be played like that! Very gloomy and full of tension! So I crawled there for another 15 minutes till the end of the concerto, telling myself: ‘listen a little bit more…a little bit more…leave only if I really, really cannot bear it.’

15 The first case was mentioned in the section discussing the ‘newness’ of appreciating Western classical music concert.
He further stressed that this incident was not because of the so-called proper manners at a concert setting, that you should not leave in the middle of a performance; it was truly the beauty of the performance, the music itself made him stay:

“That performance, even though it was just by a music conservatory student, I really did not want to leave. A good concert is not necessarily based on the prestige of the performer, or some other things. That is to say, art, especially music, it is a coincidence, without a degree, and it is also shapeless. I always say music is the most romantic among all forms of art, because it is shapeless. It is not a concrete thing, musical instruments have [physical forms], but the musical instrument itself is not music. Music has no shape. And it is by chance, not necessarily to be found even if you search really hard for it. Once you find it, find it this time, you don’t know when you would encounter it again! So to speak, once you encounter it, don’t let it go.”

His fascination and romantisation of the aesthetic beauty of music, the unpredictable encounter that brings uncertainty to the capital conversion at classical music concert, makes music consumption almost like gambling. The moment of winning is determined by the cultural capital you receive in exchange. To remain in his seat while suffering from an upset stomach made Mr. O’s labour-time at that concert much harder to be matched by the other side of the equation of capital conversions. His decision to ‘listen a little bit more…a little bit more’ demonstrated the unbeatable attraction of the performance, the embodied cultural capital or virtuosity expressed by the music student.

But this kind of anticipation of excitement is not necessarily a key variable when picking a concert. My other interview respondents talk about their expectations in a more general sense, emphasizing the concert setting and the general nature of Western classical music, besides it
aesthetic beauty. For example, Mr. D referred to the history of Western classical music when explaining his belief in its mysterious and remarkable character:

“[Western classical music] has a centuries-long history, several hundred years’ history; no doubt the level of its aesthetics and cultural arts is extraordinarily high! That is truly what we should learn from, the things of inner value. It is not something that will instantly pay back after you listen to it or study it, not at all. A lot of things function to sharpen your eyes, to enhance your cultivation (xiu yang), like [Western classical music], it is comprehensive.”

When Mr. D saw the appreciation of Western classical music as a long-term investment on one’s embodied cultural capital, Ms. C provided a more socio-psychological understanding about the healing function of listening to the tranquil Western classical music:

“I feel in various circumstances, people keep suppressing themselves, because you need to eat, to have shelter, to survive in this metropolis, you must…probably it’s for one’s survival, you must accept grievances and make compromises. But in another realm, like art, you can stretch out and be yourself!”

Is Western classical music a remedy for the almost unbearable, hectic anonymity of the urban setting? A refuge in a society ‘looking forward to money’ while discrediting other aspects of life? To stress the particularity of the presence at a Western classical music concert, Ms. Z explained:

“What you feel at a live concert is…you would feel…first of all, you take a break from your daily life, sort of you escape from reality for a while.” This ideal of Western classical music listening as meditation was reiterated by Mr. Z, an HR manager in a big state-owned company:

“The whole society, everyone in it is in this hectic mentality. The public…what people believe now is that my own material [financial?] wellbeing is more important, yes, this is the exact mentality! This way of thinking is very impatient and impetuous. In this way, if one likes Western classical music, he would never suddenly burst into a rage whenever some trivial conflict happens! At least he could be calmer and more thoughtful. Furthermore, if
some spiritual achievement has been cultivated, under circumstances, he would no longer put personal, material gain on top.”

How much, then, are these kinds of experiences and expectations realized in a concert setting? The difference between listening to the music at home and in a concert hall was pointed out by Mr. L in a somewhat official tone: “To enjoy classical music live, to feel it with zero distance, is a way to enhance one’s cultivation (xiu yang).” This voluntary self-cultivation of cultural capital, or ‘quality’ (suzhi) at a concert setting ties back to Shanghainese production of a cosmopolitan identity; further pointed out the value of this consuming practice in a bigger social context. To sum up, the value of concert attendance lies in virtuosity of the musicians, which includes their past labour exerted in training and the current one on stage, the properly performed musical pieces, their embodied aesthetics descended from several hundred years of Western culture, the prestige of the musical ensemble, and at last the enclosed concert setting, meaning the acoustic effect and atmosphere it guarantees.

4.2.3 Revitalize conspicuous leisure as true distinction

To conclude this discussion of the value and worthiness of attending Western classical music concerts in the minds of Shanghai concert-goers, I want to quote from Ms. Z, who directly pointed out the conspicuous nature of concert attendance: “To some Asians, the mentality of attending a Western classical music concert is similar to their fondness for carrying luxury brand handbag. It makes them appear to have much social status!” This argument is in line with various
theorists of consumption; for example, Baudrillard stated explicitly that within society, categories or “status groups,” are recognizable in a specific collection of objects (2001:19). There is always a conscious distinguishing between the music one listens to, or the brand of bag one carries, from those others consume. A system of objects being consumed is coherent, and formulated in a universal system of recognition of social statutes: a code of “social standing” (Baudrillard 2001:22). The universality of the system indicates that anyone in a given society recognizes the position, or status of certain commodity, or consuming practice in the hierarchy, and we believe that others sufficiently believe in it so that we can enter the game of distinction (ibid).

Even more radically, Baudrillard argued that the object of consumption was never consumed in its materiality, but in its difference (2001:25). This point is clear in the above quotes when my interview respondents talked about the difference between popular music, jazz and the anticipated function of Western classical music. The rough hierarchy of music genres is generally understood across the board. And even within the realm of Western classical music, the easiness or difficulties to decipher certain composers’ music can form distinctions. For example, Beethoven and Mozart are for beginners, as Mr. X mentioned after years of listening to Western classical music concerts, he had no more interests in listening to small pieces, while Mr. D, Mr. Z, and Ms. H are happy with short melodies like Mozart’s minuet or Williams’ ‘The Lark Ascending.’ Comparatively, listening to Mahler’s hour-long symphony, Stravinsky or Shostakovich’s pieces is a more sophisticated and demanding appreciation. The ability to
appreciate difficult pieces is nurtured by leisure time, again the labour time transformed into embodied cultural capital.

For Baudrillard, the socialization of people into recognizing that commodities now represent people’s social standing, renders the progressive decline of all other systems (of birth, of class, of positions) (2001:23). It sounds like a tactic for Shanghai’s residents and newcomers to deal with the anonymity, and inequality in a metropolis that is expanding, both geographically and demographically. In a world where millions of strangers – according to Shanghai Statistical Yearbook 2009, the residents of Shanghai in 2008 has reached 18.9 million, among them 5.2 millions are labelled as a ‘Floating Population,’ not originating from Shanghai – encounter each other daily in the streets, in public transits and shops, the code of “social standing” fulfills an essential social function when it satisfies the vital need of people to be always informed about one another (ibid). This argument is a reiteration of Veblen’s point more than a century ago, that the means of communication and the mobility of the population now expose the individual to the observation of many persons who have no other means of judging his reputability than the display of goods which he is able to make while he is under their direct observation. Especially in such places as theatres and concert halls, in order to impress these transient observers, and to retain one’s self-complacency under their observation, the signature of one’s pecuniary strength should be written in characters which he who runs may read. This works best where the human contact of the individual is widest and the mobility of the population is greatest (Veblen 1994[1899]:53-4).
When everyone is rushing to obtain more financial strength in China’s market economy, time becomes such a precious commodity. Veblen’s argument on the conspicuous leisure is revitalized. Ms. Z stressed the importance of a period of time designated for music appreciation, understood to be the available leisure for sitting in a concert hall solely for listening to Western classical music:

R: I feel for a concert, you can set aside some time, used only for listening to music, you know. That is to say, you are able to devote yourself to it, to give your one hundred percent attention to it. It is purely appreciating music, to me, this period of time solely for listening to music is very important.

I: That’s true. If you listen to music at home, you are always doing other things.

R: Exactly! You cannot just sit there like an idiot, facing the stereo, listening to music!

