

**ORGANIZATIONAL LOYALTY OF YOUNG CHINESE PEOPLE:
MORAL VIRTUES AND CLASS HABITUS**

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DEDICATION

To my big extended family,
who taught me to be curious and to love all people.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Background and purpose of the study	1
1.2. Significance and contributions of the study	3
1.3. Structure of the dissertation	5
2. Literature review, analytical framework and methodology	7
2.1. Organizational loyalty in business ethics literature	7
2.2. Postmodern times and organizational loyalty	14
2.3. Contribution of Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capital, and field to the study of organizational loyalty	19
2.4. Research questions and objectives	22
2.5. Analytical framework	25
2.6. Methodology	28
2.6.1. <i>Data collection process</i>	30
2.6.2. <i>Data analysis</i>	35
2.6.3. <i>Reliability and validity</i>	36
2.6.4. <i>Ethical considerations</i>	38
2.7. Conclusion	39
3. Content of organizational loyalty: virtues as types of moral capital	40
3.1. Being ‘the best in class’: white-collar’s appreciation of expertise and lifelong learning	40
3.2. Being a ‘common’ worker: blue-collar’s practical expertise	47
3.3. White-collar’s ‘passion’ and diligence	54
3.4. Hard work of shop floor people	61
3.5. Being a ‘kind’ person: the importance of humility, openness, helpfulness, and recognition in white-collar world	67
3.6. Being a solitary man: blue-collar’s obedience and restrained helpfulness	74
3.7. Conclusion	80

4. Grounds of organizational loyalty: values that matter in the workplace.....	83
4.1. Leading a ‘colorful’ life: white-collars’ pursuit of self-fulfillment.....	83
4.2. Blue-collars’ escape from their ‘dull’ life	94
4.3. Conclusion	104
5. Analyzing fields to explain the differences	106
5.1. Fields of education and family	106
5.2. China’s economy	114
5.3. ElectriCo’s structure of employee positions and related practices.....	124
5.4. Conclusion	139
6. Conclusion	141
6.1. Voluntary self-developing settlers and non-voluntary common wanderers: summary of key features of two types of distinctive postmodern habitus	142
6.2. Theoretical and empirical contributions	145
6.3. Recommendations for future research	150
Appendix A. Background information on the interviewees	152
References.....	155

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and purpose of the study

The starting point of this research is the observation that China's millennials – young Chinese people whom this research is about and are principally part of the *balinghou* (八零后, post-80s) and *jiulinghou* (九零后, post-90s) generations – increasingly tend to change employers. When this phenomenon is discussed by general public or businesspeople, is it usually related to a lack of loyalty. For example, Deloitte's (2016: 2) report states that "Millennials, in general, express little loyalty to their current employers and many are planning near-term exits," offering statistical data that 66 percent of them expect to leave their current employer within the next five years. China is also mentioned with her 65 percent. This dissertation provides evidence that organizational loyalty is not altogether gone from the workplace. Loyalty or loyalties cannot simply cease to exist because they are, as Haughey (1993: 4) says, "a constitutive part of both character and identity". Whereas corporate loyalty in terms of workforce stability, that is, spending entire or a larger portion of one's career with the same company, may be disappearing, a new form of workplace loyalty that is attuned to both macro-level contemporary conditions and individual circumstances is still there. Inspired by Bourdieu, this dissertation suggests that organizational loyalty is a type of moral capital that employees possess and draw upon to realize values that matter to them. Moral capital refers to a set of virtues or excellences of character that define a 'good' person (Kleinig 2014; Swartz 2010). Organizational loyalty, then, involves employees' ongoing virtuous behavior in their current workplace (Ewin 1992: 417). If employees exhibit their organizational loyalty in exhibiting other virtues, what are the virtues that constitute organizational loyalty? Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* teaches us that our "state of character" is influenced by the kind of society which we live in by means of habit: we "do" or "exercise" virtues or vices in an environment conducive to them. Social science scholars have sought to examine more closely the qualities of character acquired through practical experience within specific social settings. We are particularly indebted to Pierre Bourdieu ([1984]2010) for helping us to better understand the relationship between social arrangements and our tendency to appreciate and display certain virtues and vices. His work shows that differences in our perceptions, actions, and

aspirations stem from our different dispositions, which reflect and are structured by objective conditions of our social position.

Here is an example of objective societal circumstances due to which long-term employment with one company has become an unreasonable and impossible aspiration for many people. Media do not stop reporting layoffs, plant closures and relocations both in China and across the world in response to economic slowdowns and competitive pressures (Allen 2016; BBC 2017; Cullen 2017; Leng 2016). Donald J. Trump's trade policy on China may further endanger her growth prospects (Hsu 2017; Mullen & Dong 2017). Temporary employment comprises one-tenth of work worldwide and two-thirds of work in developing countries (ILO 2016). According to Zhou (2013), more than half of China's total urban workforce is in types of work lacking certainty and predictability. Today's high fluidity of jobs certainly emboldens a great many Chinese millennials to keep looking for their next opportunity, which may even turn out to be a secure one. Another explanation is that the promises of freedom, choice, achievement, and happiness lure these young people into quitting jobs that are not meaningful and personally fulfilling (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Liu 2011). This short illustration raises the following questions: in what ways do young Chinese people understand and demonstrate their organizational loyalty and what values hold them to their organizations? The purpose of this dissertation is threefold: to reveal the virtues that constitute organizational loyalty of young Chinese white- and blue-collar employees in a foreign electrical equipment company by exploring how they understand and demonstrate their organizational loyalty. The second is to uncover their valued goals that they pursue by leaving or staying with their employer, whereas the third is to identify experiences gained as employees move across different fields, including those that occur in their current workplace, that prompt young Chinese employees to display particular virtues and pursue certain values. The review of business ethics literature will reveal that discussions of organizational loyalty do not consider the interrelation between organizational loyalty and social context. With help of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts, this dissertation investigates the actual social dynamics of organizational life, capturing the variations in the virtues that are entailed in individuals' understanding of loyalty to their organizations. I believe that organizational loyalty is influenced by individuals' occupational position in the company. Same can be said for the values that they pursue in the workplace.

1.2. Significance and contributions of the study

This study uses insights and concepts from various disciplines as tools to examine organizational loyalty. It offers a workable account of loyalty as moral capital, a set of virtues that are cultivated and nurtured inside and outside the workplace. Bauman (2005b: 5) argues that “in order to get something which one needs to stay alive and happy, one must do something which is seen by others as valuable and worthy of being paid for”. Bourdieu (1977: 88) believes that our dispositions to think or act in certain ways are molded by our past experience of objective “*structural exercises*” and conditions typical of our social and occupational positions. Using his concept of habitus, which is understood as a durable “disposition¹ that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions” (Bourdieu [1984]2010: 166) resulting from employees’ past and present experiences of their social position, this dissertation unearths the differences in the meanings that employees attach to the qualities of character that help them to attain valued goals. Sayer (2005b: 2-3) stresses the importance of studying the moral aspects of class² experience, explaining that “People’s normative concerns in relation to class go beyond the unequal distribution of material goods and recognition and respect, to questions of just what is good in terms of ways of life, practices, objects, behaviours and types of character that people see as desirable.” My research also sheds light on the uncomfortable yet fundamental aspect of this pursuit: occupational position and class habitus join forces to prevent many young Chinese people from escaping the poverty trap and leading a fulfilling life by not allowing them to acquire moral dispositions that are essential to finding a high-status job. As a result, people performing blue-collar jobs, which bring little or no respect and are not personally rewarding, provide alternative definitions of virtuousness and

¹ ‘Habitus’ and ‘disposition’ are used interchangeably in this dissertation as Bourdieu himself equates the two terms, “The word *disposition* seems particularly suited to express what is covered by the concept of habitus (defined as a system of dispositions). It expresses first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*” (Bourdieu 1977: 214, emphasis in original).

² This dissertation adopts Bourdieu’s understanding of class as group of people who occupy similar positions, possess similar composition and quantity of capital, and “have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances” (Bourdieu 1985).

valued rewards in their struggle to improve the moral value of their occupation and maintain their self-esteem (see Lamont 2000; Sayer 2007).

While Bourdieu is interested in how individuals' moral perception varies according to their social position, he mentions the difference in terms of ethos only briefly as his main interest is the aesthetic aspect of class distinction. Drawing on Bourdieu's work, Diane Reay's excellent investigation of class habitus and moral dispositions uncovers the students' understanding of themselves as learners (Reay & Wiliam 1999; Reay *et al.* 2009), their higher education choices (Reay 1998), and the production of distinction in the classroom (Reay 1995). Nevertheless, most empirical research pays little attention to the moral dimension of class and does not seek to compare it across individuals occupying different positions in organizational setting. Similar can be said for studies of the lived experience of young people in contemporary China. These provide us with invaluable knowledge of the effects of social institutions on self-perception and practices of people in general (Cockain 2012; Jacka *et al.* 2013; Kleinman *et al.* 2011; Rofel 2007), as well as particular social groups (Hansen & Svarverud 2010; Hoffman 2010; Hu 2011; Jacka 2006; Lin 2013; Link *et al.* 2002; Ren 2013; Wallis 2013; Wu *et al.* 2014). Amy Hanser (2008), Ngai Pun (2005) and Eileen Otis (2012) devote great effort to the study of female workers in their specific workplaces. To my best knowledge, there is not a single publication available that presents the virtues of character of individuals who belong to different groups in a specific workplace context, including the institutions that form, maintain or alter them. A book by Michael Griffiths *Consumers and Individuals in China: Standing Out, Fitting In* is a notable example that comes nearest to dealing with virtuousness of Chinese migrants, professionals and workers by providing a categorization of values around which their identities are formed: authenticity, knowledge, civility, and sociability.

This dissertation expands previous research on moral significance of class in organizational context by providing an authentic account of differences in young Chinese people's moral perception of themselves as employees and the moral value of their occupation.³ These people are often misrepresented as “lazy parasites” (好吃懒做, *haochi lanzuo*) and “serial job hoppers” (跳槽型, *tiaocao xing*) who “lack ambition” (不求上进, *buqiu shangjin*) or “aim too high” (好高骛远, *haogao wuyuan*) (Zhi 2009). There is also a

³ ‘Occupation’, ‘job’, and ‘work’ are used interchangeably in this dissertation.

belief that salary is the only aspect of the job that China's millennials take seriously (Phoenix Comprehensive 2012). The above generalizations and criticisms are anything but reliable and credible presentations of these people's character because they neglect the fact that the context in which these people are immersed shapes their thoughts, actions, feelings, and aspirations. The present study identifies two groups of employees with a different habitus. This study also examines how the broader social context within which these young people are differently positioned informs their attitudes and behavior.

Although this dissertation does not capture all layers and properties of young Chinese people's habitus, it provides important insights into how they perceive and deal with their current circumstances. Why should we care about the existence of organizational loyalty? The productivity of the organization depends on employees' virtuous behavior: literature relates the lack of organizational loyalty to high absenteeism, high turnover, low productivity, high costs of employee replacement, and the condition of a "normless nomadic monad" (Haughey 1993: 4) that leads to mental illnesses. For the vast majority of workers, the ability to lead a respectable life is to a great extent conditioned by their active participation in the market, which frequently fluctuates and may collapse at any time. Moreover, not all 'good' choices are open to everyone. Findings will undoubtedly appeal to companies that seek alternatives to engagement surveys with pre-determined definitions of organizational loyalty, wishing to gain an accurate view of their employees' attitudes and behavior or a deeper understanding of mechanisms behind them. More importantly, words that follow may help millennials such as me who occasionally feel lost, confused, or disappointed with the outcomes of their life path to understand it's not necessarily their fault, overcome those negative emotions, and better navigate their way through the world.

1.3. Structure of the dissertation

Chapter 2 integrates the literature review with the presentation of the analytical framework and methodology of the study. I relate the dissertation's research on young Chinese people's organizational loyalty to business ethics literature, and to sociological theories of postmodernity and class, reviewing what existing literature says on the content of organizational loyalty and goals that employees pursue in work and life. This chapter also places special emphasis on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, field, and practice that are used as theoretical backdrop upon which to analyze white- and blue-collars' accounts

and interactions. The chapter then deals with data collection process, data analysis, reliability and validity of the study, and ethical considerations. Chapters 3 and 4 form the core of my research; they are structured around the first, individual level of analysis and provide insights into distinctive moral dispositions of selected blue- and white-collar employees, whose attitudes and behavioral patterns are shared by other research participants belonging to their respective groups. Chapter 3 presents the differences in blue- and white-collars groups' perception and display of virtues germane to organizational loyalty, whereas Chapter 4 compares moral values that they assign to their work. Chapter 5 considers former and present experiences that shape and reinforce young Chinese people's moral dispositions, and is structured around the second level of analysis (organization, family, broader economy, and education as fields). Chapter 6 summarizes the main findings of the study, concluding on its contribution to theoretical and empirical knowledge, and giving suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review, analytical framework and methodology

This chapter begins by discussing and incorporating concepts and theoretical propositions from various bodies of literature that are relevant to the purpose of the dissertation in order to identify research gaps and provide guidance for this study. The first section provides an overview of studies on organizational loyalty and motives for remaining in or leaving a company outside the circle of sociological theory and empirie. The second and third section apply sociological theoretical work on neoliberal individualization and class to the study of organizational loyalty and the moral appeal of work to put the study in broader socioeconomic context and link wider structural processes with individual attitudes and behavior in relation to organizational loyalty. The chapter continues by spelling out research questions, objectives, and presenting the analytical framework. Finally, it describes the methodology for the dissertation.

2.1. Organizational loyalty in business ethics literature

Organizational loyalty has been the subject of a broad and extensive discussion within business ethics circles that resulted in a great number of definitions and different views of its nature, objects, and grounds. Concerning the nature of organizational loyalty, business ethics scholars have mainly been debating whether organizational loyalty is a sentimental attachment or a type of conduct, and whether it is exclusively altruistic (i.e. self-sacrificial and well-wishing) or if it may be combined with self-interested motives. The vast majority of theorists claim that organizational loyalty is primarily a feeling or a sentiment that may express itself in deeds in relation to the object of loyalty. This is evident from Haughey's (1993: 1-6) statements such as "loyalty is an affection that binds the person to act on the basis of an experienced bond", or "it carries with it an implicit promise to take action on behalf of the loyalty's object". For Ewin (1990), loyalty is an emotional bond that motivates individuals to perform their duty and occasionally even go beyond it, which involves the exhibition of a number of virtues or vices depending on whether the object of loyalty is good or bad, respectively. Randels (2001: 31) offers a similar understanding of loyalty as an affection – "a social passion, a type of love that extends beyond the self to some object of loyalty" – that is tied up with actions springing from virtues or vices. Illustrations of a loyal person's sentiments toward the object of loyalty mention passion,

love, and pride in times of its prosperity (Ewin 1992; Schrag 2001), and shame, anger or indignation in times of its decline (Oldenquist 1982). Notwithstanding their assertion that loyalty is of attitudinal rather than behavioral nature and may involve vices, the aforementioned scholars provide ample examples of virtuous rather than vicious acts of loyalty that employees perform in the workplace, such as executing contractual duties faithfully or putting in longer hours and taking extra care in work (Schrag 2001), doing more than the job and sticking to the firm through the hard times (Ewin 1992), or bolstering the firm's public image (Pfeiffer 1992). They also name virtues that are exhibited in the conduct of a loyal employee, such as cooperation, courage, gratitude, justice, sociability, and trustworthiness (Ewin 1992, 1993; Randels 2001). Some scholars have perceptively noted that loyalty is context-dependent (e.g., Haughey 1993; Pfeiffer 1992; Schrag 2001), explaining that what qualifies as a loyal action depends on particulars of a given context (e.g., employee's age, job or position in organizational structure, employee's needs or organization's needs, law, values prevalent in society). Ewin (1992) even implicitly admits that he cannot provide a general and precise account of loyalty due to individual differences in terms of values.

While it is reasonable to expect loyalty to involve feelings, employees can have strong feelings of loyalty without demonstrating them through actions. In line with Kleinig (2014), who proves this point by giving an example of the weak-willed Peter that emotionally affirmed his loyalty to Jesus but publicly denied any association with him, I believe that actual deeds rather than feelings are the clearest and most determinative evidence of loyalty. Coughlan (2005: 47) is one of the few scholars that advance the view of employee loyalty focusing exclusively on individuals' sustained actions, claiming that "loyalty involves ongoing behavior based upon a community's shared values" that are a subset of shared values that exist in greater society. An interesting observation is that Coughlan's definition implicitly suggests that the behavior that exemplifies loyalty displays perseverance. The author briefly mentions respect, social responsibility, personal moral obligation, honest communication, concern for employee welfare, and justice as moral values that guide individuals' behavior in the workplace. It is important to point out that 'values', 'moral principles', and 'moral values' are used synonymously throughout Coughlan's article, the third being defined as "what we care about when differentiating proper actions from improper actions" (Coughlan 2005: 48). For the sake of terminological

clarity, I will use the term ‘moral virtues’ here to refer to the sources of good and proper behavior, which is consistent with the author’s emphasis on realization of community’s shared values in action – that is, living these shared values in the workplace on a consistent basis – and moral judgment as the guideline for action. “By evaluating various principles of conduct and adhering to those viewed as good,” says Coughlan (2005: 46), “the loyal individual engages in moral judgment prior to action.” For Coughlan, loyalty is not a matter of affection but of voluntary decision to engage in virtuous acts. One problem with his idea of continuous conscious deliberation is that it excludes the possibility of habitual exhibition of virtues that are acquired unintentionally, for example, through upbringing. As Ewin (1990: 9) explains, “Principles can be held because I was brought up to believe in them and never gave them very much thought.” Organizational loyalty scholarship seems to share the conviction that moral judgment and acts through which employees demonstrate loyalty to their organization are inseparable (e.g. Pfeiffer 1992; Randels 2001; Schrag 2001). What they disagree about is the effect of moral judgment on loyal employee’s conduct. Take for example Ewin (1992: 403, 412), who contrary to Coughlan proposes that loyalty can also be vicious, taking the forms of fraudulence, intolerance, and injustice, and even goes as far to suggest that loyalty requires employees not only to suspend their moral judgment but even to set it aside, which demarcates excellence of character from failings of character.