The utility of conspicuous leisure for the purpose of reputability lies in the element of waste…a waste of time and effort, serves to demonstrate the possession of wealth (Veblen 1994[1899]:53). That is to say, the issue of wastefulness doesn’t exist. Doing nothing but listening to a music performance in a concert setting is not a waste of time, but very productive. The utility of this practice is revealed by the embodiment process of cultural and symbolic capitals. A concert-goer’s ‘devotion’ to music in a concert hall at that moment instantly distinguishes her from people who need to work overtime, or to take care of family members, or those who prefer to watch sitcoms on the couch at home rather than dressing up to listen to some ‘serious’ classical music. The preference for high-cultural consumption won’t be prior if the individuals are under certain obligations due to their financial constraints. In this sense, the attendance at
Western classical music concerts indicates the possession of conspicuous leisure, besides the pecuniary ability to pay for a several-hundred-yuan ticket.

On the other hand, even writing in 1899, Veblen was aware that when the differentiation has gone farther and it becomes necessary to reach a wider human environment, possession of consumer goods surpass the less-visible leisure as an ordinary means of decency (1994[1899]:54). It is true for most of the daily commodities, but in the small circle of Western classical music concert audiences, the leisure they invest into this practice is no less valuable than the ticket they purchase. The acquired knowledge to decipher the music piece, in Bourdieu’s notion, the embodied cultural capital, requires a long time and much effort to accumulate. Otherwise, a feeling of being out-of-place will surely haunt them when they are waiting outside for the first break even if they are only 1 minute late, or when they are unfamiliar with the ritual of applauds, or when they are surprised about the relatively vacant seating area on the right side of the audience hall at a piano recital – because everyone wants to see the pianist’s hands; not to mention how much they can appreciate the virtuosity of the soloists, the tempo, and the style of a particular conductor.

A third controversy between my research respondents is on the luxury nature of the attendance at Western classical music concert. The above quoted Ms. Z usually purchases concert tickets in 300 yuan range, while Ms. C, who can afford 780 yuan per ticket for her family of three, has a counter argument. She said: “Ideally, we should not treat attendance at Western classical music
concert as luxury; it would make me feel less comfortable. I’d like to treat it like a daily commodity of relatively better quality.” Interestingly, another interview respondent, Ms. H, who holds a managerial job at a fortune 500 company, provided similar denials to the conspicuous nature of the attendance at Western classical music concert. It seems that they are uncomfortable to position themselves as upper middle class, to stand out in a pecuniary sense. They stressed that the aesthetics of music and the tranquility it promised was the major drive, whom they have tried to distance themselves from is not the social stratum lower than them in the financial sense, but those new rich lack of ‘quality’ (suzhi). Their opinions echo the literature on the new rich who have gotten rich via under-the-table deals or speculation, or termed to be ‘vulgar rich’ in China (Lu, 2008; Goodman & Zang, 2008). In this regard, both of my respondents portray themselves to be highly-educated, law-abiding, of good taste and cosmopolitan identity Shanghairen (Shanghai people). I will elaborate this “cultural” over economic capital self-awareness as a major indicator of Shanghairen identity in the last section of this chapter.

Baudrillard also acknowledged that within the very framework of this seemingly homogeneous system, we can observe the unfolding of an always renewed obsession with hierarchy and distinction (2001: 23-4), as shown in Mr. X’s zealousness for Richard Strauss and Mahler’s music. Here we see what Veblen stressed, that the group at the top is always trying to figure out something new and distinguishable to counteract the achievement of emulation from the group right beneath them. In Shanghai, this emulation works on a transnational level. The group on top tends to look beyond national borders for inspiration. What my research subjects admire and
emulate always has a Western tone. But this is not necessarily a from-head-to-toe Caucasian, an advanced ‘Other’ in current globalization. This Western-ness has been fabricated in the semi-colonial history of Shanghai, embodied in the lifestyle of long-time Shanghai residents if their family was better-off in the times of ‘Old Shanghai.’ The century-long history of Shanghai being an East-meet-West hybrid provides fertile ground for producing a local identity. In the next section, I will discuss more on how the notion of being Shanghairen encourages and justifies the ‘tradition’ or fondness of Western classical music.

4.3 Shanghairen Identity: Sophisticated and Modern
To answer the research question, what the consumption of Western high-culture have to do with being a Shanghairen (Shanghai people), I apply an urban culture perspective to analyse the interview responses. The semi-colonial history of Shanghai incarnated in the urban-built environment reminds the residents of Shanghai about the presence of an ‘advanced’ West in historical times on a daily basis. These concrete reminders act as agents to create a place-bound Shanghairen identity, which distinguishes the local from other Chinese urbanites embodied with presumably less knowledge of the modern West. I argue that there is an inseparable connection of Shanghai natives’ identities with their accumulated cultural capital, applying Bourdieu’s theory on habitus. Justifying their embodied cultural capital, backed-up by the objectified cultural capital in urban built-environment and the Western classical music they consume, my research subjects dwell comfortably in their identity of modern, sophisticated Shanghairen. In their imagination, they have been included in a cosmopolitan, modern community,
geographically expanded to New York City, Paris, London, or other ‘global cities’. Thus, attendance at Western classical music concerts serves as a representation of their perceived Shanghairen identity, connecting their daily lives in the local to an imagined Western, modern community at the global level.

When the violence and brutal treatment of the Chinese local by the Japanese imperialism are exposed and heavily denounced in textbooks, the negative impact of British, United States’, and especially French colonial practice in Shanghai is brushed over by the municipal government. These result in a selective nostalgia towards the semi-colonial period of Shanghai, and an affection for the Western modernity – Western high-culture and Western-looking buildings being part of it – the Shanghailanders brought to this city in the early 20th century. I will approach the Shanghairen identity from two intertwined aspects: 1) interplay between place-bound identity and suzhi; and 2) volume of cultural capital and Shanghairen identity.

4.3.1 Interplay between place-bound identity and suzhi

The Shanghainese are said to be urbane, sophisticated, and different from other Chinese urbanites (Huang 2008:219). Not only scholars having researched and written on urban China, or on Shanghai in particular admit this, Shanghai natives are proud of this unique identity of being Shanghairen, which clearly associated with the notion of “Western-ness”. As one of my interview respondents claimed:
“The “openness” of Shanghairen is regarding the attitude towards the West, precisely, the attitude towards new Western things is relatively open, [we are] more willing to accept them. The mentality of Shanghairen, in their mind, that is to say, the society is… the closest in the entire China, the closest to the Western industrial society.”

I, being a Shanghairen myself, am no exception in this pride. Then how does this Shanghairen identity play out in the Western cultural consumption in my research? With no attempt to generalize my argument to the entire body of Western classical music audiences in Shanghai, I want to illustrate the contours of my research subjects’ understanding of the Western modernity as a heritage of Shanghai, and bridge it to their articulation of the identity of being Shanghairen. An interview respondent working in a publishing house expressed his understanding of this connection:

“Listening to Western classical music in Shanghai is…related to the history of Shanghai; there existed a tradition of appreciating symphony. This is so different from Beijing, indeed so different! This has been a long-time tradition; I mean, Shanghairen appreciate [Western] classical music.” (emphasis added)

This comment was not an isolated case. The semi-colonial history of Shanghai was frequently used in my interview respondents’ elaboration of the identity of Shanghairen, which has been locally produced under global influences. When commenting on the difference between Shanghai and Beijing, Mr. O stressed the uniqueness of Shanghai lies in its semi-colonial history:

“Shanghai has its own characteristics. I think Shanghai is a very interesting place. I remember when we were still in school, the official textbook, the official ideology always criticized colonialism, this or that about Western colonialism…or suppression on the poor locals in concessions etc. But when I grew up, when I started to explore Shanghai myself, I feel the things Shanghai can truly be proud of, or the only thing really worth treasuring in Shanghai’s entire history (more than 700 years) is that period, the period of colonialism [starting from the First Opium War in 1842]. It has left so much to Shanghai…what it left
was the genuine root of our [Shanghai] culture, which belonged to our own (emphasis added). Shanghai was even for the whole China, has become an important, indispensable window of China open to the West. Shanghai are more willing to accept Western things. In fact, don’t you feel, actually in Shanghai, French brands and the notion of the French are very appealing, because there was such a big French Concession in Shanghai!”

This awareness can be considered a cultural disposition, haunting people’s perception of their Shanghai identity. This selective nostalgia towards a modern, civilized past coincides with the Shanghai government’s ambition to model the city to be a world-class metropolis. This West is not intangible in mass media news report, TV series or movies, but concretely exist as buildings in your neighbourhood, along the roads you pass daily commuting to work. Shanghai’s proximity to the ‘advanced’ West reminded and reinforced by the urban built-environment is what the locals cling to in order to justify their place-bound identity, distinguishing themselves from outsiders who originate from other parts of the country.

Not surprisingly, the traits left in Shanghai’s urban architecture from the semi-colonial times make it easier for Shanghai to relate more to imperial Europe than to McDonald’s and the United States. To a certain extent, the melancholy towards the “Old Shanghai” has more European, especially French, high society in its imagination. When commenting on the performance of Le Poème Harmonique, Mr. D holding only high-school diploma pronounced the name of the ensemble in French. He was not the only one who spouted French words and showed admiration or aspiration for the French culture during interviews. Working in the sales department at an American chemical company, Mr. O picked a café in the former French
Concession for the interview (Figure 4.3.1& 4.3.2). From the French window\(^{16}\) of that cafe, we enjoyed the view of the Wukang Building across the street (Figure 4.3.3). That is Mr. O’s “favourite building in Shanghai, before the liberation, it was called la Mansion Normandy (he pronounced the name in French, then translated it back into Mandarin) nuo man di gong yu.”

---

\(^{16}\) How authentic! Emphasis added by author.
Unavoidably, this ability to speak foreign languages brings us to the notion of quality (*suzhi*), which is a very popular and convenient term in China used to measure, distinct, criticize or discriminate certain behaviours or ways of thinking. When I ponder on how to translate this notion into English, I try to find inspiration from the examples I experience myself – the behaviour I believe performed by people lack of *suzhi* – and other stories I heard from friends or interview respondents. Accordingly, *suzhi* generally covers self-discipline, civility, consideration for others, breadth and depth of one’s knowledge, to name a few. A fair amount of scholars have written on this term (Kipnis, 2007; Murphy, 2004; Woronov 2007; Yan, 1994). As noted by Li, that *suzhi* is for the most part higher in the city than in the countryside, higher in the economically advanced areas than in backward areas (1988:60). On the international level, the populations in the developed First World have higher *suzhi* than those in the Third World (Yan 1994:496). To my research respondents, Shanghai’s encounter with the West in history, hence its proximity and similarity in the urban built-environment grant its residents higher *suzhi*. Besides, the locals’ self-cultivation in accumulating more knowledge about Western cultural practices lifts them even further on the scale of *suzhi* possession.

One of my research respondents mentioned an overtly publicized example to explain his understanding of *suzhi* presented in a concert setting:

“There is a Chinese musician in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra called Li-Kuo Chang, the assistant principal violist. He was very impressed by the audience in Shanghai after their performance in February, 2009. Before the visit, they had this concern whether Shanghai
The audience would be capable of appreciating the pieces they were going to play. The music pieces they brought to Shanghai were relatively heavy, one was Bruckner’s Symphony No.7, and the other was Mahler’s Symphony No.1. Mahler’s pieces are not played often in Shanghai, so [their concerns] were one, whether the audience could understand the music, then the other, what was the quality (suzhi) of the Shanghai audience, whether they would applaud at improper times during the concert, walk around [during the performance], that sort of uncivilized behaviour. You know, this kind of behaviour is still common in Beijing, even now! But, the orchestra was surprised and very impressed by the very good, high quality (suzhi) of the Shanghai music lovers. No such behaviours happened, and the audience could totally appreciate the music. Mr. Chang was so impressed that he wrote a letter to the Mayor of Shanghai, Zheng Han, and it was quoted in several newspapers. In that letter, the musician expressed his surprise, and highly praised the quality of Shanghai audience; of course, this kind of praise represented the whole orchestra, and also the conductor.”

The pride of being a ‘civilized’ Shanghairen, and the contrast to the traditional, ‘less civilized’ Beijing audience, grabbed my attention. This pride has been reinforced by the modern-looking urban built environment as well. It is not necessarily the skyscrapers replacing the Art-Deco architecture and mansions built in the early 20th century, but the combination of the two – omitting the decades in the Maoist era in between – that exemplifies the level and extent of modernity Shanghai has achieved. The embodiment of this modernity, precisely, the place-bound identity of Shanghairen eventually legitimates my interview respondents’ entwined narratives about their cultural consuming practice and their suzhi.

I even discussed this issue of ‘culture’ and ‘civilization’ with an interview respondent. His opinion is as followed:

“Frankly, Shanghai has been influenced by Western civilization. You can say it is a Westernized city, but the ‘westernize’ here does not have a negative connotation. What Shanghai accepted was a type of Western civilization, modern civilization. The development of the city benefited from the acceptance of modern civilization. That is to say, Shanghairen
is more civilized; he knows how to appreciate (art)...on the appreciation of (Western) classical music, or elegant culture, indeed, (Shanghai) is one of a kind. But to talk about civilization, and also culture, these two things have some relations, but not the same. For example, a person with better education, generally speaking, he is supposed to have some culture (wen hua), right? Even with some culture, in daily life, in the ways that person carries himself, communicates with others, or deals with things, whether he can better, or naturally demonstrate, is how we judge ‘whether this person is civilized’. These two things, civilization and culture is not equal...the educational level, naturally the higher level of one’s education forms the base to become a more civilized modern person; but it is not necessarily to say that with this level of education and cultural quality, you are without doubt a modern person, no.”

His examination is representative in the general public’s understanding of the distinction between one’s educational level, and the degree of being modern and civilized. Even the connotation of suzhi can be very expansive and flexible; but its constant function remains the same: inclusion and exclusion. The fine line of distinction lies on the ambiguous notion of modern, thus it can be applied to particular attitudes, behaviours, or knowledge possession in different context.

Only by having acknowledging this relationship between place-bound Shanghairen identity and suzhi, can we understand why, in the following quotation, the first half of the sentence is about the city, and then the speaker readily jumped to the topic of suzhi and cultural capital in the second half. After providing me with the example of Chicago Symphony Orchestra in early 2009, the above interview respondent further strengthened his argument by mentioning another occasion in 2004:

“It was Vienna Philharmonic’s Shanghai performance in 2003, or ’04. They expressed their great surprise after the concerts. There were several things; first, they had not expected Shanghai to be this beautiful, and this modern! Second, they hadn’t anticipated that the music lovers in Shanghai were so enthusiastic, of such high suzhi, that is to say, could fully
appreciate [their performance].”

Clearly, *suzhi* includes more than the proper conduct, or ritual part, of the attendance at Western classical music concerts, the cultural capital aspect stands out\(^\text{17}\).

Mr. L’s story serves as a good example of *habitus*, and shows how the embodied cultural capital justifies *Shanghairen*’s understanding of their modern identity. Mr. L’s story of his early encounter with Western classical music fits perfectly into a Bourdieuan argument. The *habitus* he possesses from his father and from living in old, modern Shanghai is central to his ability to consume and appreciate Western classical music. It appears that I cannot get away from people’s romantization of the “Old Shanghai” in their imagination, notwithstanding I do not intend to.

“[Listening to Western classical music] Shanghai has its tradition. It was the very first in China receiving the West, the Western culture, because it was the earliest to open the port!\(^\text{18}\) The earliest receiving Western civilization, receiving Western classical music, for example, Shanghai Symphony Orchestra was initially called Shanghai Public Band, and it was the very first symphony orchestra in China. For more than one hundred years\(^\text{19}\), it has formed a tradition which has a very big effect on Shanghai, and on *Shanghairen*. The city has this tradition. Why say so? For instance, my father, although he learned to play *yangqin*, likes folk music (*min yue*) – I saw a picture of him playing *yangqin*, sitting in the middle of the ensemble of his work unit – he knows the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. My interest in the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra has a lot to do with my father’s influence. I remember when I was young, he once told me, ‘There is a Shanghai Symphony Orchestra in Shanghai, the conductor is called Huang Yijun.’ … the reason why I give you this example is that someone like my father, an ordinary working-class [man], fond of traditional music himself, knows about the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. Then you can imagine that our city Shanghai has indeed a tradition of appreciating Western classical music. I believe this tradition will pass down from generation to generation.”

\(^\text{17}\) Though I am not so sure how performers can know whether the audience can understand the music pieces, apart from the timing of their applause and the enthusiasm of the applause.

\(^\text{18}\) This of course isn’t actually true!

\(^\text{19}\) Shanghai Symphony Orchestra celebrated its 130th Anniversary on September 27th, 2009 in the Shanghai Grand Theatre.
The always entwined self-perception of being *Shanghairen* and the love of Western classical music leads to my argument about the East-meet-West hybrid identity of Shanghai, and its urbanites. Although my interview respondents constitute only a tiny fraction of the audience body, and their attitudes and opinions might not be representative, the insights they provided do depict a vivid snapshot of *Shanghairen*’s own understanding of the bloom of the Western classical music market, and embodied superiority of the Shanghai local.