Another area of disagreement concerns motives that underlie loyalty. Is loyalty exclusively self-sacrificial, seeking to further the interests of the company, or can it be tied to the employee’s own self-interest? Duska (2009: 158) holds the opinion that loyalty has other-interest at its core and therefore has no place in business because business is primarily for making a profit and not for mutual fulfillment and support, “Loyalty depends on ties that demand self-sacrifice with no expectation of reward. Business functions on the basis of enlightened self-interest.” Pfeiffer (1992: 535) seems to contradict this view, suggesting that employer-interest and self-interest co-exist in the workplace, “To be truly loyal, actions must be performed from loyal motives. A truly loyal employee does not act *merely* [italics added] in order to promote personal gain. Such an employee has the employer’s best interest at heart, and strives to promote that interest.” Randels (2001) has been openly critical about Duska’s denial of existence of self-sacrifice in the corporate world and Pfeiffer’s argument that employer-interest is the core property of loyalty. As a

counterargument to Duska's claim, he offers the observation that employees make sacrifices for their employer in terms of their time and even their lives, explaining that interests of employees and corporation overlap when the corporation imbues work with values that are of personal significance for the employees. "It is not just in the company's interest or the boss's interest or my co-workers' interests that the product succeeds [sic], but *my* interest. It is not strictly a matter of sacrifice for others, although I may make sacrifices. I have invested myself and thus have a stake in the object of loyalty. In many respects, its interests *are* my interests," explains Randels (2001: 34). There is consensus among scholars that loyalty involves identification with the object of loyalty (e.g., Haughey 1993; Oldenquist 1982), which is discernible by the use of first-person possessive pronoun 'my' or 'our'. The disputed point is whether one's identification with the object generates loyalty (e.g., Ewin 1993; Schrag 2001) or occurs as loyalty develops (e.g., Randels 2001). I will also touch upon this later in connection with the grounds for loyalty. Randels' (2001: 29) response to Pfeiffer is that loyalty has to do with action rather than motive: actions required by loyalty may stem from "self-interest, a sense of professionalism, or the desire to honor one's word" as employees join a new company and later be motivated by the strong internal passion called loyalty, which has developed over time. Haughey (1993: 5) provides an alternative view, stating that "loyalty can be quite other-directed or altruistic so that I would stand by the object of my loyalty without counting the cost to myself. Or, a loyalty could be quite self-interested so that the value to me of the investment of self is more motivating than the object to which my loyalty is adjoined." Albert Hirschman's *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* is one of the rare studies linking sociology, economics, and political science to provide a model of calculated loyalist behavior. The author presents loyalty as a "special attachment to an organization" that has a revitalizing effect on a declining organization by increasing the likelihood of employees' voice that helps it to recover, and by making exit less likely (Hirschman 1970: 77).⁴ The exercise of voice and refraining from exit depend on one's judgment whether these actions will have a positive effect over time. It is also worth

⁴ Since Hirschman (1970: 38, 92) mentions that loyalty is also expressed when employees "refuse to exit and suffer in silence, confident that things will soon get better", an employee stays with the organization either as an active "reformist" to provide input to change organizational circumstances or as a passive member that displays tolerance or forbearance. The third type of loyal conduct is unconscious, whereby the employee is "simply unaware of the degree of deterioration that is taking place".

mentioning that Hirschman (1970: 43) believes that voice is an art that can be encouraged by corporate policies and practices, and that the existence of exit alternatives obstructs its development. Since Hirschman is primarily interested in giving a detailed account of how organizational loyalty operates in times of decline, one may only speculate that loyalty will have the same effect in times of prosperity, which is to prevent exit and activate voice that improves the welfare of the company. Kleinig's (2014: 18) way out of this theoretical conundrum is to accept that there is a variety of explicit motives for loyal conduct, and to focus on individual's concern not to jeopardize the object's interests and well-being. The latter is in line with Hirschman's (1970: 98) suggestion that loyal employees might refrain from leaving the organization if they feel that their exit might propel deterioration. The question still remains of who is to judge what specific actions jeopardize the interests of the company and cause it harm.

In organizational context, to whom or what are employees loyal? Business ethics scholars believe that an employee can be loyal to the organization itself, with its values, practices, and mission (Schrag 2001), to people or groups of people such as manager or colleagues or to the work itself (Haughey 1993), or to moral values including those that are pertinent to one's profession (Ewin 1990; Haughey 1993; Pfeiffer 1992). In *Loyalty: The Police*, Ewin provides an excellent illustration of the tensions that occur between police officers' loyalty to peers, loyalty to the police code of ethics, and loyalty to the police force's mission of public service. Not only do employees juggle different loyalties that operate inside the workplace, but they also deal with a complex of loyalties that exist outside of it. Conflicts may therefore occur between loyalties to objects in organizational context and between loyalties that operate in different contexts. As Randels (2001: 36) vividly explains, "Loyalties to family, friends, religion, town, country, and corporation, among others, may happily co-exist with one another, but likely will compete from time to time." Clash of loyalties makes it hard for employees to act consistently with all values that matter to them and leads to rethinking and reordering of priorities in an effort to preserve own integrity (Ewin 1990: 9; Pfeiffer 1992: 541). However, this strand of literature does not provide detailed theoretical insights into the interrelation between loyalty to an organization and the plethora of loyalties to other objects. Haughey (1993: 11-13) offers a few clues worth following: based on his observation of changing workplace circumstances, he argues that loyalty today is "less co-dependent" than the one of portrayed by William

Whyte in *The Organization Man*, whose protagonist sacrificed personal life to the company that offered him a secure job and had no other allegiances but to the firm. The organization man's identity was subsumed by the organization; he lacked autonomy and individual creativity, and prized mediocrity over brilliance. Haughey also proposes that loyalty has become "less fixed to place and persons" due to the increasing technological sophistication and relocation of the workplace, as well as more "principled" and "discriminating" in terms of being judged against personal, professional, or legal values and dependent on its alignment with them.

Finally, business ethics literature offers several possible understandings of the grounds for organizational loyalty. While Coughlan (2005) contends that loyalty develops through interaction over time in the context of an employment relationship formed by two or more parties, Randels (2001) demonstrates that person can be loyal without a literal relationship by examples of a company's product, a football club, and ideals. When Schrag (2001: 44) says, "Loyalty cannot be turned on like a spigot but grows out of a relationship," he uses term 'relationship' in yet another sense: loyalty is engendered by the identificational link between the self and object. This was mentioned above in the discussion of motives as components of loyalty. Schrag argues that the identification with the object – and therefore loyalty – arises within the context of a relationship from shared experiences and personal history and is contingent upon this factor. This very much mirrors Fletcher's (1995: 7) stance that "all forms of loyal bonding presuppose relationships rooted in shared histories". Ewin (1992: 408) provides a description conveying the same view, "A group of people who are unfairly persecuted are likely to develop a loyalty to each other, identifying with each other because of their common plight," and goes on to mention that loyalty may also be an expression of gratitude. There is a common thread linking these different views: all consider certain moral values as necessary for the development or maintenance of loyalty. In *Organizational Loyalty*, John Fielder writes that individual's identification with a group or organization is a function of two factors. The first one is shared goals, which comprise affiliation (i.e., the pleasure derived from being a member), recognition (i.e., having the value of own contributions acknowledged by the group or organization), and the sense of worth and accomplishment obtained by achieving valued goals through group efforts. The second one is fairness in the distribution of benefits and workload, and in general treatment by the group or

organization. Fielder (1992: 82) also points out that “not everyone will have the same understanding of what constitutes a fair distribution”. The link between meaningfulness, recognition, and bonds of loyalty is also evident in Haughey’s (1993: 5) description of how organizational loyalty emerges in the workplace, “Loyalty is, therefore, a response to something out there, or to someone(s), some operation, some cause, some community that I take to be trustworthy or at least worth the investment of myself. [...] Loyalty to a company (or to any of its subsets already mentioned) is a response to being heard, valued, cared about, fussed over. [...] Some form of reciprocity is needed to encourage and preserve [sic] affection.” For Haughey, organization exhibits trustworthiness when it accords employees voice and gives them fair compensation for their work. Ewin’s (1992: 412) understanding of how trust and loyalty interrelate helps to avoid the problem of different opinions concerning the acts by which trustworthiness is demonstrated: loyalty depends on one’s feeling that the object of loyalty cares about the right things, making judgments and acting according to those values. In *Corporate Loyalty: Its Objects and Its Grounds*, Ewin provides a wonderful illustration of an executive’s loyalty to a company that is grounded on the company’s value of excellence, which the firm expresses in its products and the executive demonstrates in his work by revealing and correcting inefficiency, incompetence, or corruption of organizational members. Since the object of executive’s loyalty is “the company-with-those-standards”, Ewin (1993: 390) predicts that the executive’s loyalty to the company and the pride related to it will erode if the company stops living the value of excellence.

Since business ethics scholars discuss organizational loyalty without connecting it to the context in which employees’ lives are embedded, in the following two sections I use sociological theories to provide a largely missing perspective on the context – employee – organizational loyalty link. I first review what prominent sociological writings on morality in postmodern times (Bauman 1993; Giddens 1990, 1991; Harvey 1989, 2005)⁵ and the social consequences of neoliberalization and individualization processes (Beck 2007; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991; Harvey 2005) have established when it comes to the prevailing values of the broader social environment, including virtues that are

⁵ There are several synonyms for what Bauman (1997: 19) calls “the time we live now”: “late modernity”, “second modernity” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002), “reflexive modernity” (Beck 1992), “liquid-modern era” or “fluid modernity” (Bauman 2000).

encouraged and fostered as means to achieve them. I organize the discussion along the three major lines of the aforementioned debate: the nature of organizational loyalty (i.e., virtues that loyalty may bring into play, instances of behavior judged to be good, and motives for virtuous conduct in the workplace), its objects in the workplace context, and its grounds (i.e., duration of employment relationships and values that are central to them). I then continue with explanations for differences across individual organizational members drawing on insights from literature on social class.

2.2. Postmodern times and organizational loyalty

So far as the pursuit of values is concerned, self-fulfillment seems to top the ‘life goals list’. To quote from Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 22-23), “The ethic of individual self-fulfillment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time.” The literature suggests that self-fulfillment has many different components; it has been associated with achieving freedom and security (Bauman 2005a), developing personal capacities (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002), being free from dependencies and possessing a sense that one is a good, worthy person (Giddens 1991), pursuing a “life of one’s own” (Beck & Grande 2010: 420) or being true to oneself and following own desires (Bauman 2000, 2005a). The description of the individual whose primary duty is to satisfy own interests accords with many a distinctive characteristic of the “liquid times” we live in, to borrow Bauman’s (2007) expression.

We learn from Harvey (2005) that neoliberalism as a political economic theory advocates the improvement of human well-being through liberation of individuals’ entrepreneurial freedoms and skills in a free market, and the reduction of state interference in it to a provision of supportive institutional framework.⁶ The main argument for the supremacy of neoliberal economic system in allowing individuals to achieve success is

⁶ Jones (2012) provides an excellent review of neoliberal political thought. Neoliberalism is usually linked to theories proposed by Karl Popper, Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman, the last of who belongs to the Chicago School Economics. Unlike Adam Smith’s classical liberalism, which advocates a laissez-faire governmental approach to economic matters (i.e., abolition of governmental intervention in them), neoliberalism prefers the state actively creating conditions for the free market.

based on two beliefs. If we understand the term liberate as “to set free from some kind of fetters that obstruct or thwart the movements; to start *feeling* free to move or act” (Bauman 2000: 16), the first one is that individuals are given the freedom to compete in the market and improve their lot by choosing an occupation or a company from a wide range of options. The second one is that all competing individuals get what they deserve according to their skills, efforts and resources – that is, the market bears equally upon everyone and rewards merit. Hence a perspective on the individual’s character: a good and virtuous person is professionally successful and well-off by virtue of own skills, abilities, and hard work. Personal failure is naturally considered a direct correlate of individuals’ own mistaken educational or occupational choices, wrong strategies, or moral inadequacies (Bauman 2000, 2001). A neoliberal state does not interfere with the competition but promotes deregulation and privatization of life because the interference is unfavorable to freedom and contradicts the assertion that merit determines success. The deregulation of employment relations – understood as a reduction of legislative constraints on the terms on which work is undertaken – and the ensuing diversification of employment contracts and other human resource management (HRM) activities⁷ are meant to introduce individuals to a variety of employment options. This goes hand in hand with employment volatility: everyone is potentially redundant or replaceable as enterprises are also allowed the freedom to make economically sensible decisions. There is no guarantee that a job will not be eliminated and employee discarded if employers, who are now engaged in global competition, decide to restructure, downsize, outsource, technologically innovate, close down their operations, or even turn to investments in financial markets to increase their profits (Bauman 2000, 2001). As Standing (2011: 31) perceptively observes, “The pursuit of flexible labor relations has been the major direct cause of the growth of the global precariat.” Standing (2011: 10) defines ‘precariat’ as people who lack the seven forms of labor-related security: labor market security (i.e., adequate income-earning opportunities), employment security (i.e., protection against arbitrary dismissal), job security (i.e., opportunities for retaining a niche in employment and for upward mobility in terms of status and income), work security (i.e., protection against accidents and illnesses at work), skill reproduction security (i.e., opportunity to gain and use new skills), income security (i.e., assurance of an adequate stable income), and representation security (i.e., possessing

⁷ Hiring, compensation, career development, termination, unions, and so on.

a collective voice in the labor market). Security that was a condition of the organization man's loyalty has therefore become a rare commodity. At the same time, state cuts in public expenditures for social services and welfare confer upon individuals the duty to be self-reliant and to take actions to secure their own education, income, health insurance, retirement funds, or lifestyle in general.⁸ "Dependence' has become a dirty word: it refers to something which decent people should be ashamed of," says Bauman (2001: 72). In a neoliberal state that advocates the liberation of individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills, people are compelled not only to frequently change jobs but also to engage in continuous self-improvement because these two are medicines against economic ruin, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) suggest. To put it another, more positive, way, mobility between employers and lifelong self-development are keys to success in all realms of society, which have been increasingly commodified. The ideal virtuous person is, therefore, the one who sees it as a moral duty to be mobile and proactive, taking charge of own life, who is fully "responsible and accountable for own actions and well-being" (Harvey 2005: 65), and behaves as a competent actor at all times.

Let us consider several implications that the aforementioned processes have for the nature, objects, and grounds of organizational loyalty. The decline in long-term employment relationships and increase in moves between jobs renders the notion of organizational loyalty as the bond that arises from a durable relationship unfeasible. The focus on self-interest and self-care suggests that moral virtues that are constitutive of organizational loyalty have become instrumental for individuals' own gain in the labor market and means to realizing own values in their lives. Loyalty to "organization-with-those-values" as an object will therefore be greatly influenced by the congruence between values that individuals bring to the workplace and those that the organization stands for and lives. Sociological theorists seem to agree with Haughey's (1993) prediction that loyalty in the workplace has become less co-dependent, less fixed to place and persons, and more principled and discriminating. This is further exemplified by two extraordinary illustrations of virtues of character that postmodern conditions are assumed to plant and cultivate. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) write about mobile, adaptable and creative individuals who aspire to be the authors of own biographies. They set long-term goals,

⁸ Lifestyle is a set of routinized practices comprising habits of dress, eating, modes of acting, and socializing that are related to self-identity (Giddens 1991: 81).

carefully plan how to achieve them and endure all frustrations along the way. These people are not autarkic self-entrepreneurs typical of neoliberal societies as described by Amable (2010), but resourceful team players who draw on both own and others' wits. Giddens' postmodern individuals are courageous human beings who do not hesitate to sail into uncharted waters. They have the ability to learn as fast as they move through the unknown. "If your life is ever going to change for the better," says Giddens (1991: 78), "you'll have to take chances. You'll have to get out of your rut, meet new people, explore new ideas and move along unfamiliar pathways." Bauman (1997, 1998) takes a very different view of how individuals go about reaching their objectives. His wandering nomads refuse to think long-term and are neither patient nor stick to any cause or a person because these do not pay off under the condition of uncertainty. Their lives are series of short-term projects that resemble anything but carefully planned career steps (Bauman 2007). In *Liquid Modernity*, Bauman draws a distinction between individuals in terms of *de jure* freedom to lead a fulfilling life and *de facto* chance to follow their heart's desires. Some of them thus wander as tourists, enjoying being in motion, following their passions and pursuing new opportunities, experiences and pleasures. They are self-assertive and expect the work to be entertaining. For them the purpose of a job extends beyond its basic instrumental role of maintaining the versatile lifestyle to being a fun and fulfilling facet of their lifestyle itself – means-end-rational versus value-rational action in the Weberian sense (Beckerman 1985: 228; Weber 1978: 24-25). When the promise of amusement is not fulfilled, they either complain or leave. Others are vagabonds, wannabe tourists who have no other bearable choice but to move because remaining in one place ends in humiliation and boredom. While vagabonds are concerned about their survival in the free economy, tourists feel that they are thriving in it.

We are indebted to Bourdieu ([1984]2010), Lamont (1992, 2000) and Charlesworth (2000) for illuminating how the class-related aspect of the above theoretical elaboration appears in the real Western context, though Charlesworth is exclusively interested in the working class' sense of the world. These scholars reveal the distinctive ways French, American and British people perceive themselves and their social and working environment, and provide deep insights into the multiplicity of institutional factors that inform these differing views. Insightful and well-established research of Pierre Bourdieu and Andrew Sayer shows that societies are hierarchies of positions that offer different

objective chances of access to occupations, resources or experiences which are necessary for living a free, fulfilling life. In other words, individuals are free and have equal opportunities only in theory, and many of them perform jobs that are mundane, mentally unstimulating, dead-end, and underpaid, eroding one's sense of dignity and self-worth. Sayer (2005b: 118) blames the efficiency-driven intra-organizational division of labor for that, "Some kinds of work, paid or unpaid, can be a source of both internal goods and external recognition, but many offer neither and may be stultifying rather than satisfying." People's lasting experience of such occupations results in subjective disposition to see other options as "out of character" (Giddens 1991: 82). Bourdieu commits his entire work to the interplay between people's dispositions, internalized from their structural positions, and their 'choices', perceptions, aspirations, and actions. Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* is a brilliant illustration of distinctive tastes and lifestyles in French society that unify each of its three classes, defined here as groups of individuals endowed with the same habitus. Bourdieu observes that individuals distinguish themselves from others not only through taste but also ethos. Background information on the interviewees that may be found in Appendix A draws attention to some of the grounds of distinction between groups in China.