I will provide one last quote on the difficulty of deciphering Western classical music, and the necessity to learn to consume:

“Your understanding of (Western) classical music, it needs – of course, if you just go to the concert for leisure, it’s still fine, not necessarily… - but if you wish to understand more, it requires knowledge accumulation. Then your appreciation of classical music can reach a deeper level; … art, no matter music, or other types, eventually they are used to express a kind of emotion, a deeper sentiment, some philosophical thing. You must have some knowledge accumulation of life, of culture and cultivation. If not, it will be very difficult for your deeper level of appreciation... I should admit, the concert audience in Shanghai is generally of higher level, music lovers, some professional, students, and teachers, actually of diverse social strata; but they truly, from deep down in their heart, they like classical music!”

Another consensus is the difference between Shanghai and Beijing. Several interview respondents stress that “[i]n accepting new (Western) things, Beijing is of no equivalence to Shanghai.” The tension between Shanghai and Beijing is not new, and there is a common saying that Beijing is of *Jing* Style (*jing pai*), while Shanghai is of *Hai* Style (*hai pai*). The Chinese character for ‘hai’ here means sea, or ocean, indicating an openness to and tolerance of diverse trends and forces from home and abroad. This geographical consciousness is also reflected in my
interview respondents’ comments on the performing arts venues in Shanghai. To them, the Shanghai Concert Hall built in 1930 is the default location for Western classical music concerts, a representation of the visualized ‘classics’ (Figure 4.3.4 & 4.3.5) in downtown Puxi (the west bank of Huangpu River, in juxtaposition to Pudong, the east bank). The origins of the sophisticated and modern connotation of Shanghairen identity is definitely situated in Puxi, the previously colonized areas at the west bank, especially the southwest part of Shanghai, the former French Concession, which later came to be called Shang Zhijiao (upper corner). As Mr. O put it: “Shanghai Oriental Art Center (in Pudong) is modern-looking, of course, but you just feel uncomfortable, something is not right…I don’t know what exactly it is…it’s just somehow the atmosphere there is not compatible with Western classical music.”

Figure 4.3.4 & 4.3.5: Shanghai Concert Hall building and lobby. Photos by author.

The interior of the Shanghai Concert Hall obviously resembles European concert halls; therefore it facilitates the audiences’ imagination when they appreciate music in this setting. Figure 4.3.6, 4.3.7 was taken on June 14, 2009, a weekend daytime concert performed by the Youth Orchestra of the Shanghai Music Conservatory, while Figure 4.3.8 was taken before the door-opening of
above mentioned Zurich Chamber Orchestra and Boys Choir concert.

The contrast of the crowdedness inside the Shanghai Concert Hall captured in the above three photos is telling exactly the story of the differentiation of the possession of cultural capital. Though the emptiness reflected in Figure 4.3.8 was due to its taken before the door-opening that concert night, in reality less than half of the seats were sold for the Zurich Chamber Orchestra and Boys Choirs concert. To put it plainly, the cheaper the ticket price, the easier to decipher the music pieces\(^20\), and the more the audience. Unavoidably, the niche difference still exists within the realm of Western classical music appreciation. Some of my research subjects are more than ready to take this difference to distinguish themselves further, while some others declared that they are comfortable to just enjoy the beauty of the melody and the sound with no intension to explore its aesthetics on a philosophical level. Nevertheless, none of them acted snobbishly when commenting on those who don’t listen to Western classical music, because their standing of suzhi

\(^{20}\) For the June 14, 2009 Weekly Radio Concert, the three ‘easy’ Haydn pieces played were Symphony No.82 in C Major “L’Ours,” No.83 in G Minor “La Poule,” and No.85 in B-flat Major “La Reine.”
reinforced by this consuming pattern also means kind, civility and other social manners in order to be recognized as a *Shanghairen*.

Shanghai’s semi-colonial history in the early 20th century and the Western-looking urban built-environment still present in the city fuel the local’s selective nostalgia towards a Western modernity in the past. This belief on a hybrid, East-meet-West identity of Shanghai and *Shanghairen* legitimates the consuming practice of Western classical music, because it was a ‘tradition’ in Shanghai. From my research subjects’ responses, appreciation of Western classical music is rather an epitome of *Shanghairen*’s cultural consumption to justify their higher *suzhi*, than an isolated case. In the next section, I will elaborate my argument on the relations between cultural consumption in general and *Shanghairen* identity.

4.3.2 Volume of cultural capital and *Shanghairen* identity

Besides listening to classical music, most of my research respondents engage in other types of artistic creation or appreciation. The volume of their cultural capital impressed me so much that I believe attending Western classical music concerts is merely one aspect of their high-cultural consumption or artistic pursuit21. Their versatile cultural capital went so beyond my expectations, that it will not be too much to call them omnivores of musical forms or of arts in general. What really represent the *Shanghairen*’s sophisticated and cosmopolitan identity is the incredible

---

21 I was constantly tested and challenged during interviews when my research respondents talked about their hobbies, or knowledge about other art forms. I believe my Master’s study in Canada to a certain extent invites them to question the possession of my cultural capital because presumably knowing more than I do further strengthens their *Shanghairen* identity, which connotes the breadth and depth of one’s knowledge about the West.
volume of the knowledge about the West, about Western culture and its high-culture in particular. My argument on the connection between the appreciation of Western classical music and *Shanghairen* identity can only stand when the entire volume of my research respondents’ cultural capital serves as the particular background.

My research respondents’ remarkable breadth of cultural capital, which is not necessarily results from formal education – Beijing actually has more top-tier universities than Shanghai – can be demonstrated in Mr. D’s case. In his early 20s, Mr. D had only some college education but had taken a lot of language classes at night school, told me: “Classical music…actually there were plenty in Chinese culture, but in the West, at that time in Europe, the music had been passed along for so many years, the pieces were from years and years ago. When I was learning German, it was mentioned in class like Mozart, Austria, that sort of ‘country of music’ place.” And he had not only learned German, but French as well: “The latest time I listened to a concert at the Shanghai Concert Hall was April 20th, [2009] something…there was a Sino-French Cultural Festival going on then. That was the performance of *Le Poème Harmonique* (Here he actually spoke in French, after saying the translated name of the ensemble in Chinese). You know, I have learned French before.” His following comment on the *Le Poème Harmonique* concert further demonstrates a balanced understanding and disposition of traditional Chinese culture and European history and culture, signifying a hybrid, and sophisticated identity of *Shanghairen*:

“Poetry, think about it, we Chinese have a lot of that! In very, very early times, we had already had many poems and prose, but what have been passed down are texts, nothing in
melody. But for them [the French], their stuff, the texts are still there, and the music is there as well! I have looked at those pieces, something like in year 1665, or seventeen hundred something, it is remarkable! Besides, it was European royal families, in palaces, or those so-called high-class societies, that kind…you will imagine the kind of life they had. They can pass down this kind of thing till now, cultural stuff in their daily lives; it must be of some depth.”

Mr. D’s case above has already showed us his knowledge of classical Chinese poems, and his language skills. The three quotes below are more music specific, discussing the different genres of music. Unlike the genre divisions in popular music, the distinctions in their narratives are more geographical, reflecting the knowledge of the geo-historic mapping of the origin of the genre, and of the big picture of social and economic circumstances at that time.

In a quote from Ms. C, she self-examined the reason for her disinterest in Sibelius, who is usually categorized as a contemporary composer:

“I have already mentioned the Sibelius concert to you! [laugh] It was…really…I was very tired that day, then his type of music…ugh…impressive though! I learnt that the kind of environment a person was in, determines the kind of music he wrote, he certainly would be influenced by the environment. His music would express it. Then I feel if someone hasn’t experienced any thunderstorm, he could not write convincingly about thunderstorms! He lived in the very peaceful and tranquil Scandinavia, with few people, everywhere ice-covered. His creations must be like this. Very calm, sober, makes you feel that life is like that.”

The geographical division of music genre is most salient in Mr. O’s answer to my question, “what type of music you choose to listen to?” A virtual world atlas appeared in front of my eyes as he talked about his omnivorous musical ‘preference’:

“My musical choice, that is to say, is ‘no-choice.’ As long as it is music, with its characteristics, as far as it is good, genuinely good, with its speciality and personality, I will
like it. Western music, I like; Chinese traditional ones, Japanese ones, Korean ones, and also include Arabic, Indian, any, anything, African as well, I love to search for these [types of] music, also some from Xinjiang province of China, through mid-Asia, till Turkey, that type of music full of Turkic culture, I am very interested in all of them.”

Mr. O’s music taste is not common, because most of my interview respondents expressed strong preference in terms of the particular type of music they enjoy, or they are willing to pay several hundred yuan for its concert. Nevertheless, his taste of music can be considered strong proof of his enormous knowledge about folk or regional music.

If we go beyond the musical realm, the several quotes I provide below will illustrate the breadth of my interview respondents’ cultural capital, and also situate their appreciation of Western classical music in the bigger picture of their overall cultural consumption. In Ms. C’s case, she recognized that the background music playing in the Starbucks where we were conducting the interview was a piece from the ballet “The Nutcracker.” Feeling excited, she switched the topic to ballet music: “There was a time I was fond of ballet, ballet music, for instance, the music of “Nutcracker,” and “Swan Lake.” The “Dance of Little Four Swans” is too famous, that it is kind of embarrassing to say you like it… [laugh] And also music in ‘Giselle,’ I really like.” Later on, she started to name her favourite venues for watching drama plays in Shanghai.

The interest in ballet and ballet music was echoed in Ms. Zh’s response. Besides, she is engaged more with fashion and furniture design. She pointed to the details on the cuff and forepart of her siphon shirt, saying those were her ideas upon discussion with her tailor. She later mentioned that
in her parents’ house there was a large, old mahogany dinner table, which she wants to modify into a more contemporary-looking usable piece. Other examples of the versatility of my research respondents’ cultural capital include Mr. L’s comment on music critique, and Mr. X’s interest in abstract photography.

Mr. L stressed the importance of music critique and how it could facilitate and advance the development of music performance, providing parallel examples of Belinsky and Chernyshevsky for the evolution of the 19th century Russian Critical Realism literature. And then he illustrated a whole picture of the social and cultural environment from which emerged Western classical music:

“If you delve deeper into the issue, [Western] classical music is not an isolated cultural phenomenon. In the 19th century, the bloom of it, the founding of the Classical Music School needed to be traced back to Bach. The connection between music and the societal evolution, for example the start of the Enlightenment movement, till the French Revolution. The music (composition and appreciation?) corresponded with the social culture. Above that, classical music also involves Western religion, geography, architecture, and also literature at that time, touching on each and every aspect.”

Whereas Mr. L conveyed his knowledge about the social and cultural context of Western classical music’s origins, Mr. X elaborated his innovative argument that “abstract photography can express the beauty of music”:

“This argument originates from the saying that ‘architecture is the solidification of music.’ Architecture is the art form of three dimensions, while photography is of two dimensions. If music can be solidified in three dimensions, why not in two dimensions? … If the photos possess the characteristics of music, then they have the beauty of music. One of the characteristics is melodic, ups and downs, a linear. If there are lines, winding, smooth lines in
the photo, then the viewers can imagine...can relate it to music. The second point is more important, repetition. Music is repetitive, including beats, rhythms, and melodies; they are all repetitive, for example, the ternary form, right? And also double-ternary form, rondo, variation, are all repetitions. Sonata as well, it includes exposition, development, and recapitulation, again repetition. Music requires repetition...which is its essential means. Therefore if there is repetition in the photo, that piece possesses the beauty of music.”

Their overall volume of cultural capital will not be surprising if we understand it from the combination of their self-perception of the Shanghairen identity and their suzhi. The Shanghairen identity is formed along years living in the Western-looking urban area, being exposed to various Western cultures – not necessarily arts performance, but culinary culture, and social manners too. The socialization process to be familiar and accustomed to Western culture at large is how Shanghairen identity is produced. To my research respondents, the volume of cultural capital, especially the knowledge about the West is an essential component of Shanghairen’s ‘quality’ (suzhi). Hence, attendance at Western classical music concerts, as one example of accumulating embodied cultural capital is the vehicle for reproducing the Shanghairen identity. Therefore the momentum for the spiral ascendance of Shanghairen identity on the scale of suzhi is the Western cultural consumption.

More or less, habitus is also recognized as an important part of my respondents’ understanding of their Shanghairen identity, the unique quality endowed by that piece of land through the socialization within the domestic realm. They are very conscious about the family class background, and the disposition of their parents. As in Mr. L’s quote above, he mentioned his

---

22 A very popular Shanghai stand-up comedian’s recent comment on the difference between Shanghai native and North Chinese is like this: “How could you compare a coffee-drinking Shanghairen to a fresh garlic biting Northerner?? Not on the same level!”
father was merely a worker interested in Chinese traditional music, yet he knows about the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and its conductor notwithstanding. And Mr. X, in his early 70s, talked about the social status of his father in an awkwardly proud way – probably because it is still intimidating to claim oneself to be middle class even now:

“My father was of middle-class, so he always brought us to watch American movies. American movies in English, he interpreted the dialogues to us when watching. That was American culture, the seeds of American culture planted in me when I was young…My father liked light pieces of [Western] classical music, so he often played the LPs. This was how I was influenced by my family on musical appreciation.”

But it was not necessarily the knowledge of Western arts that serves as the sole determinant; the pro-high-cultural consumption atmosphere in Shanghai families plays a bigger role, as Mr. O’s case below indicates. When the accumulation of cultural capital of a specific type of art has reached a certain level, the tolerance and ability to understand other types of art opens up; thus the previous accumulation serves as a platform for the person to appreciate a wider range of art, a pan-art form fondness:

“My mother is a water-ink, traditional Chinese painter. Therefore I was exposed to various types of Chinese traditional art since young. But I was also very sensitive to Western art before my 20s, no matter painting, music or sculpture; I was very fond of Western stuff…There was a notion at home, also promoted in society at that time, that it was not called Western art, but ‘elegant art’. I was attracted by the term ‘elegance’. And then it was my mom’s opinion, that she is fascinated by Russian art. By various reasons, or by coincidence, my interest turned to Western classical music, introduced by Mozart and Vivaldi, small pieces and ‘Four Seasons’.”

Though different individuals attribute their interest in Western classical music to diverse reasons, being a sophisticated Shanghainen and from a well-educated family appear to be the major cause.
What is unique in *Shanghairen* identity itself and its (re)production is this identity’s association with the West, in this case, Western classical music. That’s why I argue there is a spiral structure in this process. *Shanghairen* identity is both the starting point and the end product, and the cycle continues. Attendance at Western classical music concerts serves two functions simultaneously, for one it expresses the possession of cultural capital, for the other, it is the venue for accumulating more cultural capital, therefore consuming Western classical music, as an epitome of the embodiment of cultural capital, serves as the vehicle for this dynamic production of *Shanghairen* identity.

The set of knowledge about the West is what I mean by ‘embodied cultural capital’ connecting Western classical music appreciation and *Shanghairen* identity. To my research respondents, it ranges from the knowledge of the social, political, and cultural background of the society the composers lived in, different tides of intellectual thoughts and influences, to various art forms in the same time period, the technical side of music pieces, and of course the proper manner at a concert setting – when to applaud believed to be a very important indicator. This set of knowledge would not be obtained from the formal curriculum taught in post-secondary schools, not to mention the educational level lower than that, but acquired by those people’s own motivation, influenced by *habitus*, and the broader social environment.

The process of embodiment of cultural capital in a Western classical music concert setting is more apparent in low-end weekend concerts, on the programme of which are usually easier to
decipher music pieces. As part of my two-month long fieldwork in Shanghai during the summer of 2009, I attended three separate Weekly Radio Concerts at the Shanghai Concert Hall. During each occasion, the audience underwent a process of “learning to consume,” i.e., the proper manner of music appreciation for one to display during a concert. As a general practice, audiences are not supposed to applaud between movements of a particular piece, but at each concert there occurred loud and enthusiastic applause when the orchestra paused after the first movement of the first musical piece. As each concert progressed, more and more of the audience realized, or were possibly, reminded by the frowns or chuckles from their neighbours, that one should applaud only after the orchestra had completed playing an entire piece. For this reason, applause gradually became scattered and sounded more uncertain as the concert continued. In the end, though, there was only silence when the musicians finished the penultimate musical piece of the concert. But then, at the end of the concert itself affirmative, enthusiastic applause erupted, which some audiences had reserved for more than half an hour, and it continued for a long period after the last note of the last musical piece faded away and the conductor had turned his back to the audience.  