In the section that follows, I elaborate on Bourdieu's core concepts of habitus, capital and field as the main components of his theory of practice, considering their applicability to this dissertation. Bourdieu (1977: 73) speaks of practice as "action" that agents perform (e.g., gifts, challenge) at a tacit level of awareness, "series of moves which are objectively organized as strategies without being the product of a genuine strategic intention" originating from habitus. In Bourdieu's work, habitus, capital and field function together to explain the production and reproduction of social distinction by families, schools, corporations, government, and individuals themselves. The theory of practice is a model that conceptualizes action as the outcome of a relationship between habitus, capital and field, which is represented by the formula that is offered in Bourdieu's *Distinction*: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu [1984]2010: 95). A simple interpretation would be that behavior that individuals display is a function of their dispositions (habitus) and the sum of the types and forms of capital that they possess, within the current state of the social setting (field) in which they find themselves. I regard bundle of virtues that organizational loyalty entails as product of a set of cultivated, internalized moral

dispositions which generate judgments and actions that signal social position. Anchoring habitus to organizational loyalty helps understand how individuals are positioned both in their workplace and the broader society because “transposable” dispositions manifest themselves across a wide range of fields, including the workplace (see Bourdieu 1981: 312)

2.3. Contribution of Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capital, and field to the study of organizational loyalty

Bourdieu (1981, [1984]2010, 2000b) sees society as an amalgamation of fields,⁹ with each of them comprising different hierarchically organized positions. More specifically, fields are “*systems of relations that are independent of the populations which these relations define*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 106). These positions offer distinctive objective chances and constraints for accumulating, applying or exploiting particular types of capital independent of types and quantities of capital possessed by individuals who occupy them (Swartz 2002). A single firm also functions as a field because it organizes occupational positions or jobs by rank and scope, assigning them specific rewards and employing individuals of different capabilities who actively pursue them (see Bourdieu 2005: 17). Fields are not “dead” structures (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 19) but “arenas” (Bourdieu 1985: 734) where individuals compete against one another for valued goods drawing on their accumulated capital. Individual action is therefore fundamentally interested, aiming at the preservation or maximization of capital of one kind or another, but still ‘reasonable’, ‘adequate’ and ‘practical’ rather than ‘rational’ as the rational actor model suggests. Bourdieu (2005: 8) makes this position clear when he explains that economic interest is socially constructed, “Economic interest, to which we erroneously tend to reduce any kind of interest, is merely the specific form assumed by investment in the economic field when that field is perceived by agents equipped with adequate dispositions and beliefs – adequate because they are acquired in and through early and protracted experience of its regularities and necessity.” Critical of the ‘economists’ for regarding interest solely as a conscious economic calculation that has material profit as its objective, Bourdieu ([1990]2004: 88) expands the concept to allow for the appreciation of various forms of capital by defining it as “what ‘gets people moving’, what makes them get together,

⁹ Social, economic, religious, artistic, cultural, educational, bureaucratic, and so on.

compete and struggle with each other, and a product of the way the field functions". In a nutshell, there are as many interests as there are fields and individuals approach the field in which they act in an instinctive rather than rational manner, through their habitus. Fields function both as sites in which the valued forms of capital are acquired, applied, and used, and as "markets" that determine the worth of certain forms of capital, "reinforcing what is acceptable, discouraging what is not, condemning valueless dispositions to extinction" (Bourdieu [1984]2010: 78). Bourdieu states elsewhere that "capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 101). Fields also provide social settings for habitus to operate, and habitus and field are mutually constitutive. Each individual occupies a position in a field according to the types and quantities of economic, cultural, and social capital that they possess (Bourdieu 1985; [1984]2010). Two alternative forms of capital, which Bourdieu discusses only briefly in his *Distinction*, are symbolic capital in terms of "reputation", "respectability" and "honorability", and "moral guarantees" or "virtue" comprising "asceticism", "seriousness", and "hard work", which I call moral capital in this dissertation (Bourdieu [1984]2010: 285, 333-334). Individuals who are endowed with the form of capital that is seen as desirable in a particular field have a competitive advantage over those who lack it. Moreover, a particular form of capital that is seen as appropriate in one field may not be desirable elsewhere. "The kinds of capital, like the aces in a game of cards, are powers that define the chances of profit in a given field (in fact, to each field or sub-field there corresponds a particular kind of capital, which is current, as a power or stake, in that game)," says Bourdieu (1985: 724). In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu (1990: 53) defines *habitus* as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them." By conceptualizing habitus as "structured structures" and "structuring structures", Bourdieu builds a relationship between the stratified social context and the individual's perception and action: dispositions, which are lasting and transposable to other fields, are learnt and internalized through exercises and socialization experiences associated with the individual's position in the field. The dispositions are "structured structures" in that they reflect objective social divisions and social conditions within which they were instilled (Bourdieu & Thompson 1991: 12). As "structuring structures", the

dispositions generate “schemes of perception, thought, and action” (Bourdieu 1989: 14) that are objectively adjusted to the conditions of existence in which they were inculcated. The internalized dispositions provide individuals with “taken-for-granted acceptance of the fundamental conditions of existence” (Swartz 2012: 105), seemingly natural, practical, “reasonable (not rational) expectations” (Bourdieu 2005: 214), feelings, and practices that “suit their position” (Bourdieu 1989: 19). In other words, what individuals judge as good, appropriate, or reasonable for people of their social standing originates from their dispositions or habitus. What habitus and capital have in common is that both are internalized social structures, acquired and manifested through practice in social fields. The taken-for-granted sense of one’s place in the field and of what is possible or sensible and not in it, which Bourdieu calls *doxa*, is borne out of the relationship between the habitus and the field (Bourdieu 1990: 68). “Consequently, habitus produces practices and representations which are available for classification, which are objectively differentiated,” says Bourdieu (1989: 19). Bourdieu’s notion of habitus enables us to tap into the dimensions of existence which are out of individuals’ control and reason, as habitus operates at a subconscious level. Bourdieu (1981: 313) believes that field and class habitus exist in harmony because there is “a more or less ‘successful’ encounter between positions and dispositions”. In the workplace context, occupational positions involve mechanisms that select individuals with a particular class habitus, and individuals with certain habituses are predisposed to choose certain jobs. “This harmony may be expressed in their sense of being ‘at home’ in what they are doing, of doing what they have to do and doing it happily (in the subjective and objective senses), or with a resigned conviction that they cannot do anything else, which is another way, though a less happy one, of feeling ‘made’ for one’s job” (Bourdieu 1981: 308).

The interplay between the habitus, capital, and field has several significant implications for the study of the nature and grounds of organizational loyalty. First, employees occupying different positions in an organization possess different types of moral capital that signal their social position and that were acquired as the employees moved across different fields, including the family.¹⁰ The organization is the social setting that reproduces social distinction by excluding some employees from the opportunities to

¹⁰ I agree with Atkinson (2014) that family may be understood as a field of social (re)production where the acquisition of moral capital may happen in the context of the struggle to define what is ‘right’ or ‘desirable’.

realize certain values and to exercise certain virtues that are necessary for gaining and maintaining an ascendant position within the field. It also transmits and reinforces moral dispositions that are appropriate and acceptable for a particular position within the corporation. More specifically, the dominant class in the organization erects deliberate barriers to prevent the dominated class from acquiring and displaying the moral dispositions that are seen as 'good' and 'right' for the upper ranks. Given the class differences in habitus as the generative principle of moral perceptions and conduct, employees not only have different notions of the 'good' employee, the 'appropriate' behavior in the workplace, and the 'right' values to pursue through their work, but also execute their job responsibilities or obligations in a different manner. The last implication of habitus for organizational loyalty is that moral judgments and actions directed at the company or any other object in the workplace can be altered by changing social conditions such as current work experience itself. In introduction to *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) rightly argue that the concept of habitus is a powerful means of linking micro- and macro-level of analysis in the study of life in organizations, as it illuminates the interaction between the division of labor in organizations and individuals' judgments and practices that are products of their different habitus.

2.4. Research questions and objectives

The literature review suggests that there are two areas worth exploring. The first one refers to the ways in which class habitus affects how Chinese employees characterize and demonstrate their organizational loyalty. This brings me to the following questions:

RQ1: How do young Chinese employees differ with respect to their organizational loyalty?

RQ2: How do young Chinese employees differ with respect to values that they pursue in their current organization?

These research questions focus on employees as the unit of analysis and will be dealt with in Chapters 3 and 4. The first question aims at identifying the differences in virtues as types of moral capital that are constitutive of their organizational loyalty (i.e., content of organizational loyalty) and that the employees exhibit, acquire and draw upon in

the workplace. We have seen that business ethics researchers agree that organizational loyalty involves a plenitude of moral character traits. There is, however, no clear consensus and relatively little guidance as to the virtues that it entails. The second question serves to unravel the differences in the grounds for organizational loyalty. The literature points to the close relationship between organizational loyalty and recognition, trustworthiness, meaningfulness, or security. Postmodern theories offer a more detailed overview of virtues and values that are attuned to postmodern conditions, proposing that hard work, self-development, mobility, proactivity, authenticity, and responsibility lead to a fulfilling life characterized by freedom, independence, and security. However, the different meanings attributed to these terms suggest the need for obtaining more accurate context-related understandings. I believe that meanings are not only contextually specific, but also socially constructed and continually changing to reflect objective class relations and individuals' subjective perceptions of social reality. This is why Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice and methodological approach in general is of particular importance to this dissertation. My goal is to explore the distinctive perceptions of valued moral capital generated by habitus, including the actions through which its different kinds are displayed in the workplace. I will tap into the employees' understanding of good and appropriate conduct in the workplace and moral judgments of actions that they, their colleagues or supervisors undertake as they perform their job duties. I also aim to gain deeper insights into the intimate link between employees' organizational loyalty and values that the organization lives and breathes by revealing what specific organizational values the employees offer as explanation for their virtuous behavior in the workplace, including their stability (i.e., decision to maintain their membership in the organization over a longer period of time). To resolve business ethics scholars' disagreement about the nature of organizational loyalty in terms of motives, I tackle both questions bearing Bourdieu's view in mind that all action is interested and oriented towards the preservation or maximization of capital of one kind or another. What I explore is how different objects of loyalty interrelate: whether actions that uphold moral virtues in the workplace are judged as valuable in relation to the company (the-company-with-those-values) or seen as good in relation to an object extending beyond the current workplace (values that employees bring to the company).

Since habitus, moral capital and field are intricately intertwined, they cannot be studied as separate concepts. Grenfell (2014: 223) correctly argues – in line with

Bourdieu's presentation of his three-level methodological approach in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* – that “it is the links between individuals (*habitus*), field structures, and the positioning both within and between fields that form a conceptual framework for research”. That is, individual *habitus* accounts gathered through ethnography need to be analyzed with respect to the forms of moral capital that operate within the field, including the structure of its distribution, and finally connected with further analysis of the field in relation to other fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 107-108). Although class *habitus* is the central focus of my investigation, I follow Bourdieu's instruction to gather the knowledge of the field in which it currently operates as such insights are necessary in order to truly understand why employees occupy particular positions in it and possess certain dispositions (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 107). My aim is, therefore, to unravel the interplay between *habitus* and field, understanding the influence of the field on employees, and to locate the organization within the broader social space, finding out why certain virtues and values are most and least pursued in the hierarchy of the field. This brings me to the following questions:

RQ3: How does the organization as a field with particular virtues and values that underpin its structure of positions affect employees' organizational loyalty?

RQ4: How does the organization as a field relate to other fields in the society with respect to the virtues that it encourages and values that it lives?

Chapter 5 provides insights into the organization as a field and the unit of analysis, while establishing the connection with other relevant fields and employees' *habitus* in relation to the desired moral virtues and values. The third question addresses the objective structure of positions in the field, seeking to provide insights into the values that underpin them and enhance the understanding of particular kinds of moral capital that are “the aces in the game of cards” (Bourdieu 1985: 723). In other words, it aims to examine the objective differences in opportunities to exercise virtues and realize values that are available to the employees in the organization (e.g., chances of access to higher positions, opportunities for training and skill development) (see Bourdieu 1977: 21). The fourth question seeks to relate the organization to other fields that are present in the social system, such as the familial, educational, or economic, so as to illuminate how values or virtues typical of structure of the relations between positions occupied within different fields complement or oppose each other. This will allow me to understand more about the virtues

and values encouraged within the organization itself, but also the values that characterize other environments in which employees' habitus operates or has operated. I propose that fields are sites of reproduction of habitus.

These research questions constitute an analytical focus on three facets that are mutually interrelated and can enhance the understanding of how organizational loyalty is perceived, demonstrated, created, maintained, or eroded in the contemporary Chinese workplace. Next section presents the analytical framework that will structure the empirical investigation, offering definitions and explanations of the concepts of organizational loyalty, class habitus, moral capital, moral virtues and values, interest, field, and practice.

2.5. Analytical framework

This dissertation draws upon concepts and insights from several theoretical disciplinary traditions to understand the content and grounds of organizational loyalty of young people in China's contemporary society. These are supplemented by Chinese empirical studies and combined into an analytical framework that allows the analysis of individuals' organizational loyalty in the context of a space of structured positions that are inseparable from habitus and moral capital. Figure 1 presents a way to incorporate the concepts of habitus, moral capital, field, practice, and values into the analytical framework of organizational loyalty in line with the research questions that address two levels of analysis.

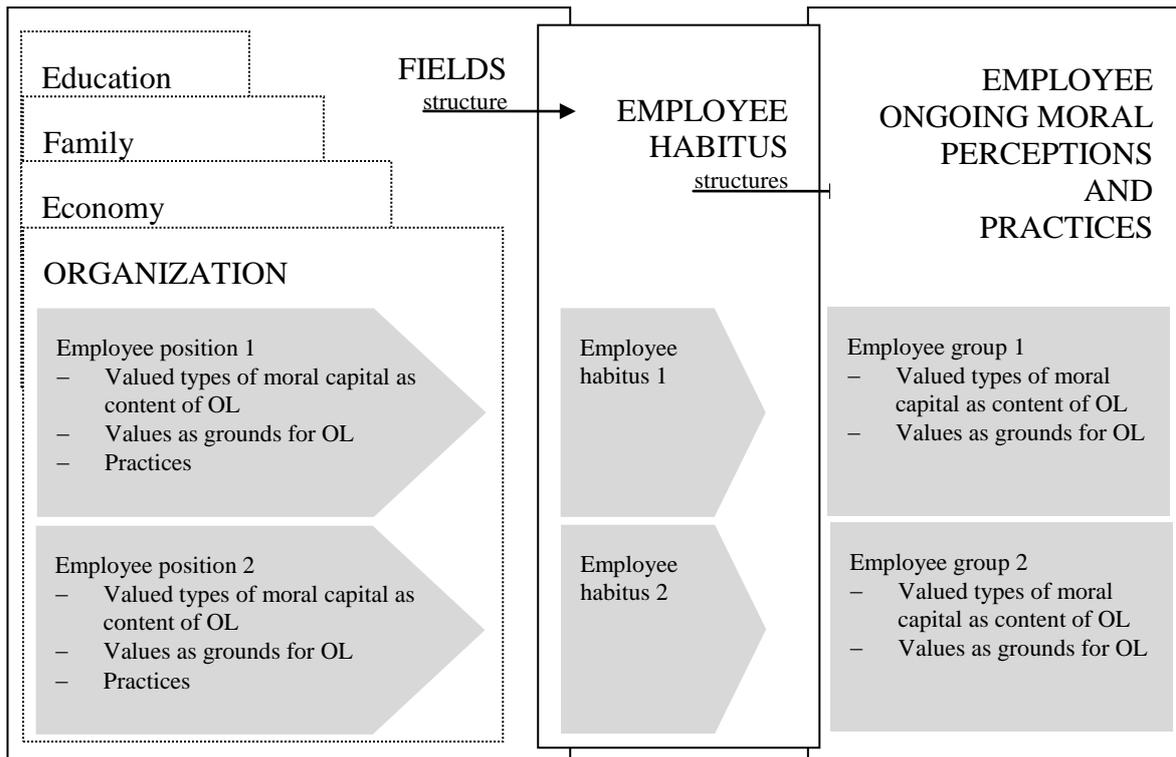


Figure 1. Analytical framework of organizational loyalty as an expression of habitus and type of moral capital

In this study, organizational loyalty is considered to be an expression of habitus shared by members of an employee group, manifesting itself in employee ongoing moral perception and practice in an organization as a field. Habitus is a “disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions” (Bourdieu [1984]2010: 166), structured by past and current objective practices of different fields that are associated with the employee’s position in them (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 134). It is analytical variable applied to explaining the social determination of organizational loyalty. When Bourdieu says, “The *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history” (Bourdieu 1990: 54, emphasis in original), he implies the need to understand that each individual habitus bears the trace of past experiences of the entire group. Practice refers to individuals’ particular ways of behaving in the organization that originate from habitus and that are performed at a tacit level of awareness (Bourdieu 1977: 73). It is also moral education provided by everyday social interaction, including the responses of others, that encourages the development of particular dispositions. Moral perceptions are employee

statements about reality that are virtue and value-laden – that is, they are concerned with moral properties of reality and carry moral weight. Organizational loyalty has valued types of moral capital and values as its content and grounds, respectively. Moral capital refers to a set of virtues or excellences of character that define a ‘good’ or ‘valued’ employee (Kleinig 2014; Swartz 2010). Employees occupy positions in the organization according to the composition of moral capital that they possess; they acquire, enlarge, safeguard or lose their moral capital in their efforts to realize values that matter to them. Values are things that individuals seek to achieve in the context of work and life, regarding them as good and important (Sayer 2011). They are grounds for loyalty or valued goals, while moral capital is means to realize them. Finally, field is a particular context in which individuals find themselves and compete for things that matter to them. The field interacts with individuals’ habitus and moral capital to produce practice (Bourdieu 1977). This dissertation takes a close look at the organization – current workplace that is hierarchically organized into employee positions by the distribution of moral capital, values, and practices associated with them – and its relation to fields of education, family, and economy.

At the level of employees, the analysis explores the differences in the valued types of moral capital and values. It considers the types of character and examples of conduct that young Chinese people perceive as normal, good, right or desirable in the workplace, character traits that they attribute to themselves and to people they hold in high esteem in the work context, behaviors they display at work as they perform their job duties or interact with others, and values that hold them to their organizations. The analysis is also concerned with descriptions of character, people, practices, or aspirations that these young people find bad, wrong, or unthinkable. This data is collected by means of interviews and participant observation. The analysis illuminates differences in employee ongoing moral perception and practice while consulting Western and Chinese sociological studies on class and social stratification, which provide perspective on distinctive aspirations and activities of young working and middle classes as workers, parents, and people in postmodern times. These ethnographic studies also consider individuals’ experiences of job searches, daily workplace routines, promotions, dismissals, and relationships with colleagues and managers, offering important insights into individual perceptions on the rewards that are available to them in the company and the types of moral capital that is sought, accumulated and used in the workplace.

At the level of the organization, a complete picture of the structure of employee positions and their conditions (i.e., moral capital, values, and practices) will be gained by gathering a range of data through interviews with management, participant observation, and analysis of corporate documents. The analysis explores managers' perspectives on practices that they employ to encourage the development of different types of habitus: hiring and firing practices, compensation, training, promotion, work organization, and leadership style. Secondary literature will relate practices in the organization under study to what is known about practices in other companies in the economic field and link them to types of moral capital and values transmitted through practices in the fields of education and family. Using Western and Chinese industrial relations readings, the analysis investigates the implications of China's economic reforms for management practices in companies that operate in different industries under different ownership and consequently for employee habitus. Human resource management studies that draw upon neo-institutional theory and argue that legitimacy concerns encourage organizational isomorphism provide important insights into management practices in offices and on the shop-floor, including the role of managers' taken-for-granted assumptions in organizational conformity to local values and norms. The analysis draws upon ethnographies of class and family to illuminate the differences in values, attitudes and behavior of members of the working and middle classes in terms of education, work and life in general, which translate into different parenting practices. Statistical studies provide insights that can be applied to understanding the relation between the family background and opportunities such as educational and career achievement. Ethnographies of higher education are of immense help in explaining how higher educational institutions and their staff contribute to production and reproduction of hierarchies in terms of moral capital and corresponding hierarchical dispositions in graduates. In the following section I discuss the methodology of the dissertation, focusing on ethnography as a suitable research method.

2.6. Methodology

How does a researcher investigate the link between habitus, moral capital, field, and practice? The examination of habitus and moral capital, both of which are acquired through interaction with social fields and put into play in them, necessitates methodology that captures the directly observable persistent practices and moral evaluations of individuals.