The consensus among my interview respondents regarding appreciating Western classical music is that it is an art form holding a high threshold, not comprehensible by laymen, but as long as one has an interest in it, and is willing to learn, we hard-core music lovers will welcome you into

\[23\] In opposition to this long-held standard of practice, one respondent, a long-time music lover who had previously travelled to Europe to attend classical music festivals, mentioned to me that he despised this standardized rule or manner. His feeling is that one should have the freedom to shout “Bravo!” when one is utterly moved by a performance, similar in nature to what he witnessed in Germany and Austria. Notwithstanding his reasoning on the subject, among Shanghai audiences, presenters, and mass media, rules about when-to-applaud still serve as an indicator of one’s knowledge about, or capacity for, concert-attendance.
our community and be accommodating because you are a modern *Shanghairen*, and having the same motivation as us to equip yourself with the knowledge of Western high-culture and to be a civilized person, though you may not be able to quickly be on par with us. That is why being *Shanghairen* appears frequently in the responses I collected, and also why governmentality can be effective in promoting this type of cultural consumption. As a matter of fact, the simultaneous impulse for self-cultivation towards sophistication and better taste, which presumably determined by the modern Western societies, and for emulating the high-cultural consuming pattern of the ‘advanced’ West distinguishes *Shanghairen* from other Chinese urbanites. When it is a general belief that *suzhi* of people in the West is higher than in China (Yan 1994:496), the proximity to and familiarity with the West put *Shanghairen* in a higher position on the scale of *suzhi*.

The consciousness of urban inhabitants is affected by the environment of their experience, out of which perceptions, symbolic readings, and aspirations arise (Harvey 1989:350). This is especially true for long-time Shanghai residents. Most of them are not part of the privileged class in China’s market economy. For example, one interviewee said that he would rush to the box office on the first ticket-on-sale day to ensure he could purchase a lowest-priced ticket – usually 100 *yuan*, approx. CDN $15 – to a concert performed by a world prestigious symphony orchestra. What justifies his interest is his financial standing, but the eagerness for self-cultivation, further, an identity of being *Shanghairen*, which is fostered in the once-, and once again metropolitan city, surrounded by Western-looking buildings and an urban environment. Based on the city’s
semi-colonial history, its ‘connectedness’ to the modern West, its openness in embracing Western
arts genres, and the familiarity with flows greater than the domestic ones, the less-privileged of
Shanghai residents adopt specific tactics to face the ‘rushing in’ of foreign, famous-brand
products and expensive, Western high-cultural products. Some audience-members even pointed
out that their parents and/or grandparents consumed Western cultural products in pre-liberation
time, e.g., gramophones and LP recordings. Though they lacked such resources during their
teenage years, due to the Cultural Revolution, and the Chinese Communist Party’s censorship of
Western cultural products, these respondents heard repeatedly about the good times in “Old
Shanghai”. Because the act of consumption results from the immense power of the imagination,
they have those dreams and desires of consuming long before they reach a counter to purchase a
ticket, then sit for two hours in an audience hall. De Certeau stresses that a tactic is a calculated
action in a space of the other. Thus it must play on, and with, a terrain imposed on it, and
organized by the law of a foreign power (1984:37). The “gushing in” of commodities and the
global and national financial and ideological flows are embraced by the city government. But the
chaotic and formidable forces engender anxiety and resentment among Shanghairen as much as
they produce cheerfulness and excitement about the lifting of censorship and other loosening
state regulations.

Rather than a straightforward connection between consuming pattern and identity – with social
status a big part of it, the identity of Shanghairen serves as both a starting and an end point. The
capacity to decipher Western classical music is a representation of sophistication and modernity,
which *Shanghairen* identity connotes. While being a *Shanghairen*, it is natural for someone to acquire a set of knowledge of the West, which expands to history, geography, and especially art, even without formal education on these subjects, and the urban built-environment provides a sense of proximity to Western civilization. Thus being *Shanghairen* justifies the acquisition of Western high-culture, and endows *Shanghairen* identity uniqueness. When my interview respondents claimed that listening to Western classical music is a tradition in Shanghai, and the 130 years’ old Shanghai Symphony Orchestra is the earliest and the best-known ensemble of its kind in East Asia\(^{24}\), no wonder they have the pride of being *Shanghairen*, and living in this city. The selective memorized semi-colonial past is embodied and also performed in *Shanghairen*’s participation in the current cultural globalization. They perform this pride and uniqueness when facing other Chinese cities; even to a certain extent, their identity being *Shanghairen* trespasses their national identity, precisely, a pride to be a resident in a global city, rather than in a Chinese city. That’s why their assimilation towards the ‘advanced’ West is mainly self-motivated, and with the arrogance towards the rest of the urban Chinese.

\(^{24}\) This claim is made in the official introduction of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra on its website: [http://www.sh-symphony.com/en/aboutus.asp](http://www.sh-symphony.com/en/aboutus.asp)
5. Conclusion

With the proposition that Western classical music concert attendance serving as a yardstick for social standing, I started my research project in Shanghai in the summer of 2009. Despite my previous work experience in the classical music performance business prior to the master study, I was constantly amazed and inspired by what I saw and heard at the concerts and from my informants. Concert ticket prices, accurate timing for applause or other proper conduct in a concert setting and imagined participation in a global elite community are still reductionist understanding of this phenomenon. *Shanghairen’s* attendance at, and interest in, Western classical music concerts is an epitome of the local’s response or coping mechanism when encountering the ‘modern’ global in its historical and contemporary form. Their pride at their capacity to appreciate Western high-culture thrives from an underlying xenocentrism, which is an unavoidable consequence of Shanghai’s semi-colonial history. The perceived connection between the capacities to appreciate Western high-culture and the powerful Western colonizers representing advancement and modernity, though established in the early 20th century, continues to affect the self-identification of the local subjects. The presence of the foreign colonizers in power in the past, together with the image of an advanced Western society China needed to catch up with in economic and technological senses reinforced in the Maoist era form the idea that to be more advanced, progressive, and modern is to be closer to Western practice. *Shanghairen’s* familiarity with the Western high-culture justifies their proximity to development and modernity, and presumably lifts themselves above the population in the rest of the country.
The narrative of *Shanghairen*’s capacity to embrace and appropriate Western high-culture expresses a pride in engaging with the lifestyle of the developed West, in contrast to that of the rest of China. In the current period, this self-perception can also be read as a consciousness realized, when groups feel either threatened with a loss of previously acquired privilege, or, conversely, feel that it is an opportune moment politically to overcome a longstanding denial of privilege (Wallerstein 1979:184). Being a Shanghai native, I have sensed this mentality for the past 15 years, with the loosening of the household registration system, which enhanced the inter-city and inter-province mobility of ordinary people. My research investigating the demographic and historic characteristics of Shanghai concert-goers further demonstrates that this consciousness is actually realized by these two contradicting feelings together. The threat comes more from affluent migrants originating from other parts of China. The opportunity is provided by the “Open Door Policy” to rejuvenate Shanghai as a ‘global city,’ and to enable city dwellers to once again enjoy the pleasures of consumerism after forty years of socialist thrift and shortages.

The consumption of Western high-culture contributes not only to the city image itself, but also enables city dwellers to imagine their cohorts in other “global cities.” The identical physical setting for this consumption, the content of the cultural products, and the encoded status of this practice taken from European origins all provide the opportunity for Shanghainese to interpret and negotiate a cosmopolitan identity. This aspired identity serves as a coping mechanism to justify *Shanghairen*’s claim on urban space and superior metropolitan status, battling against the
‘vulgar rich’ (Lu, 2008) originated from elsewhere of China.

Since the focus of this research is on the personal experiences and subjective perceptions of the Western classical music concert-goers in Shanghai, a content analysis of governmental policies and the narratives in concerts’ promotion materials has not been incorporated into this research. Thus the interpretation of the institutional forces shaping and facilitating this consuming pattern is mostly based on my previous working experience in the high-cultural industry in Shanghai. From the promotional campaigns I participated in from the fall of 2004 to the summer of 2007, as well as the materials I collected during my fieldwork, one characteristic is apparent. Following Appadurai’s argument that global advertising is a key technology for the world-wide dissemination of a plethora of creative and culturally well-chosen ideas of consumer usage (1996:42). Promotional materials, such as flyers and posters produced and distributed by the concerts’ organizers, are usually bilingual – Mandarin and English, except for the case of weekend daytime performances which are monolingual. The juxtaposition of the two languages clearly signifies the presence of the ‘other’ and the ‘otherness’ of this consuming practice. The photographs and biographies of musicians are standardized by international agencies and spread around the world in the same mode; thus, the audience’s imagination is standardized by a dominant, Western pastiche across national borders. The biographies of musicians list out the same world famous music festivals they have attended such as Bayreuth, or Salzburg; the same prestigious venues in which they have performed such as Carnegie Hall in New York, or Musikverein in Vienna; the same organizations they have collaborated with such as Berlin
Philharmonic or the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Also, most photos for publicity are taken on stage with the artists dressed in black and/or in shining gowns. This standardized presentation of Western classical music concerts bridges the audience groups globally, at least in the imagination of Shanghai audience.

I believe my argument on the presence and prospect of the Western classical music appreciation would be more insightful and thorough if I had chance to work professionally in the field, either to document the changes in the Shanghai Concert Hall, e.g. the funding and sponsorship opportunities, the operation of their small auditorium on the B2 level, or whether there has been shifts in the governmental policies regarding the proper content to present, etc, or to have a taste of the difference in the operation at the Shanghai Oriental Art Centre, the management team of which is Beijing-based Poly Culture and Arts Co., Ltd with ‘mighty power and rich resources’.

At the micro-level, long-time Shanghai residents, under tides of migration – from both abroad along foreign direct investment or from other parts of the country entailing the loosening of household registration system – and buttressed by the city government keen on enhancing their ‘quality’ (suzhi), embrace these consumption patterns so as to equip themselves with urban sophistication and metropolitan lifestyles. This minimum economic threshold of the lower priced concerts on weekends challenges the conspicuous nature of attending performances at these

---

25 Quoted from the official introduction about the Shanghai Oriental Art Center. As a subsidiary of China Poly Group Corporation, which have the offspring of important Chinese political figures as board members, Poly Culture has a very strong political connection.
preeminent arts venues as perceived by new elites, while providing ordinary people an opportunity to negotiate their social status through this entitlement to the high cultural consumption – in the sense of a claim on public space and practice, rather than attendance at a particular performance. Thus Western classical music concerts serve as a platform for *Shanghairen* to establish a dialogue with their contemporaries in the West, in the hope that they can claim their own space in an imagined global community.

Initially in my proposition, the emphasis was given to the social inequality presumably reflected in the differentiated volume of cultural and economic capital among audiences, and the motivation for social distinction. But I was unable to reach any of the concert-goers paying more than RMB 1,000 yuan (approx. CDN $155) for a concert ticket, or attend concert merely for social status seeking or affirmation. Regardless of how long they have been listening to Western classical music, all my interview respondents claimed their fondness of this type of high-culture, and stressed its importance for self-cultivation and ‘*suzhi*’. Though the motivation for distinction is still present even within music-lover community, there does not seem to be an eagerness for exclusion, represented by the confidence of their unshakable standing based on the accumulated cultural capital, and long-time music lovers’ kind attitudes towards rookies and dilettantes.

Further, I acknowledge the potential bias in my argument generated by the small group of research subjects I interviewed and the number of concerts I observed. The educational level of my interview informants is very high, and the overall cultural capital they possess is impressive.
To testify how much my argument generated from this qualitative study holds true among the
general audience group, a survey might be more effective. With no intention for generalization, I
wish my findings can provide the readers a glimpse into this interesting consuming phenomenon.

Two cities in two times collide into one. This is the story of the current urban Shanghai. The
“Old Shanghai” in the early 20th century in narratives and imagination, with the visualized
modernity in the urban built environment and lifestyles in the New-York-City-like current urban
Shanghai entwined and represented in the practice of attending Western classical music. The
tension between imagination and reality, between narratives and experiences, between the
perceived self and the daily conduct is encapsulated in a concert setting. This project aims at
understanding the reason for urban Shanghai residents’ willingness to learn about Western
classical music and pay for the attendance of its concert. Though my initial proposition is based
on the Bourdieuan distinction, that is to say, via high-cultural consumption, people mobilize
their economic capital in exchange for embodied cultural capital, eventually cultivate their social
status for distinction, the data I collected during the two months fieldwork in Shanghai suggest a
more complicated picture.

Attendance at Western classical music concert is a consuming practice revitalized in the last two
decades in Shanghai, this ‘newness’ generates controversies among my research subjects
regarding its value and position in their overall cultural consumption. Rather than instant
cash-out of one’s embodied economic, cultural and symbolic capital at a Western classical music
concert setting – a demonstration of one’s social status, the concert-goers in Shanghai understand this cultural consumption from the perspective of being *Shanghairen*, an identity legitimates this practice meanwhile be enhanced or reproduced during the appreciation of Western classical music. In this case, the Bourdieuian symbolic violence (1998:121) does exist to the extent of Shanghai native’s self-perceived superiority based on their knowledge of the ‘advanced’ West and rests on the notion of *suzhi*. It is a new valuation of human subjectivity specific to China's neoliberal reforms, and its improvement has become vitally important in the planning of governing elites for China to become a competitive player in the field of global capital (Yan 1994: 494-97).

Based on this understanding, I would assume the attendance at Western classical music concert is not an isolated phenomenon. This pride has other representations in people’s daily lives, for example, in the forms of coffee-drinking, watching Hollywood movies in English, or the pursuit of luxury-branded clothes and accessories. Veblen’s conspicuous consumption can be neatly applied here, but the underlying tone of these consuming patterns in the Shanghai context is probably more complicated than in other societies due to its semi-colonial history, and its geographical and economic significance in China’s transition from an egalitarian society to a neoliberal society bearing its own characteristics.
Bibliography


Bunnel, T. (2002). Cities for nations? Examining the city-nation-state relations in information...


Economist 14 August 1999:64


Appendix A

Interview Guide

I. Demographic Information
   - Education Background
   - Occupation
   - Parents’ occupation
   - Arts related training and family’s cultural consumption during childhood
   - Birth origin, residential status
   - Marital status, have child?

II. Cultural Consumption
   - When first encounter classical music?
     If it was a performance:
       # Probe: when, with whom, what performance, how was the experience like?
     If it was training:
       # Probe: when, why attend classes, under whose influence, where to learn, what music instrument? Walk me through the first lesson/most impressive lesson? What do you think the learning experience influence life now?
       # Walk me through the first time you attended a classical music concert.
   - How often do you attend classical music concerts? What are the determinants?
     # Probe: ticket price, leisure, social interaction?
   - Walk me through the last time you went to a concert. (Why did you choose that one? Where did you get the information? How do you like the performance?) What preparation will you make at the day of the performance? (dressing, arrange dinner, childcare) Is that a part of the fancy night activities for certain date/occasion?
     If bring child together, why? How did the child like the experience? How do you plan your child’s extracurricular activities?
III. **Social Interaction through consumption**
- With whom you usually attend classical music concerts? (family, friends, business related?)
- What is the experience like, surrounded by other audiences in audience hall and during intermission? Any impressive moment?
- Will you talk about the concert attending experience with others? (With whom, what would you say?)
- How and when did you become a member of any classical music related club or organization? What kind of activities the members have? Could you walk me through the latest activity?
- What do you think of the image of the classical music audiences in nowadays society?

IV. **Wrap-up Questions**
- The reasons you pursue classical music performances
- How do you like the overall experience?
- Other thoughts you want to talk about?
Appendix B

Advertisement of Interview Respondent’s Recruitment [in Chinese]

招募古典乐音乐会观众

尊敬的先生/女士：

您被邀请参与一项关于上海古典音乐会观众的硕士论文研究项目。本项目由加拿大英属哥伦比亚大学社会学系的韩爱梅博士主持，硕士研究生徐舫合作执行；并获得了上海音乐厅的鼎力支持。作为上海音乐厅古典音乐会的忠实观众，是您受邀参与的原因。该硕士论文研究项目旨在探究当代古典音乐会观众的观演经历，并聚焦出席音乐会的原因，围绕文化消费的人际交往，以及就追求西方表演艺术的态度和看法。

您将被受邀与合作研究者徐舫进行一次30至60分钟的访谈，话题涉及您的过往经历和对于出席古典音乐会的感受和看法。本次调查中所涉及到的您的个人信息将被严格保密。为感谢您对于此研究项目的支持，您将会受赠一张音乐会门票。

如您有兴趣参与此研究项目，请留下您的联系方式，以方便合作研究者徐舫直接联系您，安排采访的具体时间地点。

姓名：____________________
电话：____________________
电子邮件：____________________
通讯地址：____________________

如您对本研究项目有任何疑问，敬请联系合作研究者徐舫（电话：1391-6932-372，或电子邮件：fangxu@interchange.ubc.ca）

此致

敬礼

徐舫
社会学系 硕士研究生
加拿大英属哥伦比亚大学
电话：1391-6932-372
Email: fangxu@interchange.ubc.ca
Advertisement of Interview Respondent’s Recruitment [in English]

Dear Sir or Madam:

You are invited to participate in a research project for a Master’s thesis on audiences of classical music concerts in Shanghai. This study is being conducted by the principal investigator Dr. Amy Hanser and co-investigator Fang Xu, an MA student, in the Department of Sociology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

You are asked to participate because you are a classical music concert-goer and hold membership in any of the following performing-arts venues in Shanghai: the Shanghai Grand Theatre, the Shanghai Concert Hall, and the Shanghai Oriental Art Centre.