Since this dissertation uses Bourdieu's concepts, it also draws on his methodological offerings. Explorations of habitus have favored ethnography as useful means to illustrate the transmission, (re)production and operation of habitus, such as Wacquant's (1995) study of the pugilistic habitus of boxers in Chicago. Bourdieu himself entered the social world in Algeria to unravel the acquisition of spirit of calculation (Bourdieu 2000a). Ethnography is, therefore, the only method that allows me to capture true meanings of virtues that constitute organizational loyalty of young Chinese people, to understand their reasons for staying in or leaving the company, and how their experience of their social position affects their workplace attitudes and behavior. This is evident in Brewer's (2000: 6) definition of ethnography as "The study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally." According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 3), ethnography is a social research method that possesses five key features:

- 1) people's actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts, [...] research takes place 'in the field';
- 2) data are gathered from a range of sources, including documentary evidence of various kinds, but participant observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones;
- 3) data collection is, for the most part, relatively 'unstructured', in the sense that it does not involve following through a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start, and that the categories that are used for interpreting what people say or do are not built into the data collection process through the use of observation schedules or questionnaires but generated out of the process of data analysis;
- 4) the focus is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scale, perhaps a single setting or group of people to facilitate in-depth study;
- 5) the analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts. What are produced, for the

most part, are verbal descriptions, explanations, and theories; quantification and statistical analysis play a subordinate role at most.

This study takes the interpretivist epistemological stance as it is interested in studying subjective meaning and distinctions among people in terms of how they understand their life inside and outside the workplace (Bryman 2012: 30). The ontological stance is constructionist, underpinned by belief that the social phenomena is socially constructed and that there are multiple realities. Nonetheless, this study takes a step further to overcome the objective/subjective dualism by exploring the objective structure of relations in the field.

2.6.1. Data collection process

I engaged in a seven-month-long fieldwork (September – December 2011; November 2012 – January 2013) that involved examination of corporate documents, observation of office and shop floor activities, and in-depth, open-ended interviewing in a European electrical equipment company in Wuxi, a city in Jiangsu province in China. The company's name 'ElectriCo' is a pseudonym, as are the names of all participants in order to preserve confidentiality. I sometimes leave out the precise information on interviewees' occupation and the department to avoid doing them harm. 'Gallia' is a fictitious name used for the company's home country. Given its size and diversity, ElectriCo was a perfect venue for observing how habitus operates and how it is reinforced or modified by workplace practices. It employed a large, occupationally diverse workforce. Even today the company enjoys the reputation of being one of the best employers in China, making me even more curious about reasons behind its 20 percent turnover rate in 2011. I wondered who was leaving and why. My original intention to conduct observation and interviews in both ElectriCo and another Chinese enterprise went awry because none of the five Chinese companies that I contacted half a year before my fieldwork sent me a response. Fetterman (2010: 36) rightly points out that "access is clearly impossible without some escort." It was unfortunate that I had no 'Vitamin B' or '*guanxi*' as Chinese would say in the world of Chinese electrical equipment manufacturing. Having arrived in Jiangsu province, I nonetheless paid an unannounced visit to a Chinese company, introducing myself as a doctoral student in sociology and asking for an appointment with a general or HR manager. I decided to leave having spent three hours waiting in an empty corridor.

Since I only had four months for the first round of fieldwork, my *sens pratique* told me to abandon my original research design based on two different companies and focus on employees of only one company – ElectriCo. There I had full access to all company’s facilities by virtue of my personal connections (an expatriate manager and a member of HR staff) who knew me well as we used to collaborate on placing my former college students into internships and jobs in their company (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). They introduced me to the company’s top management on the day of my arrival and ensured that my moving about the company and talking with people would not create any suspicion. An additional advantage of having social networks in the field and participating overtly in it revealed itself during the third month of my stay, when my HR acquaintance provided me with an official letter without which the extension of my three-month tourist visa for an additional month would not be possible. As it was very important to me that the company and its employees also benefited from my stay, I offered a pro bono Business English training twice a week to twelve employees.

I conducted 41 in-depth, open-ended interviews that usually lasted one to two hours: 8 of them were with project and department managers, 20 with office employees (professionals with and without a leadership position, and other staff), and 13 were with shop floor employees (interns, workers, and group leaders) whom I randomly picked as I was strolling through the company’s departments and workshops. Shop floor employees were employed in two testing workshops and on two assembly lines, whereas office employees worked in human resources, research and development, strategic procurement, quality management, incoming and shipping, localization, export projects engineering, and business process improvement departments. Three and half years of living in China taught me that building close, trust-based relationships with participants would elicit honest and insightful responses, helping me to represent their views and actions in a genuine, authentic way. My recipe for building trusting relationships contained five main ingredients: 1) revealing my true identity and the purpose of my stay to all; 2) making it publicly known that I did not receive any remuneration from the company but financed my research with my own means; 3) extensive ‘chit-chatting’, sharing personal information voluntarily, and ‘hanging about’; 4) guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality, and 5) demonstrating an unpretentious, understanding, and interested demeanor at all times.

The news of my arrival in the company spread at enormous speed. On the second day of my stay, friends of engineers with whom I shared the office approached me out of curiosity, asking questions about me and my research, and opening up without any initiation from my side. As I had many informal talks with those enthusiastic informants, I was curious whether accounts from randomly selected participants would offer any additional insights. Office staff was extremely motivated to use their English and insisted on being interviewed in it. I refrained from offering them to switch back to Chinese as I wanted to avoid insulting them. There is evidence of Chinese interviewees feeling embarrassed having been offered to switch back into their native language (Welch & Piekkari 2006: 430). I was concerned that speaking a foreign language would have a negative impact on white-collar employees' verbal expression of genuine thoughts and feelings. However, it turned out that these people desired to use English because they were familiar with the language of the topic and often used foreign languages in their workplace, as suggested by Cortazzi and colleagues (2011). I enjoyed these people's tendency to use Chinese idioms and proverbs as they made or legitimized their moral judgments. 'Chinglish' would always bring some good laughter into our talks, keeping them dynamic and exciting. This shared pleasure of humor worked wonders in terms of bringing us closer together. Interviews with production and assembly workers were conducted in Chinese. As there was a great deal of context-dependent vocabulary and phrasing that I did not understand, my strategy to check for understanding was to use it myself and ask workers for correction. I noticed that the teacher-student interviewing approach helped to smooth over educational differences and create a positive bond. Establishing a good rapport and becoming a '*zijiren*' (自己人, an insider) was more important to me than the use of Chinese or English language itself while conducting interviews, as a genuine self-disclosure is a function of the former rather than the latter (Cortazzi *et al.* 2011). Interviews took place both inside and outside the company, depending on interviewees' preference. Some seemed to enjoy using the interview as a good excuse to sneak out of their workplace and take a break while the manager was not around. I also had 17 informal *ad hoc* conversations with 5 blue-collars and 12 white-collars, who were interviewees' managers, colleagues, friends or family members working either in the same company or elsewhere. I believed that these would provide the insightful complement to formal interviews. Using voice recorder during interviews that took place on the shop floor was

rarely possible due to extreme background noise that would render recordings unintelligible. Conversations in quiet surroundings were mainly recorded.

Since habitus is historically constituted, “the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product” (Bourdieu 1990: 56), special attention was paid to individual histories. This is in line with Reay’s (2004: 434) suggestion to operationalize habitus as “a complex interplay between past and present”, which emphasizes the role of the field in replicating or transforming dispositions. Interviews were guided by a set of general questions about current and former employment, which aimed at teasing out subjective values, beliefs and feelings about oneself and others in the workplace, interpersonal relationships at work, one’s job, corporate practices (i.e., hiring, compensation, training, promotion, work organization, etc.), purpose of work, and broader social forces that influenced one’s workplace-related attitudes and behavior. I started without any preconceived ideas about what I would find in the field and was open to surprises. Since the first part of my fieldwork was also my first interviewing experience – which involved plenty of learning by doing – I asked all sorts of questions to gain understanding of the people, issues that were important to them, and the context in which they worked and lived (Fetterman 2010). My attempt to follow Lamont’s (2000) and Barbour’s (2008) advice and refrain from asking leading questions, using value-laden expressions, or imposing my own assumptions was not always successful. For the second round of my fieldwork I prepared a checklist with simple, short and carefully worded general questions that were more effective in eliciting subjective moral understandings, which were often expressed in idioms and metaphors. The questions were informed by relevant sociological theories and empirical research on the implications of class position for workplace attitudes and behavior in postmodern China, as well as my understanding of the field coming from my personal experience (Saldaña 2009; Wacquant 2011). The checklist helped me to collect comparable information from each interviewee and maintain my focus, though it also allowed my interviewees to stray from it and elaborate on topics which they considered relevant (Fetterman 2010; Madden 2017). During the interviews, I sought to identify topics that mattered to them most and reorder my questionnaire accordingly (Barbour 2008). What I enjoyed most were the moments when interviewees asked their colleagues to join the conversation or when the colleagues joined out of curiosity without even being asked.

One-on-one talks would suddenly turn into lively discussions which I continued to silently observe and interrupt only when the discussion went off the topic.

I was certain that an inexperienced interviewer such as me did not always ask the right questions. Being a participant observer and an observer participant during my fieldwork served as a check against my interviewees' subjective accounts and helped me to gain additional information that interviews could not provide (Becker & Geer 1957; Dey 2005). As participant observer, I spent 40 hours per week in the company's offices and workshops observing work routines, interactions among employees, or job interviews. As observing participant, I was given an office space within an engineering department, where I could observe employees' activities and use my computer. These people's kindness and openness gave me a sense of home, so I had to continuously remind myself to keep appropriate distance as a researcher. I was given an identification card to be able to enter the facility, and a canteen card with which I used the canteen free of charge like every other employee. I shared a rented apartment with a female engineer, spent time with her and other employees after their work hours and on the weekends, visited them in their homes, talked with them about their jobs, colleagues, friends, families, life – generally did the same things any other member of their social group would do. I also trained 12 employees in Business English, two of whom were factory workers that were allowed to join at my insistence, and attended the company-organized workshops for management staff. A little notebook was with me at all times; it had a pre-prepared list of units for each observation (date, length, space, actor – act – activity, object, feeling) and space for any interesting (i.e., deviant) observations or utterances I had or heard, including my interpretations of them (Wolfinger 2002). Those comprehensive notes were invaluable to me not only because they helped me to recall the exact sequence of all events, but also because each of these recollections kept me engaged and smiling throughout the whole process of dissertation writing, which felt, at times, like the Tantalus' punishment: the goal was always within my reach yet never attained. The combination of interviews and observations was beneficial in a number of ways. It allowed me the unique opportunity to become a part of the company and obtain a broader perspective of the world of work. I also managed to record a wide array of authentic speech accounts and behavior and identify macro-level structures in those micro-level behavioral forms. Finally, I gained deeper

understanding of class habitus and the moral value of everyday life that otherwise would not be possible.

2.6.2. *Data analysis*

My seven-month-long ethnographic study generated round 300 pages of transcripts and field notes that had to be categorized and analyzed. In his excellent book *An Introduction to Codes and Coding*, Saldaña (2009: 86) suggests using Values Coding to categorize and analyze the data that is collected specially for the purpose of looking into “subjective qualities of human experience” and understanding individuals’ meanings in terms of values, attitudes, and beliefs. He agrees that social context shapes individuals’ self-perception and points out that Values Coding can also help to identify the institutions that these three different constructs derive from (i.e., family, school, media, or peers). According to Saldaña (2009: 89), “a *value* is the importance we attribute to oneself, another person, thing or idea.” It is a norm, principle, moral code that individuals follow. “An *attitude* is the way we think and feel about oneself, another person, thing or idea” (Saldaña 2009: 89), an affective, evaluative reaction. *Beliefs* are anything that individuals take for granted, consider true or factual. In line with Bourdieu’s understanding of habitus as embodied dispositions that structure moral perceptions and practices, I viewed attitudes, values, and beliefs as displays of moral properties of habitus conveyed through speech and actions. All transcripts and field notes were coded according to this logic. In this process, I paid attention to personal and possessive pronouns and antonyms that my interviewees used, as these are also used as tools of distinction in terms of social position or moral responsibilities (Yates & Hiles 2010). This has been confirmed by Griffiths and colleagues (2010), whose interviewees use we/they oppositions regularly, usually ascribing goodness to ‘us’ and badness to ‘them’. Bourdieu’s (1989, 1998, [1984]2010) work offers a plethora of examples of oppositional polarities that individuals use to differentiate themselves from the others: unique/common, bright/dull, free/forced. I followed Manning and Kunkel’s (2013) idea of coding and categorizing beliefs, attitudes, and values separately before identifying connections between them, especially how beliefs and attitudes tie into values. What I obtained was a “values structure” that combined these three aspects into an “intelligible whole” and contained a set of values relevant for each group (Manning & Kunkel 2013: 86). After the first round of my fieldwork, I coded anything and everything

that I collected. In light of my continuous need to re-code my data and refine my interpretations of the codes in their surrounding textual context due to new theoretical and practical insights, which, as Saldaña (2009: 22) claims, is “not always possible on a computer’s monitor screen”, I opted for manual coding and analysis over a coding software.

2.6.3. Reliability and validity

Ethnographic studies are often criticized as unreliable because they are difficult to replicate. The detailed description of methods of data collection provided in this dissertation should allow interested scholars to repeat the study (Dey 2005; Silverman 2000). LeCompte and Goetz (1982) warn of the researcher status effect, meaning that the researcher’s gender or role in the setting may influence the information obtained from respondents. In other words, the data might not be the same even if the study is replicable. Without help from acquaintances, interviewees whom I made friends with and their colleagues and friends this dissertation would certainly not be possible. Neither would the collection of such informative and insightful data. While development of comparable social relationships is essential for obtaining comparable information, my respondents’ reality has many aspects. This dissertation mirrors only some of them. Researchers whose roles in the setting differ from mine might not be able to obtain comparable data, but will certainly be able to detect other interesting facets of the respondents’ lives, which are equally legitimate (LeCompte & Goetz 1982).

Concerning validity, I strongly believe that ethnography excels in it as a method. The findings resulting from ethnographic studies are authentic representations of respondents’ reality because the very aim of interviewing based on neutrally formulated questions is to collect respondents’ genuine thoughts and utterances – something that survey instruments with abstract questions fail to do. Moreover, observations take place in settings where participants actually work and live, and are therefore more accurate portrayals of reality than controlled settings (LeCompte & Goetz 1982). Verbatim quotations and descriptions of observed situations abound in this dissertation, allowing the reader to judge its authenticity (Fetterman 2010). There is evidence that interviews in English with a foreigner result in disclosing more personal information than with a fellow Chinese in Chinese (Cortazzi *et al.* 2011: 525). In the context of international business research, Welch and Piekkari (2006: 430) report interviewer experience that rapport and

trust, which allow interviewees to respond genuinely and openly to questions asked, “might even be achieved by not using their native language – despite the researcher being fluent in it” and that being a foreigner invites interviewees to “actually perhaps say more than they would to someone of their own culture”.

Yet, as success of ethnographic research depends on building close relationships with respondents, the presence of researcher in the process of data gathering is unavoidable. I argue that validity cannot and should not be understood in traditional terms of objectivity and lack of bias. We are not neutral observers or data analysts and it frequently happens that our own perceptions affect our ethnographic research. Reflexivity is one of the strategies to deal with this issue, that is, being aware that subjectivity may interfere and continuously engaging in further inquiry, especially when our interviewees’ responses or observations are ambiguous (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). Before going into the field, I knew that ethnographers are in danger of having own perceptual biases but nevertheless managed to fall into that trap. In November 2011 my supervisor noticed that I immersed myself in my research environment too deep because my preliminary summary of findings was written in a sympathetic tone. I came to care for the people and was mixing my own perceptions with their formulations. He asked me to return to Germany to allow my objective mind regain control over emotions. Pierre Bourdieu used the same strategy when he realized that Loic Wacquant allowed himself to be “naively embraced [by object] and constructed by it” (Wacquant 2011: 88) during his study of professional boxers. As I had some of my interviews recorded and kept detailed interview and observation notes, I was able to re-code and re-write the results. Being out of the field and having interview transcripts and systematic conversation and field notes certainly prevented me from giving a distorted view of the experiences that interviewees shared with me (Becker & Geer 1957; LeCompte & Goetz 1982). Researcher presence may also cause respondents to alter their attitudes and behavior. I experienced the unwanted researcher effect in terms of educational level during my first talks with production and assembly employees about their education. They had the tendency to provide responses which were more echoes of the dominant beliefs about the excellence of university education than expressions of own thoughts and feelings about own learning experiences. I did not consider this an obstacle but explored whether the sense of inferiority which I inferred and which Yu and Yang (2008) also report in their study in Taiwanese context might have been something else. I

noticed that using humor and playing down the educational difference would effectively neutralize this effect and ‘set the ball rolling’.

The most serious threat to validity of my interpretations was, in my opinion, my non-native level of Chinese. Misunderstandings during the interviews and conversations, as well as misinterpretations of utterances during the analysis were frequent. What helped me to arrive at the right definition was asking informants for clarification immediately and using the word, idioms or metaphors I heard to create sentences (Madden 2017). Observation provided a great deal of opportunities to both use and witness the usage of specific vocabulary in its natural context. When there was a risk of interrupting the conversation flow, I would wait until the discussion ended. This approach had astonishing results in terms of additional knowledge it provided. I was impressed by my respondents’ ability to use a variety of creative techniques to show me what they really meant. They told jokes, stories, drew stick figures and graphs, even suggested literature for reading. Whenever I asked them to write down the words and phrases in my notebook, I had the impression that that they did it gladly. To my interviewees I was a foreigner, someone who needed more explanation about circumstances in China, and I had the feeling that they felt obliged to explain everything in great depth. When participants were not around, I asked a Chinese friend of mine teaching English to look at my transcripts and clarify.

2.6.4. Ethical considerations

I would like to reflect on some ethical dilemmas that I had during my fieldwork in China. These were related to three codes of research ethics mentioned in Silverman’s (2013) handbook of qualitative research: obtaining informed consent, voluntary participation and the right to withdraw, and doing no harm. Observation involves not only the managements’ permission, which was oral and informal due to the very informal nature of my stay in the company, but also the participants’ approval. Handing out informed consent forms seemed absurd to me in a country where contracts bear little formal significance and many people work without them. I decided that the best way was to approach each of my respondents personally, introducing myself and my research in detail, explaining why their views mattered to me, informing them that nobody would know that I talked to them because they would be given false names, and finally asking if they were interested in taking part in it. If yes, I would ask for their permission to record conversations and take notes during

observations, explaining that these methods would help me to accurately present their concerns in the dissertation which I would publish later on. I made it clear that they did not have to participate if they did not wish to, and that they could tell me at any time if they did not want me observe them or talk to them anymore.

Yet, to which extent is the respondents' consent truly informed? Those whom I befriended felt comfortable to reveal their deepest thoughts and feelings at all times by virtue of our close relationship. There were certainly moments during which they were not aware that their words might be published in my dissertation. As protection of my respondents' identities was more important to me than the relevance of their accounts for my research, I decided to exclude stories or personal information that might have lead to poor workplace relationships or do them any other harm. Ethical issues occur spontaneously in the field and there are no ultimate recipes for dealing with them. Our actions may hurt our respondents without us even being aware of it. It is nevertheless possible to predict some ethical challenges before entering the field and devise counter-strategies. I encourage researchers who pursue similar endeavors to anticipate at least some of the ethical puzzles they might have to solve and think of solutions in advance to avoid being caught in an intricate web of moral dilemmas that spoil the pleasure of ethnography.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter placed the study of organizational loyalty within business ethics literature and sociological studies of postmodern times and class, suggesting that the exhibition of virtuous behaviors that organizational loyalty requires is an avenue to a life imbued with personal value. It then elaborated on Bourdieu's theory of practice as useful means to understand the driving forces behind Chinese employees' distinctive perceptions and practices in relation to organizational loyalty. It also presented a conceptual and analytical framework that guides the study. Finally, it dealt with data collection process, data analysis, reliability and validity of the study, and ethical considerations. We may now move on to look more closely at distinctive moral perceptions and actions of young Chinese people generated by their habitus.

3. Content of organizational loyalty: virtues as types of moral capital

This chapter begins our focus on virtues that inform moral perceptions and practices of ElectriCo's employees. To determine which types of moral capital these people possess and value, I talk to them about their job duties and responsibilities, daily activities of the workplace, and interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates. I invite interviewees to describe themselves and their role models in the work context and give examples of organizational members that they dislike. I encourage interviewees to outline and elaborate on personal qualities that they consider to be appreciated or disapproved of in their work setting, paying particular attention to virtues they demonstrate to achieve their valued goals in the company. These attribute questions are inspired by Fetterman (2010) and Lamont (1992, 2000). The bundle of virtues uncovered by interviews is supplemented by instances of virtues observed in employees' actions and interactions in the offices and on the shop floor. Let us discover the key qualities of "good", loyal employees, and the actions that are part of their workplace loyalty.

3.1. Being 'the best in class': white-collars' appreciation of expertise and lifelong learning

White-collars display a strong commitment to becoming experts and believe that expertise is acquired and further developed through a combination of study and real-world experience. They are proud of their academic qualifications though not by virtue of knowledge that these are supposed to embody. Wang Wei, research and development (R&D) project manager, thinks that Chinese university-level education does not suffice once one begins a job because it is based on broad and diverse theoretical knowledge:

“Actually for mechanics, structure, if it's really detailed things, it's really hard to know everything about that because for my major, mechanism [mechanical engineering] includes a lot of, a lot of things, you are not able to be an expert in each field. Which is why the school teachers teach a lot of things, very large scale. [...] We have, how to say, just structure about all the knowledge about mechanical engineering, we will learn something useful, just general knowledge about this field, but for really, really detailed, the final, how to say he he, really theoretical things, it's really hard to learn it in four years. [...] Because this [major] definitely in China will not be your really related to your job.”

Wang Wei understands that having a university degree with good grades does not make him an expert and that he cannot rely solely on academic qualifications to complete job-related tasks. The degree is highly valued because it opens doors in terms of career opportunities. Wang Yang, staff member, claims that “the name of the university matters”, because it determines one’s chance of getting a “decent job” after graduation. “Decent” may mean fulfilling, interesting, secure, easy or well-paid (Woronov 2011). Wang Yang defines a decent job in terms of status, which, as she believes, affects her opportunities to better herself. This is evident in her statement that “the brand of the company” and being “famous” are very important considerations for her in choosing a job, “It is very important for young people to work in a famous company because they can learn more and improve themselves.” To increase her chances of finding decent employment, Wang Yang obtained an additional “certificate” during her study, “Because at that time it was easier for you to get a job if you passed that examination.” Chen Kai, R&D team leader, believes that he got his first job easily because of his “good score” (Hoffman 2010; Rosen 2004). As he cheerfully reports, “In my grade I was always among first ten people.” For Shen Jian, quality management (QM) supervisor who graduated from the university, promotion to management is inconceivable without the university degree, which is “a key to the door” (一个门开, *yige menkai*). The university graduation certificate acts as an important indicator of good moral character and signals white-collars’ potential to become competent in their work. This is expressed by Xu Xiaoyang, R&D engineer, as she recalls the interview for an engineering position at ElectriCo, which she attended shortly after graduation, “I did a test, there were questions about my technical knowledge, [...] I didn’t do that well because I really knew nothing about ElectriCo products, it wasn’t my major. And he [department manager] asked me if I am ready to learn more about the job here, and I answered this question very carefully. I said, ‘I believe I can become competent in my work because I have always been a good student who studied hard.’”

When asked how he deals with technical problems, Tang Weiye, a newly appointed customer quality manager, says, “For our function, [...] you should have very good background about quality, knowledge to distinguish the cause of the problem. You should have this knowledge because you are responsible for it.” The description that he provides suggests that being competent means possessing occupation-related subject knowledge, as well as being able to draw upon it to solve problems and get the work done successfully.

Incompetent white-collars are objects of scorn and even publicly criticized. During a team meeting that I observe, a team leader gives an angry response after hearing from his team member that a long-prepared, expensive test – for which the latter was responsible – failed for unknown reasons, “When the problem occurred some time ago the leader [领导, *lingdao*] asked you why. If you continue to say, ‘I don’t know,’ we all know how he is going to respond to that, ‘You are the test engineer, you should what what,’ right? When he is in a good mood, he’ll tell you, ‘Make sure it doesn’t happen again.’ When he is in a bad mood, ‘Why, why!’ Then you’ll feel such tremendous pressure, you’ll feel even more uncomfortable, right?” Cao Lihua, engineer, feels quite content with her transfer to another department because she is not fond of working with a manager who lacks product expertise. She declares, “I was lucky to have the chance to transfer. It must be very hard for Mr. Xu Honghao and Mr. Jiang Dongbo to work with Gu Chen. [...] he doesn’t have any technical knowledge about ElectriCo’s product and it is very hard for him to help engineers when they meet problems.” For white-collars, the worst kind of manager to work for is the incompetent know-it-all. Cai Lili, HR staff member, illustrates such a character when she explains why she celebrates the dismissal of one of ElectriCo’s managers, “He does not possess any technical knowledge and he has two assistant managers below him, so these guys are having hard time with him. He does not take other people’s views into consideration but he insists on showing that he knows about technical stuff. And when he is at the meeting with technicians, it is very hard for him to justify his thoughts with technical people who know what they’re doing.”

White-collar interviewees speak positively – and in fluent English – not only of their “knowledge” but also of their versatile “skills”. The broad skill set, which they gained in ElectriCo or elsewhere by their own effort, allows them to perform all duties that are part of their current role successfully. Talking about qualities that enabled him to become a quality department manager, Sun Hao mentions product knowledge and a wide range of practical abilities such as “communication skill” and “three years workshop management skill experience”. Ellie, strategic purchasing staff member, and Wang Yun, engineer, talk about “negotiation skills” and the ability to “organize things”, “sort the mess out”. Expertise is therefore the sum of theoretical knowledge relevant to the job, the ability to apply it practically as demanded by the occupation, and a variety of other job-related practical skills. White-collars admire colleagues and managers who not only know their

jobs well, but also exhibit mastery of a wide range of “classical skills” (Griffiths 2013: 45) that reflect a person’s high level of cultivation. Sun Hao’s role model, for example, is a colleague from his former company whom he admires for his skillfulness in tai chi and ancient swordplay. Hu Jinzhu, R&D engineer, speaks highly of Zhang Juzheng, Yu Qian, and Wang Shouren, historical figures whom he describes as “great people” and whom he is very fond of because they were not only good politicians, but also great generals and excellent calligraphers.

According to Jason Yang, ElectriCo’s general manager, a loyal employee has “the best in class” mindset. I ask him what that means and he gives examples of Gu Chen, who has managed ElectriCo’s IT department for five years, and Wu Xiaoling, newly promoted female manager responsible for business process improvement:

“I offered him this opportunity, planning, logistics, everything but not so experienced, they started to learn. [...] He think, ‘I am going, my function is going to be the best, I’m trying to be the best,’ [...] so they they they are really group of people that really try to pursuit perfect, they have passion to be perfect. Wu Xiaoling, [...] that lady is really, how to say, have a passion to be the best, ‘When I do the lean I should be better than Xu Lei, I should be better than [sister company in] Shanghai, or better than [headquarters in] Gallia. So I really impressed with this young lady, is driving, even eager to do things starting from basic, the view is not, she has the view but they really should start from we call very primary stage, learning step by step.”

Being “the best in class” is associated with intense eagerness to acquire new knowledge and skills that are needed to succeed in the job. Cai Lili’s illustration mentioned earlier points to the importance of being willing to question own knowledge, which is an integral part of being the very best at what one does. “They are required to fit the different roles, maybe different role very quickly. I need a quick learner,” says Xu Cheng, assembly and testing department manager, hinting at the ever-changing nature of the workplace and the importance of being flexible. White-collars’ positive disposition towards lifelong learning is a demonstration of their flexibility. Sun Hao and Zhang Jialin, R&D team leader, describe their continuous effort to learn humbly from others by quoting Confucius, 三人行，必有我师 (*san ren xing, bi you wo shi*).¹¹ “If there are three people, there must be one man who can teach you something. So there must be many people who you can learn

¹¹ From *Discourse on Teachers* (师说, *Shi Shuo*) by Han Yu (768-824).

from,” explains Sun Hao. “So you don’t feel, ‘I’m the best, I’m super,’ no, you’re not super, maybe somebody can teach you something,” says Zhang Jialin, who seems very well aware of the limitations of his own knowledge. Wu Xiaoling tells me that she likes relaxing in the park in her spare time, preferably with a management book in her hand. During working hours, she puts the theory she learnt into practice, with a goal of bettering both herself and her team members:

“Currently I am reading a book called *Golden Mind*, it’s a storybook with lean philosophy. [...] And during my maternity leave I read another book called *Target*, also borrowed from another manager from this company. [...] After reading this book, during the weekly or bi-weekly department meeting with my colleagues, I always ask him, ‘What’s your target for this task,’ because I found that they submit reports with mistakes, the format is unclear, so I ask him what’s the target behind everything, it helps him to make some improvements.”

Wang Heng, HR manager, also embraces the practical aspect of continuous learning, believing that his hands-on experiences will allow him to reap greater financial rewards in the future. He explains, “Compared with market [level], I am only paid half. [...] If ElectriCo doesn’t recognize me, maybe other company will give me this opportunity. [...] I’m learning by doing. That is why I am putting much effort into doing different things, because by doing I’m gaining experience, and this experience will make me more valuable in the market.” Similarly, Meng Hanwen, incoming and shipping manager, sees a direct connection between a certificate that he obtained and his present role at ElectriCo, “I also took a public test at the customs bureau, that certificate was very important for my advancement.”

The flexible mind of a lifelong learner is “proactive”, “persistent” (坚持, *jianchi*) and “creative”. Sun Hao describes his role model as a man of “strong mind”, “eager for success” and further elaborates on these two concepts:

“In work he is focused on improving his knowledge in specific field and after duty I still remember weekly we had English corner, [...] this colleague he participated every time. Whenever I went to English corner I saw him. He asked many questions, he was really proactive during the English corner. [...] He know what he want, and he can put it into practice, and also he insists in developing, 坚持 [*jianchi*, persists], so I think it’s quite important.”

Proactivity is manifested in white-collar workers' self-initiated efforts to master knowledge and competencies required on the job, such as asking questions, seeking guidance, or searching for information on their own. "You know, I found there is no confirmation or order to make you to learn or not. You have to find it out by yourself, realize that and learn it," says Ellie. Rather than waiting for feedback, she seeks it from her manager and gathers resources in anticipation of future needs. As she explains, "You have to have that ability or the habit to collect or to search that information in case you need it so you can optimize those kind of resources for your work or your thinking." When faced with a defect or a problem at work, Chen Kai immediately asks experienced colleagues for help or consults Internet and Baidu¹² to determine their root cause. To grow professionally and deal with workplace challenges, Huang Bowen, engineer, uses multiple resources. He says he "read so many technical books" and asked his blue- and white-collar colleagues, supervisors and other experts in his field to "teach" him.

White-collar workers demonstrate persistence when they keep on pursuing a long-term plan for their personal growth even when the pursuit gets tough. "I have someone who I respect and learn from. I admire his learning and self-development, but the probability to become like him 不大 [*buda*, not high]," says Chen Kai, laughing. "It is Liu Chuanzhi." In his career planning, Chen Kai follows the example of this prominent Chinese businessman and the founder of Lenovo, who "has clear and far vision regarding the development of his company, product development or own career". These young people do not simply flit from one occupation or employer to another. Chen Kai and other white-collar interviewees have been holding on to their specific or closely related occupations and would "jump" (跳槽, *tiaocao*)¹³ into other jobs only if they assured continual growth and financial betterment. Even at the expense of temporary separation from his future bride and the related emotional distress he is experiencing, Zhang Yin, R&D engineer, is determined to remain committed to his profession. He believes that this commitment is a key to a successful career in engineering, which will turn him into a man whom his girlfriend finds financially suitable enough to marry, as we shall see in the next chapter:

¹² Chinese search engine.

¹³ 'Jump' and its Chinese equivalent '*tiaocao*' is frequently used by my interviewees to describe voluntary turnover. Woronov (2011) translates the Chinese word as "jump feeding troughs".

“It is important that I remain in the same profession and develop. If I changed the profession, even if I moved to another industry I would have to learn from the scratch and that would take too much time, and it would be hard. For example, if I designed some medical equipment, I would have to learn everything from the beginning. [...] So I knew that in order for the two of us to be together later, I had to leave her. Now it is very hard for me emotionally. I am talking to her every day because if we do not keep in contact our relationship will become worse.”

White-collars value persistence and long-term planning in their private and family spheres. This is demonstrated both by Zhang Yin, who prepares for marriage by saving up for an apartment and a car, and by Tang Weiye, who saves up for his so far unconceived child’s education. “I was thinking of buying a car and we will have a baby in two years,” says Tang Weiye as he reveals his family planning strategy. Having a baby at present is for him and his wife unreasonable and economically unmanageable, “Because the education for children is too expensive, so we have to start saving up enough money for that.” Similarly, Wang Yun proudly reports, “I never had a weekend for four years in my university because every weekend I had to go to learn French and it was very far away from my college.” She says she was curious about learning French during her study and did not mind giving up weekends to learn it.

Ensuring success at work by coming up with new ideas and being committed to experimentation is a sign of creativity. Wu Xiaoling learns that the new 3I system that she conceived is to be implemented company-wide. Bursting with excitement, she tells me, “This experience is really fantastic!”¹⁴ Talking about a project she is responsible for, Wen Chenxi, R&D team leader, reveals her desire to “design something extraordinary and think of some great ideas”. While we talk, she draws my attention to the fact that the continuous external pressure for cost reduction encourages her to be creative, as she often has to replace her old designs with new ones that are below the cost limit. Wen Chenxi exhibits a ‘can-do’ attitude and expresses her conviction that nothing is impossible for those with imagination by using the expression 没有做不到, 只有想不到 (*meiyou zuobudao, zhiyou xiangbudao*), which she translates as “there are only things you cannot think of, but no things you cannot accomplish”. Based on a company-wide Employee Engagement Survey

¹⁴ As Wu Xiaoling explains, 3I is a “motivation policy to call everybody to contribute with ideas and then the company can pay them for their improvement ideas”. It involves a suggestion box as a formal communication channel and relies on formal criteria for suggestion evaluation and rewards.

in 2011, Wang Heng concludes that “people here are not open to trying to find new ways of addressing business challenges”. This finding, however, might be related to the fact that some of ElectriCo managers do not approve of subordinates’ creative thought and action. Many young managers such as Sun Hao, Wang Heng, Wu Xiaoling, and Gao Jingyu, a young manager from ElectroCo’s sister company in Shanghai, are strongly against such managerial behavior.

3.2. Being a ‘common’ worker: blue-collars’ practical expertise

Quite contrary to white-collars, blue-collars talk little about their schooling and knowledge they gained from it. Moreover, they often try to avoid answering questions about their education by completely changing the subject. Wang Yanhui, whose responsibility is to operate a computerized numerical control machine and maintain email correspondence with a related department, is one of the few workers who provides an evaluative answer to the question about the knowledge she gained at the college that she graduated from. Her response touches upon the appreciation of learning, “Our college is not so good. As majority of students have not attended [general] senior high [高中, *gaozhong*], there is no such experience, there is no strong learning awareness [对学习的意识不怎么强烈, *dui xuexi de yishi bu zenme qianglie*]. We studied only year and a half and then did an internship in a machinery company in Wuxi.”

Blue-collar workers’ practical skills typically attained from specialized training or experience in an occupation rather than their educational credentials play a pivotal role in recruiters’ decision to hire them for a specific blue-collar post. White-collar team leaders, line supervisors, and managers assess blue-collar workers’ competence during the interview by checking their company and product knowledge, ability to describe production processes in a former company, and the ability to use tools or operate technical equipment related to the job for which they apply. I observe Tom, a 47-year-old manager, while conducting an interview in one of ElectriCo’s meeting rooms. There are six candidates sitting at an oval table and some company magazines placed in front of them. None of the candidates skims through the magazine stack. Tom gives me a bottle of water, takes one for himself, and gives none to the first candidate with whom he talks. The five remaining candidates can hear the job interview because there is only a two-meter-high

wall of shelves between the three of us and them. One of the remaining candidates leaves abruptly during the first interview. Tom says confidently that it takes him five minutes and five questions to know if a candidate is a good fit for the job: 1) Tell me something about yourself and your work experience. 2) What tools did you use and can you describe the process to me? 3) Do you know what we produce and did the HR agent tell you anything about the job here? 4) Tell me more because I want to see what skills you have and if I can use you. 5) Do you have any questions for me?

“I worked in Guangzhou in a shoe factory for three years,” says the first interviewee. “I did not use any special tools to make shoes.” He cannot name the machinery in the factory, but makes every effort to explain his previous job in detail. He says he does not know much about ElectriCo, its products, or the job for which he applied. Tom gives his evaluation, “He is very honest. I know that if I gave him an order he would listen and do the work. But he knows nothing about machines, he is from the countryside and he never used them.” “I worked in a factory that produced glass,” says the second candidate. He precisely describes the tools he used and mentions performing some machine work too, though he cannot exactly name the factory equipment that he operated. “I also worked as a waiter in a restaurant.” The second candidate knows about ElectriCo’s country of origin and mentions its good reputation, but does not know what it produces. Tom concludes, “Look how young he is! He just graduated, he is the same age as my daughter. But he also said he worked as a waiter, I cannot use him in this company, he should continue to work in a restaurant then.” The interviewees are not ‘useable’ because they do not have the “practical skills” (技能, *jineng*) that Tom needs. He further elaborates, “I want them to be able to use tools that are here, that they have the skills they can use in this plant. I can tell immediately after I hear what they did before if they can do the job or not.”

Interestingly enough, blue-collar workers show little awareness of the impact of their skills, traits and work history on their employment. This is demonstrated by Liu Kang, a worker in a testing workshop, as he shares his perception of difficulty in finding a job, and offers his understanding of the fact that none of the above candidates was hired, “Job is not hard to find, a job like ours is not hard to find. It is not so difficult [to get a job in ElectriCo]. [...] I don’t know, no, maybe they had bad luck, the company didn’t need many people, it wanted to choose a bit more carefully. If hundreds of people came, there is less

chance and if there are tenish, the chance is higher. It depends on the company's personnel needs.”

As Liu Kang's co-worker Yu Long and other workers in the same workshop tell me that they are not involved in any kind of improvement activities or decision-making related to their job tasks, including the quota setting, I ask them how they feel about the absence of worker participation. Yu Long and his unnamed colleague's response reveals that they see themselves as “masters of their trade” or “professionals” (内行人, *neihang ren*) who place a great value on their extreme “familiarity” with (非常熟悉, *feichang shuxi*) and “understanding” of the job (非常理解, *feichang liaojie*) gained through direct personal engagement in work. Moreover, they differentiate themselves from white-collars by calling them “laypeople” or “amateurs” (外行人, *waihang ren*), stating that white-collars know nothing about the job itself because they spend their time in the workshop “just standing”, refraining from doing the work. To understand better the group's perspective on white-collar/blue-collar distinction, I follow up with a direct question “How do blue-collar and white-collar workers differ?” Yu Long begins by saying that the difference lies in the “education degree” (学历, *xueli*). “They have theoretical knowledge [理论知识, *lilun zhishi*],” he adds. Liu Kang feels the need to provide a more thorough explanation:

“They think they have a higher income than you, a more relaxed working life than you [比你工作轻松, *bi ni gongzuo qingsong*], their education degree is higher than yours, they live a better life than you [比你生活的好, *bi ni shenghuo de hao*], like that. It is mainly a kind of attitude [主要是一种态度, *zhuyao shi yizhong taidu*], they think they have more advantage than you [比你过得优越, *bi ni guo de youyue*]. They think they, speaking about white-collars in general, in China, first and foremost they received superior quality education [高档教育, *gaodang jiaoyu*], those universities, university education, university participation rate in China, from senior high to university, it can be said that out of one hundred people coming from a senior high only ten people can attend university. That is to say, they received good education; afterwards they normally work in an office, quite a relaxed manner. These aspects created a feeling of superiority in them [优越感, *youyue gan*], they think themselves excellent [觉得自己很优秀的, *juede ziji hen youxiu de*]. I don't know if your people are also like that, but it's like this in China: blue-collars and white-collars are two social strata [阶层, *jieceng*],¹⁵

¹⁵ Since the 1990s, the term ‘阶层’ (*jieceng*, stratum) has been commonly used instead of ‘阶级’ (*jieji*, class) when discussing the patterns of social stratification in China (Ren 2013).

[draws upper and lower line with his hand] one like this, the other one like that. They are not on the same level, they think they are a level higher than you. [...] They think they are very important, the most important people in the company. [imitates a white-collar] ‘And these people below [下面的这些人, *xiamian de zhexie ren*], if they are gone, if they leave, can be recruited.’ Like us, if we are gone, if we leave, they [managers] can go to the talent market and hire another batch of people. The company is like that, looks for new [people].”

It is quite common that blue-collars ridicule white-collars for showing off with their educational background while being unable to do the work, especially in the skilled worker circles. Take Dong Can and Li Haomin, two skilled workers in another testing workshop, who feel proud of their experience gained through being in “close contact with the product” (接触产品, *jiechu chanpin*) and bitter about being excluded from department team meetings. “They needn’t us,” says Dong Can in English. Li Haomin adds in Chinese, “We have more experience than they do, perhaps even more than new recruits. Many newly recruited engineers are – they are fresh graduates.” Dong Can concludes, again in English, “But they never hear from workers!” A shared feeling of commonness and dispensability, which is at the core of blue-collar workers’ identity, surfaces in both Liu Kang’s and Yu Long’s story. “There is a saying in our China, a three-legged toad is hard to find, a two-legged man easy [三条腿的蛤蟆不好找, 二条的人好找, *santiao tui de hama buhao zhao, ertiao de ren haozhao*]. People with two legs are common [普遍, *pubian*], if you don’t want to work, there are people who want,” says Yu Long. Yet, blue-collars are flexible in terms of their ability to shift between different workshops and posts according to their employer’s needs. Since learning the ropes in lean production workshops happens fast and without any formal guidance because tasks are simple, Yu Long and Liu Kang are often being shuffled between workshops according to fluctuation in orders.

When asked if he knows about the content of his co-workers’ assignments, Liu Kang says that familiarity with the job at hand is his only concern. However, he is a rare example of a worker who can precisely describe every single step of the production process in other workshops, probably because he has been rotated between different manufacturing tasks since he started working at Electrico. Tao Jun, group leader in an assembly workshop, points out that rotations and transfers are not open to everyone. As he explains, “lending people” (借人, *jieren*) is possible because the production lines “belong to the same big boss” (属于一个大老板, *shuyu yige da laoban*). Another evidence of Liu

Kang's detailed and insightful knowledge of ElectriCo's operations is his ability to name all topic areas, customers and production sites in China. "When I came my boss showed me how to use it [the testing machine]. I just know that it's not good when the red light goes on so I'm paying attention to that," says Yu Long. He believes that there is nothing left to learn concerning his current tasks and shows no interest in knowing more about production process. Cooke (2004) received a similar response conveying disinterest in job-related details from a worker she interviewed. Tao Jun says he knows where he needs to click to place orders in SAP, but is not curious to know what function other window buttons fulfill.

Wang Yanhui gives me a negative answer when I ask her if she understands the English expressions that she receives in work-related emails. She does not seem to be interested in looking them up in a dictionary and her eyes remain fixated on Chinese text. Lu Man, quality assurance supervisor promoted from the shop floor, tells me that his job requires him to improve his English because he has to maintain written communication with foreign colleagues. "I simply cannot memorize the vocabulary," he says, adding that he skips English training because he forgets the words easily. Dong Can and his co-worker Qu Hao belong among those very few blue-collar workers who speak English. These two fervent practitioners of English language speaking would seize every opportunity of my presence to improve it. Those who are not endowed with this ability make up the majority and relate their lack thereof to external influences, such as work occupying all of their time, lack of in-house training opportunities for blue-collar workers, or foreigner-free environment. When asked if he can speak English, Liu Kang replies, "I can't, I can't speak English ha ha ha! We learnt it at school, cannot speak it anymore, forgot everything, now only remember a few words. We don't have the opportunity to get in touch with foreigners. Not speaking it too much, had only one subject at school and learnt a little bit. Haven't spoken it many years, forgot it." When asked about his role models, people whom he admires and learns from, Tao Jun replies that he does not have any, not even in the context of work. Recalling his first days at ElectriCo, he remarks that he mastered his job on his own. "There were no people to help," says Tao Jun. "There were some from Gallia but they all went back. I occasionally asked the technical engineering department, and went to Gallia. Gallian worker and I didn't talk much – you understand, I understand and it is enough. Like you, your English is good and your Chinese too, but sentences can have so

many different meanings. Only changing the intonation can cause a misunderstanding. So it was better not to talk too much.”

Gong Kai, assembly worker on Tao Jun’s team, also points to the importance of independent experiential learning as he shares his memory of experimentation during his first internship in a PC-company. He says, “You had to learn a lot by yourself, they wouldn’t teach you too many details, you’d slowly feel your way through it [自己去慢慢摸索, *ziji qu manman mosuo*], you would know from before which aspects are similar.” Blue-collar workers are accustomed to focusing only on immediate tasks and learning the ropes on their own. Lu Man reveals that he managed to advance to line supervisor position by virtue of his active and independent pursuit of further work-related knowledge and skills outside the company. “I learnt by myself, read books about electrical industry, attended external training, that teacher would always answer any question you asked him. There are different levels of training for electricians, basic, intermediate, advanced. And then after class we would invite the teacher to eat with us, visit him at his home to ask questions, and I learnt slowly this way,” says Lu Man, describing his vocational training experiences.

Yu Long, Liu Kang and other blue-collar workers prefer accumulating popular knowledge and being well informed about latest events worldwide to learning new skills to cope with future job demands. Zhao Bei, intern from a local college working full-time in Tao Jun’s assembly workshop, says that he is not only a passionate reader but also a casual novel writer. He gives the impression of trying to escape the reality of his work by immersing himself in the literature he likes:

“My favorite author is Tang Jia San Shao,¹⁶ his novels are Western-style fiction. The first time I read his novels I liked them and wanted to continue to read. I like him because his writing is directed at young people who study or work, offering them emotional comfort, which is why I like him so much. [...] His first book, *Child of Light*, and the second book *Sword of Light* or was it *Inferno Striking*, I cannot remember now. Anyway, I’ve read all his novels.”

Liu Kang says he adores history, culture (European in particular), original writings, economy, military systems, and art. He likes reading magazines after work, especially *The*

¹⁶ A 25-year-old Chinese fiction writer.

Reader (读者, *Duzhe*) because of its varied content and affordability. When we talk about his working life at *ElectriCo*, Liu Kang quickly redirects the conversation to the Discovery Channel, Sino-US political relations, and cultural rituals such as Hindu bathing and burials in the Ganges. He is very well acquainted with the performance of the ritual and its spiritual significance, but still finds it “incomprehensible” (无法想象, *wufa xiangxiang*) because the water is “filthy” (肮脏不堪, *angzang bukan*).

Like Tom’s candidates, blue-collar workers display the virtue of flexibility when they hop between jobs in different industries. Interviews with supervisors and managers show, however, that performing a variety of miscellaneous, mutually unrelated jobs over a shorter period of time is highly undesirable. Such behavior is interpreted as “bad” and equated with incompetence and instability (Lillywhite 2007: 96; Zhang 2008b: 71), which are two flaws in one’s moral character that have a negative impact on the probability of employment in *ElectriCo*. For instance, Wang Yang’s first reaction to her colleague’s statement that blue-collar workers change employers frequently and “want 20 to 30 percent salary increase compared to their previous job” is astonishment. “Really? I didn’t know that!” responds Wang Yang and continues her train of thought by expressing her disapproval of workers’ lack of “a sense of responsibility for work” and “impetuous” (浮躁, *fuzao*) behavior of Chinese people in general. I observe Zhang Jialin and Yao Yuan, HR staff member, discussing whether they should hire a blue-collar candidate recommended by one of *ElectriCo*’s workers. The candidate’s *curriculum vitae* lists running a small family business, going bankrupt, working in a factory, and quitting the factory job because it was too dangerous. This leaves Yao Yuan utterly confused:

“This blue-collar’s thinking is not like ours, his career development is quite chaotic [比较混乱, *bijiao hunluan*]. He does not compare good and bad aspects, [imitates a blue-collar] ‘I am leaving immediately.’ He is a very strange man [很奇怪, *hen qiguai*]. I asked him, ‘You came here to be an ordinary blue-collar worker [普通蓝领工人, *putong lanling gongren*]. You don’t believe that doing this way makes no sense for your own development?’ Their thinking is very strange.”

As Zhang Jialin and I leave the HR office, he clarifies why he believes that the candidate is unsuitable, “Yeah, about this guy, the first thing is his skill, it’s not very good. But you know, from my side, when I employ blue-collar workers, the first thing I choose is his 工作态度 [*gongzuo taidu*, attitude to work] and 稳定性 [*wending xing*, stability]. [...]”

some people at last work three or four years changed once, this means these people are more stable. If like this guy, he changed his job after a year and he did different jobs in different companies.” The average tenure per job of almost half of my blue-collar interviewees is two or less years (Appendix A, Table 3). It is, however, recommended to present oneself as a stable worker, which is exactly what Zhang Jialin’s second interviewee attempts to do by communicating his desire “to find a stable position and work three to five years” (Chapter 4). However, the interviewee’s history of short tenures at jobs is a signal for Zhang Jialin not to hire him because “he wants to join the company, earn some money, and when the money is enough after maybe two or three years, he will have his own business. So maybe he just, ‘I don’t need ElectriCo’, he is, ‘I just need work, I need a job.’” In accumulating experience, it is best to follow the example of Yu Long, who spent four years in a Chinese electronic company before joining ElectriCo, and Liu Kang, who held blue-collar jobs in two electrical companies in Shanghai. Notwithstanding the management’s requirement for stability, blue-collar’s professional biography usually resembles Giddens’ (1991: 85, 87) illustration of a drifting teenager, whose disposition to organize future career steps flexibly stands in stark contrast to the prevalent appreciation of occupational persistence and systematic career planning. Research by Woronov (2016: 54) raises the question whether these young people’s *laissez-faire* approach to personal development is truly as illogical as it seems to my white-collar interviewees given the rapid changes occurring in China’s economy.

3.3. White-collar’s ‘passion’ and diligence

Work plays an important role in white-collar’s identities. Wen Chenxi equates herself with “strong” Chinese women who “have to work, do the housework, raise children”. Having a job is the source of these people’s self-esteem and determines how others value them. This becomes apparent when Xu Xiaoyang laments the difficulty in finding employment after graduation. “When I graduated there were no jobs for me,” says Xu Xiaoyang. “I went back home to Huaian and stayed there two months without a job because I was waiting for my father to find me a job. Everybody asked me why I was sitting at home without a job and I felt horrible. He wanted that I teach at school in Huai’an so he 托关系 [*tuo guanxi*, pulled connections].” Employment is essential to white-collar’s life, though in terms of making it more exciting rather than only sustaining it. Tang Weiye tells me that he and his

spouse, English teacher, have already been living in Wuxi for four months, and that becoming employed as soon as possible is crucial to her because “without a job she started feeling bored, she is used to working.” When asked why she left her previous state-owned employer, Fang Di mentions that she felt uncomfortable being one of the “lazy” engineers, who were “sitting in the office playing computer games” and feeling “bored” because they had “nothing to do”. It is therefore not surprising at all that “passion” is a part of the white-collar vernacular used when describing a virtuous employee.

Having “passion to be perfect” is used by Jason Yang as he speaks about his immense admiration for Gu Chen’s effort to better himself, which involves several hours of self-study each day and staying in the office until eight or nine o’clock in the evening. When asked to elaborate on the qualities of a “good strategic buyer”, Ellie pauses briefly to collect thoughts before responding, “Good buyer, the most important is passion. No matter how much experience you have you have to love your [pauses briefly] otherwise you cannot go to the end, you know, to fight with your suppliers for the perfect result.” Ellie believes that being in talent pool for promotion in ElectriCo depends on “how much passion you have for your job”. Candidates “with passion in their work and good attitude both in life and work” are the ones that Wu Xiaoling chooses for her team. In a job interview, she tries to read passion from “facial expressions” (表情, *biaoqing*) that candidates use as they talk about a “fantastic thing in work life”, and from their answers to questions such as “what your achievements during your work, and what problems you have and what you do to overcome them”. “I know he is a good person because he always do his things well,” concludes Wu Xiaoling. As shown in the above examples, passion for the job is closely related to diligence and pursuit of expertise that lead to stellar performance. Remember Xu Xiaoyang saying in her interview that she believed she could “become competent” in her work because she had always been “a good student” who “studied hard”. Chen Kai responds in a modest tone that his “work experience”, “good hard work” he invested in his project, and being “responsible” earned him promotion to the position of a team leader.

White-collars demonstrate diligence by putting a lot of time and effort into completing their job duties well and thoroughly. Wang Yun and Xu Xiaoyang use the word “care” when they describe how they go about their daily tasks. “Care” extends far beyond plain responsibility in terms of performing duties as part of a job, role or function to

include thoroughness as the manner in which these duties are performed. This is also expressed in Zhang Jialin's description of his role model as "conscientious" (严谨认真, *yanjin renzhen*), which he understands as "do[ing] lots of prepare work so you can reduce the mistakes", and Chen Kai's talk about people he dislikes,

"Deceitful people [欺骗的人, *qipian de ren*]. When a problem occurs, he says he doesn't know, passes over the responsibility and says he doesn't know. Maybe he doesn't know and passes the responsibility, he doesn't do that on purpose, but a few people are like this. [...] I also dislike people who don't pay attention to details, because I am a detail-oriented person [注重细节的人, *zhuzhong xijie de ren*]. I cannot say anything bad about such people because everybody has their character, but I dislike such people."

Working conscientiously disagrees with rapidity, as care, detail, thoroughness, and quality require time. Huang Bowen, for example, reveals his discontent with his team leader's order to perform tasks hurriedly, which eventually led to a failure in testing. He explains, "We performed three tests last week. None of them was successful because we haven't analyzed any of them. I've discussed the tests with Zhou Peilin [team leader]. Zhou Peilin said nothing, only 'Run it faster, faster, faster!' Rushing is not good, I think. People have to write test documentation." Zhang Jialin and Cai Lili believe that sloppy work is an act of disrespect toward colleagues and as such is a source of conflicts that erode teamwork in the workplace. This is evident in Cai Lili's explanation of why a colleague she respects (1) "refused to keep a good relationship" with a colleague whom Cai Lili detests (2). Cai Lili says in a compassionate tone, "She [1] had an operation this Monday. This Sunday she came to work. She tried to prepare everything ready, but she found so many mistakes [that 2 made], employee names, compensation. Then on Tuesday she [1] goes to hospital and when she came back she saw that the salary band does not match and the names did not match so she didn't give them [workers] the salaries on time."

With all department members present at a regular team meeting and shortly after the department manager's brief introductory remarks, Zhang Jialin addresses the problem of sloppiness discreetly, "Do not blame line workers if they misunderstand their tasks. We have to make sure we do our job as detailed as possible, and give them as clear instructions as possible. [...] If we do so, we will express our respect [尊重, *zunzhong*] toward them, and then we will not have to worry if we insulted [得罪, *dezui*] them or not." Just as Chen

Kai dislikes people who fail to embrace responsibility, Cai Lili is extremely annoyed by several line managers who “blame HR for offering horrible workers”, always try to “pass the buck” (踢皮球, *ti piqu*) and want to “make it easy for themselves”. She further illuminates their blame-shifting and excuse-making behavior in a satirical tone, “If you say, ‘But you have to train your employees’ or something, they say, ‘Oh, we have lots of tasks to do, you have to deal with the training of people, to take the responsibility of production, or some values which HR or company should give.’ Our line managers have too many tasks and they should be given higher salary.”

In their interviews, white-collars relate hard work to flexibility in terms of welcoming changes in tasks, responsibilities, and the way these are done. This is suggested by Jason Yang when he mentions being annoyed by people who are “sitting there, they’re doing the job as always” and show “resistance” to changes that are already taking place. Wang Heng believes that the slow improvement in company performance is associated with people who are not prepared to change their routines. “We have department managers who have been here for ten years and it is very hard to change their working styles,” says Wang Heng. I witnessed those managers’ resistance towards new techniques during the in-house management training in coaching and interviewing several days before. They signaled their disinterest not only by responding, “We’re here because of our work” when asked by the trainer why they attend, but also by being reluctant to engage in activities throughout the training.

Wang Yun says she likes to try different “working methods” to improve her effectiveness at work. She proudly reports that one of her achievements during the time her former manager headed the department was “to just generate some new ideas, because people before had only some kind of routine, maybe you can change this kind of routine be more effective.” Recalling her former employment at a Chinese company, she mentions going above and beyond what was required as part of her official responsibilities, “Because people in my previous company are not, the laborers were not sufficient, so me, I had to do everything, not only as the engineer but sometimes accounting, sometimes as the interpreter, so everything.” Xu Ying, part-time assistant to general manager and part-time R&D controller, is proud of holding two different jobs in Electrico. She says she hates people who barely do enough to earn their salaries, “I don’t like people saying, ‘This is not my job.’ I don’t like it, I hate it! Because if you got time to argue, ‘This is not my job bla

bla,' of course it's your job but you will spend much time to argue and take it away, you have enough time to finish it!" Xu Ying attributes her diligence to the influence of her parents. When asked why she differs from those people, she responds, "Because my parents are like that. They told me, 'You need to work hard, you don't need to focus on the salary, you should complete your tasks, you should do it well, and not just finish it and not look for results. If it's your job, you have to do it maybe not hundred percent but you should try your best to do it.'" Ellie's willingness to take on duties that are not part of her formal job description is reflected in her efforts to coach her team members despite not being a formal team leader. In her words, "I'm not authorized officially."

When white-collars refuse to accept additional tasks or a new position it is usually because they try to avoid being overworked or bored with it. Take Yang Xiaoling who looks exhausted, dark circles beneath her eyes. She does not complain about her double workload. Quite the contrary, she says she likes her current job at Electrico and manages it well. When she admits that she has been intentionally missing an exam that would earn her promotion, I ask her why. Yang Xiaoling justifies her behavior by stating, "It's only some hundreds *yuan*¹⁷ more. [...] But I don't like the job, it is so boring. [...] I don't want to take that exam because my workload would just increase. [...] I already have a heavy workload because our plant is a new plant and we are not allowed to hire additional full-time employees."

Completing all those diverse tasks and delivering the best possible results usually requires persistence and proactivity. In this context, persistence is revealed in white-collars' commitment to performing their duties well and thoroughly despite the difficulty entailed in the process. Recall Yang Xiaoling who endures her overwhelming workload without complaining. Wen Chenxi's incessant attempts to create cost-competitive designs are another demonstration of the virtue of persistence. So is Wang Heng's determination to induce older managers to "change their working style" and take on their people management responsibilities. Wang Heng differentiates himself from his predecessor on the grounds of persistence and patience, which, according to him, are crucial in achieving that goal. As he explains, "Last HR manager, she was very motivated to change everything

¹⁷ The *yuan* and *kuai qian* are units of monetary measurement used in colloquial speech in place of the official Chinese currency, the *renminbi* (RMB).

in a short time, but she didn't manage to do that so she left. I told my team openly that our company has many problems and that we need to change, but that we will do it step by step." Similarly, Wu Xiaoling believes that her never-give-up attitude led a manager at her former company to give her more responsible tasks:

"My boss told me that I always insist and never give up, except only except that these things can be done well. [...] I had to do internal audit, I persuaded the manager, he shouted at me and I went back to my office. But later I think for a while, I think I have to finish this task. So after two hours I went back to his office and talked to him, so the manager saw, later he admit, 'Ah, you are right, if we don't take care of this small problem, the company can have a loss, so I will make some improvements.'"

Huang Bowen holds his former manager at ElectriCo in great esteem not only for his "great technical knowledge", but also for being "committed to the department". According to Huang Bowen, the manager's commitment is manifested in his willingness to "stay in the office and work long hours until he finished all tasks." "When we have something urgent to finish," says Tang Weiye, "I will choose to finish it on the weekend, do overtime work, not just decide to leave. I cannot leave, I have no choice." He feels it is his duty as a "good engineer" to be a "leader" by example and teach his new colleagues that "culture" or "professional spirit", as he calls his work ethos. Tang Weiye is full of praise for his female colleague who does the same.

Chen Kai considers Liu Chuanzhi's ability to "eat bitterness" (非常吃苦, *feichang chiku*) or bear extreme hardship – demonstrated by his sleeping in a hallway – an essential virtue that helped him to succeed (Cockain 2012). While majority of white-collars are willing to go the extra mile and put in the additional hours when required, managerial staff are endurance champions as they experience heavier workload over a longer period of time than non-managerial staff, who typically enjoy a lighter workload in ElectriCo. This becomes evident when a production manager from a sister company in Shanghai tells me during the management training that he dreams of being able to switch his phone off from time to time. He explains why he cannot do so, "My plant in Shanghai is working in three shifts and I have to be available around the clock, seven days a week. [...] I just continue because there is no other way [没办法, *mei banfa*], nobody can help me. I have a team, but I am the one responsible for the production management so I do not expect anyone to help me with my workload." Cao Lihua says she sympathizes with her female colleague who

leaves her son with another family on workdays. “When her son was born she and her husband did not have time for him so they took him to another family to take care of him,” explains Cao Lihua. She adds that the colleague has increased responsibilities at work due to her new management position, and that neither parents nor in-laws can help her raise her son. Cao Lihua tells me that the colleague felt heartbroken having returned from her two-month assignment abroad because of the weakened emotional bond between herself and her son. “When she returned, her son was hiding behind the woman who is taking care of him,” says Cao Lihua. “He did not want to go to her, she told me she was felt so sad [伤心, *shangxin*] that she started to cry.”

White-collars also place a strong emphasis on proactivity or initiating change at work rather than passively adapting to current conditions. Talking about his “philosophy of living”, Wang Heng says, “When you enter a new environment, the first step is you get used to this new environment, the second step is you try to change. So if you get used to this environment, than you’re just an ordinary person. Everyone will do like this. But if you want to change, show motivation to do the change, you’re extraordinary.” He likes when his team members “just take actions”; complaining “is helpless” and irritates him. Similarly, Wang Yun is proud that she improved her performance by taking charge of changing her “routines”. Meng Hanwen believes that his foresight and uninvited proposals that benefited ElectriCo earned him promotion, “I was thinking in advance what I could do to improve the company’s condition, and I planned in advance. You have to be like that, you have to give good ideas to improve business.” Cai Lili’s story of a new enthusiastic employee (1) and Xu Beijuan, the employee’s female manager with almost a decade-long tenure (2), is a typical example illustrating these young people’s proclivity to challenge the status quo, and their belief that long-tenured managers tend to stick with old habits:

“Maybe at the beginning of the year she took charge of how to optimize the shuttle bus, and then she was very, how to say, she had patience to optimize the bus and want to meet all our employees’ demands if they choose the shuttle bus instead of 150 *yuan*.¹⁸ Then people gave her lots of suggestions and where they would take the shuttle bus. She thought she could decide something, but as the result Ms. Xu Beijuan told her, ‘Let’s just modify the original lines a little bit,’ and the supplier of the shuttle bus directly phoned Ms. Xu Beijuan and she [2] never asked her [1] about her opinion how to arrange the lines.”

¹⁸Employees who decide not to take the company’s shuttle bus receive a 150-yuan transportation allowance.

Cai Lili's closing comment that the "department doesn't want to spend time on how to improve their service", which she makes in an angry tone, reveals her antipathy towards people whose performance suffers due to their reluctance to leave their comfort zone and try new ways that produce better results.

3.4. Hard work of shop floor people

Liu Kang tells me he likes watching "realistic series" (真实的连续剧, *zhenshi de lianxuju*), Discovery Channel, and documentaries after work, programs that portray "what really happened". His favorite series is *Naked Marriage* (裸婚时代, *Luohun Shidai*), which is indicative of the rising financial insecurity and the propensity to marry without an apartment, a car, or a lavish wedding ceremony (Hansen 2015). As he writes the title down in my notebook, Liu Kang explains that he is very fond of it because it is "real" (真实, *zhenshi*), it depicts real life. His favorite character is Liu Yiyang, a "working man" (上班的人, *shangban de ren*) of the "same social stratum" (同阶层人, *tong jiecheng ren*), "same like us" (跟我们一样, *gen women yiyang*), who "is under a lot of pressure" (压力很大, *yali henda*). He is about to get married, has to buy a house, his wife is pregnant, many friends of his and his mother-in-law "have high expectations of him" (对他的期望很高, *dui ta de qiwang hengao*), and he is a sole breadwinner. "But even under such circumstances he remains extremely optimistic," says Liu Kang, "working very conscientiously [认真, *renzhen*] for his family." The above lines illustrate what most of the blue-collars I interviewed are concerned with: striving to receive an adequate income for their hard work to support their family, withstanding the pressure in the workplace and in private sphere, and staying positive about their future.

Work in Electrico plays a pivotal role in blue-collars' lives, though for most of them it is a necessity that keeps them and their families above the poverty line rather than a fun-filled experience. This is reflected in the short self-introduction of a blue-collar worker from adjacent assembly workshop, which he gives while curiously approaching the group of workers I talk with. To summarize it briefly, he completed his primary school in Wuxi, calls himself "a Wuxi person" (无锡人, *Wuxi ren*), and is a permanent migrant who obtained the local *hukou* (户口, residence permit) several years ago. He works two jobs,

“*dagong*” (打工) in ElectriCo and “help dad to deliver goods” (帮爸爸送货, *bang baba songhuo*) on the weekends. He parks his three-wheeled truck (三轮车, *sanlunche*) in front of Wuxi Zhao Shopping Mall, waiting to be hired by the shopping mall visitors to transport their purchased items to Suzhou or Shanghai. He shares his delight at the prospect of earning two hundred *renminbi* the next day and returns to his post. It is relevant to draw attention here to the word *dagong*, which is typically used in the context of rural migrant workers to point to the impermanent nature of the job, as well as the disposability and replaceability of those who perform it (Pun 2005).

My blue-collar interviewees do not put much emphasis on their ability to withstand heavy workload. Yet, their disposition to work hard is revealed in a great number of acts in the workplace. The image of a worker on the assembly line who is having sweat dripping down his face from the high fever he is running will remain imprinted on my memory forever. Keeping the traditional Chinese medicine to combat his flu in front of him, he works as fast as usual because, as he says, “There is daily quota to meet.” Wang Yanhui spends almost every Saturday and Sunday in the assembly workshop, telling me that she likes earning extra working overtime on weekends. Her net salary is round 1400 *yuan* per month but with overtime work, she can “get more, two hundred percent of regular salary”. The need to do additional paid work and its habitual, taken-for-granted character is also expressed by Zhang Jialin’s (ZJL) first blue-collar interviewee (BC1). Zhang Jialin’s reaction to the interviewee’s answer signifies his acknowledgement of that necessity:

ZJL: Do you have any questions about the job?

BC1: Your working hours.

ZJL: We have regular working hours, starting at eight, leaving at five, sometimes there is a need for some overtime work. How do you feel about working overtime?

BC1: Overtime, of course that I am willing to do overtime work [我愿意加班, *wo kending yuanyi jiaban*].

ZJL: What you are saying is that you wish to work overtime [你是希望加班, *ni shi xiwang jiaban*]?

BC1: I wish to work overtime.

Liu Kang is happy when he has the opportunity to work on weekends, particularly because ElectriCo’s shuffling practice and three-shift schedule leave only limited working hours for an additional outside job. He says he does not moonlight in another company, “We here do not do that, it is not easy to find. Because if you finish your work here, you go

to another place to work, have to change cleverly, your working time cannot exceed four hours, because if it exceeds four hours, you will be exhausted, very tired.” It seems that only by committing a dishonest act one succeeds in holding a second job parallel to their core job in *ElectriCo*. A story of a long-tenured blue-collar group leader who connived with his team members to clock-in for him during two months of his absence from work spread rapidly in the company immediately after his dismissal. As a consequence of the event, Xu Cheng ordered the installation of surveillance cameras around the punch-clock.

Blue-collar workers’ contempt for people who do not exhibit hardworking behavior is echoed in the sarcasm that Qu Hao and Li Haomin use when they speak about the “upper floor” (楼上, *loushang*) with whom they work side by side on a daily basis. “Upper floor” is a term often used by workers to refer to white-collars, including their spatial (the offices are located a floor above the workshops) and moral difference from them. According to Qu Hao and Li Haomin, although many people of the upper floor “did nothing in the factory” (在厂里面什么都没作, *zai chang limian shenme dou meizuo*), their performance is “evaluated highly” (很高的平价, *hengao de pingjia*) because they “suck up” to managers (拍马屁, *paimapi*, literally: slapping a horse’s bottom). When asked what people who *paimapi* actually do, Li Haomin gives an example, “Clean leader’s car.” Qu Hao explains further, “They tell superiors what superiors like to hear, and do what superiors like to be done.” Then he continues with a brilliant illustration of how those people court their manager’s good opinion, “Make a superior happy. [...] Superior [switches to English] said, ‘I’m very cold,’ ‘This is clothes.’ If he said, ‘I’m very hungry,’ ‘Yes, here is the food’, ‘Mmh very good!’”. Li Haomin jokingly suggests I read a book called *Thick Black Theory* (厚黑学, *Hou Hei Xue*)¹⁹ to learn more about ways to shirk responsibilities at work. “You will realize that many people read that book, it teaches you how to avoid work, teaches you how to avoid accountability for mistakes you make. Many people research this thing,” says Li Haomin.

When asked how he feels about his job at *ElectriCo*, Tao Jun says he is deeply unhappy because his manager has continuously been introducing new rules for workers to follow. Moreover, he seems irritated by the sense of time wasted on complying with them,

¹⁹ Written by Li Zongwu. Also translated as *Thick Face, Black Heart*.

since the manager himself does not demonstrate persistence in keeping the implementation on track:

“Our working environment now is worse than before. Before you would just finish the job and that would be it. Now workers have to do many things, have to do this and that. Because at the very beginning he did not set any rules concerning what you should do. If you set rules at the beginning, all people will respect them, no problem at all. Not that you say during the process, ‘Now you have to respect this or that rule,’ it’s a big mess. And he does not necessarily execute those rules. So you do according to the rule and he gives it up halfway.”

Tao Jun is even more annoyed when the salary increase is given to a man whose “position is more important” (职位稍微重要, *zhiwei shaowei zhongyao*) instead of going into the hands of an “honest” man (老实, *laoshi*). He expects the manager to give the raise to all who hold the “same post” (同样岗位, *tongyang gangwei*) and do the “same work” (同样的工作, *tongyang de gongzuo*). In his portrayal of the conditions at the company, Tao Jun describes the “honest” man as “the person who does the work” (干活的这个人, *ganhuo de zhege ren*) and “is not asking” for a raise (不寻找, *bu xunzhao*). His “more important” opposite is presented as a person who is so bold as to tell the “manager” (经理, *jingli*), “If you do not increase my pay, I will not work,” and who eventually gets a high salary because he is more to the manager’s liking. Tao Jun’s account shows that honest people are constantly in danger of being overlooked and neglected. His approach to dealing with his situation at work is essentially passive adaptive: he engages into emotional regulation. When asked what he is doing or is going to do about it, he responds, “When I’m sad this feeling is quickly gone, people regulate their own moods. When I face unhappy things, I make them go away fast. When I feel uncomfortable [心里不舒服, *xinli bu shufu*], I regulate it and it is better, isn’t it. I regulate my own moods.”

For the majority of production line workers who deem groveling unacceptable, a reasonable action in the absence of rewards for additional effort is to exhibit solidarity with one another and jointly slack off. “There is a bonus,” says Yu Long, “but the bonus cannot be any higher [than what we usually get]. Normally there isn’t any bonus that is particularly high. So we work slowly.” Along these lines, another worker reveals that they “postpone tasks for the weekend” (推到周末, *tui dao zhoumo*) when they find quotas unreasonable. Dustmann’s (2015: 57) rural migrant workers also use strategy of increasing

hours worked to improve their low basic salaries.²⁰ Blue-collars' relaxed attitude towards work that is not additionally paid becomes apparent when Zhao Bei and another worker in Tao Jun's workshop discuss whether they should leave assembling panels for the next day. "It's time for a break!" says the unnamed worker. Zhao Bei responds, "But there is so much left. Look, we haven't finished this." The first one replies back, "There are only two more panels left, leave it." Zhao Bei offers a rare example of unconditional persistence on the factory floor by hesitating to leave his job undone. This young man's appreciation of the virtue of persistence is also evident in his admiration for his favorite writer's relentless writing in spite of being ill:

"He has continuously been writing, and you know how much he earns from selling his books? But now he has fallen ill. He has continuously been writing, writing more than ten thousand characters, because he thinks, if he stops writing, he is betraying his work [他对不起工作, *ta duibuqi gongzuo*], so he continues to write and write. Even though he has fallen seriously ill, he hasn't stopped writing. He is not able to write as fast as before, but is writing nonetheless."

Blue-collars' enthusiasm for current or additional work, and their commitment to completing tasks in a timely manner correlate highly with their perception of employer's reciprocity, that is, whether the employer upholds the terms of the original agreement – be it the output they are expected to produce during their regular working hours, the promise of overtime work, or procedures that have to be adhered to. This is suggested by Li Haomin, who explains that blue-collars' slow work serves to remind management of their duty to respect the original arrangement or to consult workers before making any further changes. Note how he gradually weaves his own experience into his story of production workers, emphasizing once again the significance of doing the work as opposed to "imagination" (意想, *yixiang*) or ideals, and objecting to being called "indolent" (懒散, *lansan*):

"If you are on the production line, you know immediately, for example, if I did 10 pieces for the whole day today, right, and the leader tells me to do 12 tomorrow, then you did 12. Leader tells you to do 13, then you did 13. Leader tells you to do 15, so what do you do? So we just, originally I could do only 10 pieces, I only do 5 ha ha ha! I just slack off [懒着, *lanzhe*], I'm very slow, I only do 5 pieces a day, right? He will do like

²⁰ His data analysis reveals that salaried rural migrant workers work 58 hours per week, which is 15 hours or 26 percent more than their urban counterparts.

that, it is the only way because the upper floor doesn't respect us [楼上不尊重我们, *loushang bu zunzhong women*]. Originally I could do 10 pieces, [we] agreed on 10 pieces, and he keeps increasing it, isn't it so! Reasonably speaking, he, he didn't, our leaders they didn't come downstairs and do the work, they don't know how much time is needed for this model, they rely on their own imagination. That is to say, you have to finish something today, they haven't thought about the possibility that during this process I might face a situation that a screw hasn't been brought to me or that it's defective. They haven't, it's only their idealistic thinking [很理想他的一个想法, *hen lixiang ta de yige xiangfa*], a plan. They want us to finish the work according to an idealistic plan, according to an idealistic plan, and there is no way for us to finish it, they think we are indolent, we are indolent, we loaf about [偷懒, *toulan*], that is what they think of us."

One witnesses significant idling in the workshops once the demand decreases. Those who are not "lent" to other departments usually spend their time chatting with their fellow workers while the soft background music plays from their cell phones – provided, of course, that their manager is willing to tolerate such practices. Tao Jun and his team members believe that the benefits of music go beyond improved performance to include mental health and emotional well-being (cf. Pun 2005). As they say, "playing music improves work outcomes," "playing music during work can improve performance," "playing music is good for relaxing, improves psychological and emotional state". For one of them, job performance is a direct correlate of emotional contentment, "If one's heart feels good, his work will also be very smooth." Whereas Dong Xincheng, ElectriCo's former HR manager, and several other like-minded white-collars hold the opinion that blue-collars simply have a bad work ethic, being "unwilling to devote themselves to their work" (不愿意贡献, *bu yuanyi gongxian*) and "playing with their mobile phones" (玩儿手机, *wan'r shouji*), Tao Jun provides a contrary explanation of this "loafing about" (偷懒, *toulan*) phenomenon. When asked whether workers organize and participate in self-study groups or read books during idle time, he replies, "Not allowed during working hours. If there's no work, you stay here if the boss doesn't send you to other places, but you cannot do other things during your working hours." His team member expresses agreement adding, "This is China." Tao Jun continues on, "All companies are like that. He can organize some safety training or similar, but reading books is not allowed. And you have to stay here. If he shows up and doesn't see you, he will look for you."

None of my blue-collar interviewees talks passionately about their work in ElectriCo. As Gao Zhijie, another intern on Tao Jun' team, explains, they "lose interest" in work (没兴趣, *mei xingqu*) because they are not "offered [...] a chance to do something different" and feel they are "moving backwards" (退步, *tuibu*). Yet, they say that the job in ElectriCo is valuable for their future endeavors. Although blue-collar workers do not mention the importance of showing passion for the job in a job interview, it seems plausible to assume that successful candidates perform fascination with the post and the company during it. In addition to the ability to describe the job-related responsibilities in detail – what Liu Kang and his coworkers certainly can, one's desire to join ElectriCo and interest in the post are translated as being "a good guy" whom white-collar workers hire. According to Zhang Jialin, who uttered the just cited words, failure to express fascination is understood as "I don't need ElectriCo," "I just need work, I need a job." "This guy I don't want," he says. In a world where passion is highly valued, those who do not feel any are viewed as inadequate, even if they would nevertheless perform their duties well.

3.5. Being a 'kind' person: the importance of humility, openness, helpfulness, and recognition in white-collar world

During the working days Chen Kai lives with Zhang Yin, his team member, and Wang Bing, R&D team leader, in a shared apartment several minutes away from ElectriCo, very close to districts in which other department colleagues and actually most of all white-collar interviewees rent, consider buying, or already own apartments. "We are three brothers, 兄弟 [*xiongdì*],²¹ Wang Bing is the eldest of us," says Chen Kai. Wang Bing adds, "I am 34 years old and I am taking care of them." Describing the relationship between the three of them, Zhang Yin, who is seven years younger than Wang Bing and five years younger than Chen Kai, says, "I talk freely to them and they talk freely to me, we learn from each other." Chen Kai finds work in ElectriCo "much more relaxed" than in a private company for which he previously worked, "we have much better communication, we had many conflicts in private firm and nobody talked to anybody. Here we help each other." Not only do these

²¹ 'Xiongdì' is a Chinese word for 'brothers', used to demonstrate belonging to the group. Social closeness in China is marked by the use of classificatory and fictive kinship terms.

three engineers enjoy working together, they also love spending time with other department colleagues in joint leisure activities such as cycling, barbecuing, KTV.

There are three couples working in R&D department. I hear a female engineer jokingly commenting on the department team leaders' joint matchmaking effort to bring two remaining singles together by seating them face-to-face, "They used to sit opposite of each other so they spent the whole day looking at each other." When a colleague marries, everyone attends the wedding and the happiness candies (喜糖, *xitang*)²² are left on a cupboard in the office for all to taste. Wen Chenxi regards their former Gallian manager as a "good boss". I ask her what being a good boss means and she explains, "I thought he was very kind, that we could talk about anything as if we were friends. [...] we usually talked only about work, but he would always ask us to give some ideas and think about solutions first and then go to him if we have some problems. If we had good suggestions, he would always listen to us." Wen Chenxi's male colleague also likes their former manager because "I also got recognition from him, he was really caring." Why are these young people imbued with the ethos of familialism, evident in their use of kinship terms and their family-like relationships? As suggested in the aforementioned examples, white-collars' presentation of workplace familiarity revolves around humility, openness, helpfulness, and recognition. These four virtues define a "kind" person who is able to develop good relationships with people from different backgrounds and at different levels in the company.

Gao Jingyu also likes "kind people". This young manager places high value on creating and maintaining workplace harmony because he believes it is conducive to good team performance. He despises "tough guys" or "troublesome guys" who are high and mighty, focusing solely on themselves and their own feelings and desires. Such people, according to him, disrupt "harmonious" working relationships and need to be set straight immediately. He provides a description of a "troublesome" co-worker and explains how he dealt with him:

"He only just follow own style and doesn't care too much about others' feelings. At that time, when I just entered the company and he was against me, told me to go to his office and told me to bring him some hot water, just like a waiter, he regarded me as a waiter. And he regarded

²² Small chocolate wedding favors, which are given to guests during the wedding ceremony.

himself [raises his downward facing palm above his head, parallel to the floor]. He is not a high level, he is just a team leader, so I entered the company at low level and felt a bit upset, to be honest, to be treated as a waiter, to do cleaning, bring hot water. So after several days I don't have hot argument to quarrel with him, just asked him, nobody was in the office, I just asked him for formal or serious talk. So I just told him that, 'Because I am freshman I don't have much working experience do you think every freshmen should be treated like this, just do what you tell him to do?' He was also tough at that moment, that 'If you work here you must do this,' was his answer, like this. Second I asked, 'OK, so I am pretty confident I will have higher level than you in next or two years later,' I told him frankly. 'What do you expect me to do with you then?' He just silent for a long time. After that maybe this problem solved, we don't have really hot topics or arguments. He, I just, not said to him I will take revenge against him, I am not that way. I just thought, 'It is not right approach to be too tough against freshmen, because to be young is not fault, to be treated like this, is to be equals, because if we have a good environment, good relationship, to be harmonious is good for our team's score, for feelings, try to be positive,' I told him."

Gao Jingyu's story implies that working well with others necessitates being flexible, modifying one's attitudes or behavior, especially for those who are not habitually kind. Gao Jingyu demonstrates this virtue when he refuses to act upon his anger and threaten his colleague. He discreetly approaches his colleague with the problem and tries to be forthright about his own wants while still being respectful to his. Similarly, the absence of "hot topics or arguments" may be attributed to the colleague's willingness to respond to Gao Jingyu's need, and behave in a less "tough" manner. Xu Ying reveals that being friendly helps her to maintain good, conflict-free relationships at work. From the moment I met her, I was absolutely impressed by her sunny disposition. Even serious family problems that she has been dealing with for a long time did not destroy her cheerfulness. When asked what it means to be friendly, she replies:

"I have a 杀手锏 [*shashoujian*, a killing weapon] – smile, ha ha ha! Because if you are friendly, I heard you know Chinese proverbs very well, 伸手不打笑脸人 [*shenshou bu da xiaolian ren*, no one slaps a smiling face]²³ ha ha ha! And I also, 'Please, please, I need some help,' I will not stand so high position. So if you are so friendly, I don't think people will give you too much problem. My parents told me, 'You should be friendly, 不要觉得自己又是那么了不起 [*buyao jue de ziji you shi name liaobuqi*, you should't think you are amazing].' My parents also

²³ This saying advocates being both humble and forgiving. The humble one admits making a mistake and apologizes with a sincere smile, whereas the forgiving one accepts the apology and refrains from punishment.

told me, ‘You should take care of your position, you are not so high and you are just a normal person.’”

In her description, Xu Ying relates friendliness to humility and asking for guidance, which mirrors white-collar’s emphasis on being modest about own knowledge and skills, and their tendency to seek help from colleagues and supervisors in their pursuit of expertise.

Openness is primarily reflected in white-collars’ tendency to speak their minds and be receptive to others’ ideas, suggestions or criticism. “Talk freely” (Zhang Yin), “told him frankly” (Gao Jingyu), “discussed issues face-to-face” (Tang Weiye), and “I told my team openly” (Wang Heng) are all examples of the virtue of openness. Wang Ailing, assembly line supervisor, manifests her openness by going into her manager’s office and saying, “I’d like to get promoted.” One should, however, always voice own opinion in a way that demonstrates sensitivity to the feelings of others. This is suggested by Dou Wei, engineer, who tells me that there are a few people in his department who get easily offended by his “direct” (直接, *zhijie*) communication, and that his entire team gets frustrated with them. Even though he believes that one’s “character is not so easy to change”, he is nonetheless learning to address problems in a team meeting in a “mild and roundabout” way (委婉, *weiwān*) without sacrificing his commitment to the principle of honesty. Huang Bowen explains further, giving emotional support to his agitated colleague, “Otherwise, otherwise, I know your feeling, there’s reason, from my understanding, so what Dou said is reasonable, sometimes when you talk to another colleague straightly, you will get a bad feedback, yeah, maybe this guy will talk to his leader, and this leader we do not know so we got complaints.” According to Tang Weiye, the key to avoiding “personal feelings influence work” (个人感情影响工作, *geren ganqing yingxiang gongzuo*) and persuading colleagues to accept an idea is to “provide clear evidence” or “proof” to support it, to use factual statements. Mastering the art of eloquence in a way that does not harm interpersonal relations is a must for managerial-level white-collars, whose successful cooperation and department management greatly depend on their ability to “convince” (Xu Cheng), “persuade” (Wu Xiaoling) or “explain to” (Wang Heng) others.

Cao Lihua believes that having a domineering attitude and not inviting others to share their opinions spells doom for a relationship. She illustrates her point with a gossip about Tian Wen, a female manager in Electrico, and her husband, who holds a managerial

position elsewhere. “I heard that when they go out together, she talks the whole time,” says Cao Lihua. “She behaves like a manager in her private life too and he complains about it. 一山容不得二虎 [*yi shan rongbude er hu*], you can’t have two tigers on one mountain. They compete and conflict with each other.” Fang Di, who does not work in the same department as Cao Lihua, mentions Tian Wen when asked to give an example of a manager she dislikes, “I think other employees didn’t 服她 [*fu ta*, submit to her authority]. As a manager, she is very 强悍 [*qianghan*, ferocious], everybody knew her character and did not accept her. [...] When I just came she yelled at me too and I was so shocked that I started to cry.” Managers who do not allow employees latitude in performing tasks but insist their way is the only way, continuously looking over their employees’ shoulders, are the object of scorn and pretended obedience. As Wen Chenxi reports, “In some firms, managers like to control people, so when they are in the office, everybody is working hard, but the moment they are out, nobody does anything.” Xu Xiaoyang and her brother adopt a similar strategy for dealing with their strict, controlling parents. She says, “他们管得太多 [*tamen guan de taiduo*], they were controlling us too much so I am happy I don’t live with them. [...] So when I talk to them I don’t argue, because if the four of us argued with our parents it would be horrible. We just 阳奉阴违 [*yang feng yin wei*, give parents lip service], that means that in front of them we agree, but we do something else when they are not around.” Cockain’s (2012: 100) study shows that it is common for young Chinese who feel powerless to express disagreement with authority figures thorough “subtle refusals” whilst feigning compliance.

What is the secret behind your department’s excellent performance evaluation, I ask Sun Hao. He thinks for a moment and replies by offering a comparison between his predecessor Howard and himself:

“I think it has two things. Before my former manager, during his cooperation with other employees he just put him, you know, ‘I have position,’ and not give employees impression that he respects them, I think that is very important. And also not too much communication, when there is some disagreement he just put his idea, ‘Just do it,’ and not show respect to employees opinion, that is the first one. Second is balance in the team. A lot of employees, every employee they have their own benefit and also Howard some benefit is also limited. For example, I will not give you names, if our team has six, seven employees, if there are some promotion chance, he could not give each employee what they want. So I just need to check what the existing salary status is and have

deep discussion with each employee to know what they most want. Some employees think, 'Even a hundred *yuan* is quite a lot for me,' some do not have too much economic pressure, just want to get promotion chance. So to balance and not give one employee everything they want and others get nothing, so they will be angry and want to leave, not take their job seriously. They need to get something from HR, from management, to give them more chance, just this kind of things."

Sun Hao is strongly convinced that respect is the key to employee engagement. In his elaboration he relates respect to humility, openness, and recognition, stressing the importance of asking each employee about their particular needs and tending to them as best they can. Wang Heng reveals the value he places on recognition as he talks about motivation for "putting much effort into doing different things". White-collars consider recognition to be a highly desirable quality in a manager: it means acknowledging everyone's efforts and performance in light of values that matter to them personally. Doing so is perceived as "kind" and "fair". Cao Lihua joyfully mentions an act of appreciation of her work performed by her new manager, a "very nice lady", and I hear the word "kind" once again:

"So before I transferred, I talked to her, she was very kind. She said, 'I will raise your salary, 2000 is too little, it is not fair, you should get at least 4000, you are an old employee. But I cannot do it immediately, only step by step.' And she really did it, I am getting 4000 now, but compared to newcomers, it is still little, because newcomers get 4000 immediately and since we've come to the company, we've had only small annual wage increase."

Nevertheless, Cao Lihua says she is happy with her current situation and does not need more. Xu Ying is content when she hears words of praise from her manager, "I just want to get confirm from my boss, you did a good job, I just want to hear this sentence, 'Ying, you are good and we are satisfied with your capability,' is enough for me." "Gallian manager did not tell me anything about my development. First I showed performance and then he recognized it and awarded it. He was a very reliable manager," says Wang Yun as she explains why she liked working for her former manager.

Helpfulness is a virtue that is essential to fostering a pleasant work environment and reducing workplace stressors such as work overload. When asked why she left her former company, Fang Di mentions being surrounded by pompous people who were unwilling to help her:

“I am young and I want to learn as much as possible. In the old firm, our older colleagues didn’t want to answer our questions at all, we say in Chinese 这个人爱摆架子 [*zhege ren ai bai jiazi*, this person likes to put on airs]. Here when I have a question or a problem everybody wants to help. What makes me feel comfortable about my work is that we work together on one task on our team. There is a real 团结精神 [*tuanjie jingshen*, spirit of unity], so I do not feel I have so much pressure at work. You cannot do all tasks on your own, that is 个人主义 [*geren zhuyi*, individualism]. We have to work as a team because job is easier then.”

My observation in the offices shows that white-collars enjoy acting as mentors and offering a helping hand with tasks. They share their knowledge and skills with team members, help them solve problems, and assist in work itself. Huang Bowen says his small group is like a family “because we share the workload”. Tang Weiye takes his role of a “master” (师傅, *shifu*) very seriously, helping not only during working hours but also during self-organized weekend sessions where Kenichi Ohmae’s *The Professional* and other related literature is read and discussed. Remember his duty as a “good engineer” to imbue his team members with the spirit of professionalism:

“Here there are not so many tools and not so much training because the department is still young, so I am trying to transfer my knowledge to my team members and teach them how to think professionally. [...] When you studied in China 20 years ago, you should have found a master²⁴ who would not teach you how to, would only teach you how to work, work method and how to communicate to other people, not technical stuff, some soft management, your attitude to work. Some people have different character, so they use other method to communicate, and when you work you should pay attention to work, not just do it, and be committed to other people, you cannot just do the work by yourself. Older engineers have worked long time and have long experience, like small children, they will just watch their parents, and new employees will watch older engineers. Like we have something urgent to finish, I will choose to finish it on the weekend, do overtime work, not just decide to leave, I cannot leave, I have no choice, it’s just this attitude. But the new colleagues will see this, ‘I should pay attention to work.’ So if there are no people like leaders from who they can learn this kind of attitude, no people will do this positive. So sometime a good engineer is some kind of leader who will teach younger engineers what to do, this is called culture.”

²⁴ ‘*Shifu*’ or ‘master’ is a honorific title for addressing skilled people, craftsmen, or experienced workers.

Ellie helps her teammates grow on her own initiative even though she does not have a formal position of a team leader. In her own words, “For me for myself I am doing something to get people to get my team members developed.” When asked what she does for them, she responds, “I shared my opinion for the working skill, if I found something is wrong. Or I will arrange some training for negotiation or something, this kind of training, this kind of development, and also if they are ready I will do the recommendation to my boss for the opportunity or position or something.” Helping team members realize their career goals, encouraging them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and providing them with tools and training they need to advance is highly valued, especially in white-collars holding a management position.

3.6. Being a solitary man: blue-collars’ obedience and restrained helpfulness

Liu Kang, Yu Long, Wang Yanhui and other blue-collars I interviewed live in shared apartments either with flatmates working elsewhere or family members. Although Liu Kang and Yu Long work in the same workshop, they do not know much of each other’s lives; nor do they socialize with each other after work. Both of them have been in ElectriCo for more than one year. Still, they do not know the names of some of the workers from adjacent workshops with whom they come into daily contact. Yu Long, a somewhat taciturn young man, says that he has no friends in ElectriCo and gives a negative answer to my follow-up question whether he feels lonely. When asked how he spends his free time, he responds, “At home, watching TV, playing computer games, or visiting friends” whom he met in his former company. Nevertheless, he explains, they do not meet often because he is “introvert” (比较内向, *bijiao neixiang*) and prefers being alone (我还是喜欢一个人, *wo haishi xihuan yige ren*). Wang Yanhui likes to take long walks after work and watches TV in the evening, having dined with her brother and sister-in-law who live nearby. She says she does not go out often because she cannot afford it, “Our salary is too low.”

Workers make some small talk during lunch in ElectriCo’s canteen and shortly after the lunch break while they smoke in groupings of seven to ten in designated smoking areas near their work stations. There is little verbal exchange on the shop floor. When I observe from afar, it seldom happens that lively chatter among the workers overcomes the clank and click of factory machines or interrupts the silence that fills unautomated workshops. Shop floor relationships are marked by a high degree of detachment and

restraint, which is reflected in workers' tendency to limit their interactions with co-workers and managers to what is required to get the job done, focus on task-relevant communication, and generally avoid very personal disclosures. These young people's lack of familiarity makes them resemble American workers observed by Lamont (2000: 167), who "appear to lead more isolated lives and to take less pleasure in the time they spend together in their workplace".

Blue-collar workers seldom act as mentors and there is little exchange of knowledge and skills between them. Remember Gong Kai's learning the job on his own because "they wouldn't teach you too many details". Recalling his first days at work, Lu Man mentions the experienced colleagues' reluctance to engage in master – apprentice (师傅 – 徒弟, *shifu – tudi*) relationships with inexperienced newcomers. He believes this is due to the colleagues' fear of becoming redundant and losing their jobs. When asked to describe what going to work straight out of college felt like, he responds:

"Hard, because after graduation you work in the electrical equipment industry and you do not understand it much, but the master is not teaching you, right? For a long time he was only teaching you things that don't help you, for example he was solving a basic problem, he would say, 'Little Lu,²⁵ go bring that screw, go bring things,' and that was it. He was just like that. [...] Because in China there is a saying, 'Having taught the apprentice, master starves to death [教会徒弟饿死师傅, *jiaohui tudi esi shifu*].' If you only teach others basics, boss thinks you are very important, and he will give you a higher salary. If there are two or three people who know the same, the boss might think even if you leave, it doesn't matter, so he will not value, there is apprentice who can do that, he will dismiss the master. So this saying is true in this field, the master and the apprentice compete against each other [互相竞争, *huxiang jingzheng*]. If there is no master to teach you, it is very hard for you to learn this thing. So I haven't understood this thing in the beginning, so I asked the external training teacher to explain because their experience is rich. I learnt slowly by exchanging with them and feeling my way through it."

Lu Man's account of working alongside one such master implicitly depicts experienced co-workers as bossy and unwilling to help, hinting at his own perception of the co-workers' selfish conduct as commonplace. In this context, workers demonstrate

²⁵ 'Little' or '*xiao*' is an age- and familiarity-related prefix, placed