This research project and Master thesis will explore the experiences of classical music concerts’ audiences in contemporary Shanghai. It will focus on reasons people attend concerts; the social interactions around this cultural consumption; and attitudes towards Western performing-arts.

You will be invited to a 30- to 60-minute interview with Fang Xu, the co-investigator, about your experiences and perspectives on attending classical music concerts. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please feel free to contact Fang Xu by phone at +1 604-351-1523, or +86 1391-6932-372 and/or by email at fangxu@interchange.ubc.ca. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Services at UBC at +1 604-822-8595.

Sincerely,

Fang Xu
MA Student, Department of Sociology
University of British Columbia
Tel: +86 1391-6932-372
Email: fangxu@interchange.ubc.ca
Appendix C

Consent Form [in Chinese]

同意书

硕士论文 — 文化消费研究：当代上海的古典音乐会听众

研究负责人：
韩爱梅博士，加拿大英属哥伦比亚大学社会学系（电话：+1 604-827-3135；Email：hanser@interchange.ubc.ca）

合作研究者：
徐舫，加拿大英属哥伦比亚大学社会学系，硕士研究生（电话：+1 604-351-1523 或 +86 1391-6932-372；Email：fangxu@interchange.ubc.ca）

研究目的：
本访谈隶属于的研究将主要被合作研究者用于完成在英属哥伦比亚大学社会学系的硕士学位。此研究项目和硕士论文将探究当代上海古典音乐会听众的经历和体验；关注出席音乐会的原因，围绕这一文化消费的人际交往，以及就追求西方表演艺术的态度和看法。访谈所收集到的信息将被编码分析，以达到此次研究的目的，即了解观众出席古典音乐会的动机和他们对于此种新型消费方式的自我认知。

研究步骤：
访谈将持续30至60分钟，涉及您和研究合作者关于出席古典音乐会的过往经历，对于此项消费方式的看法和您的一些基本信息的谈话。访谈将被安排在经双方讨论并认为合适的时间和地点进行。在获得您的许可后，访谈方可为保证收集信息的准确性进行数码录音。

保密性：
访谈所收集的与用于硕士论文的撰写，并有可能涉及到未来的发表或学术会议演讲。不过您的身份和个人信息将受到严格的保护，将对于除合作研究者外的任何人保密。在访谈笔录、之后的论文分析以及未来的报告或发表中，任何涉及您的信息将被冠以匿名。留有您签名的《同意书》以及其它任何表明您身份的访谈相关文件将被封存在上锁的文件柜中。数码音频文件和访谈笔录将只能通过代码来进行识别，它们将被保存在合作研究者有密码保护的个人电脑中。只有合作研究者能获取并知晓此项研究对象的身份。您的真实
姓名不会出现在的此项研究未来任何的报告文书中。

报酬：
为感谢参与本研究项目，您将会被赠予一张价值50元人民币的音乐会门票抵用券，您可在2009年年底之前用其换取或冲抵在您持有会员资格的演出场所的音乐会门票的全部或部分票额。

关于本研究项目的联系方式：
如您有任何疑问或希望获取关于本研究项目的更多信息，敬请通过电话或电子邮件联系合作研究者，徐舫。电话：+1 (604) 351-1523 或 ++86 1391-6932-372; 电子邮件：fangxu@interchange.ubc.ca。

关于研究对象权力的联系方式：
如对于作为研究对象参与本研究项目有任何顾虑或疑问，您可通过研究对象信息专线（电话：+1 604-822-8598）联系英属哥伦比亚大学研究服务办公室。

同意内容：
您对于本项目的参与完全出于自愿，您可在任何时候拒绝或终止参与。

您的以下签名表明您已收到一份《同意书》的副本以作留存，并且您同意参与此研究。

_________________________  __________________________
签名  日期

签署人姓名

最后，请您勾选对于数码录音访谈过程的意愿：

同意数码录音： □ 是 □ 否
Consent Form [in English]

Consent Form
Master Thesis 2009
Study on Cultural Consumption:
Audiences of Classical Music Concerts in Contemporary Shanghai

Principal Investigator: Dr. Amy Hanser, Department of Sociology, University of British Columbia (phone: +1 604-827-3135; Email: hanser@interchange.ubc.ca)

Co-Investigator: Fang Xu, UBC Master Student, Department of Sociology, University of British Columbia (phone: +1 604-351-1523 or +86 1391-6932-372; Email: fangxu@interchange.ubc.ca)

Purpose: This interview will be used as primary research for a Master degree in sociology at UBC. This research project and Master thesis will explore the experiences of classical music concerts’ audiences in contemporary Shanghai. It will focus on reasons to attend concerts; social interactions around this cultural consumption; and attitudes towards pursuing Western performing-arts. The information gathered from the interview will be coded and analyzed for the purpose of understanding the audiences’ motivation in attending classical music concerts and their interpretation of this relatively new consuming practice.

Study Procedures: The interview will take about 30-60 minutes. It will involve a conversation between you and the co-investigator, touching on experiences of attending classical music concert, interpretation of this consuming practice, and demographic information. The interview will be conducted at a mutually agreeable time and place for both parties’ convenience. With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded to capture the details accurately.

Confidentiality: The interview data will be only used for a Master thesis paper and potentially future publication or conference presentation. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential and will only be available to the co-investigator. A pseudonym will be used on the typed transcript of the interview, in the subsequent thesis analysis and other future report or publication. The signed consent forms and other documents indicating interview subjects’ identities will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Digital audio files and transcripts of the interviews, identified only with a code number, will be kept on the co-investigator’s computer and will be password-protected. Only the co-investigator will have access to the identities of study subjects. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.
Compensation:
As an incentive to thank you for participation, you will be offered one voucher (worth RMB 50 yuan) redeemable for concert tickets in the performing-arts venue you hold membership with. You may exchange each voucher in their box offices during open time in the rest of 2009.

Contact for information about the study:
If you have any questions or would like further information about this study, please contact the co-investigator Fang Xu at +1 (604) 351-1523 or fangxu@interchange.ubc.ca.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:
If you have any concerns or questions about your treatment or your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at +1 604-822-8598.

Consent: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records; and that you consent to participate in this study.

__________________________________________________________________
Subject Signature Date
__________________________________________________________________
Printed name of the subject signing above

Please indicate your willingness to be digitally-recorded during the interview:

Agree to digital-recording: □ Yes □ No
Appendix D

Certificate of Approval – Minimal risk

The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioral Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agricultural Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Investigator:</th>
<th>Institution / Department:</th>
<th>UBC BREB Number:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy Hanser</td>
<td>UBC Arts/Sociology</td>
<td>HD9-00047</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other location where the research will be conducted:
Shanghai Concert Hall
Shanghai Grand Theatre
Shanghai Oriental Art Centre

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):
Fang Xu

SPONSORING AGENCIES:
N/A

PROJECT TITLE:
MA Thesis: Study of Cultural Consumption: Audiences of Western High-Cultural Performances in Contemporary Shanghai

REB MEETING DATE: March 26, 2009
CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: March 26, 2010

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Name</th>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consent forms:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent form - Chinese version</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>March 12, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent form - English version</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>March 12, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee recruitment ad - Chinese version</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>March 12, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee recruitment ad - English version</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>March 12, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>March 12, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Guide</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DATE APPROVED: March 27, 2009

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:

Dr. M. Judith Lyram, Chair
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Laure Ford, Associate Chair
Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair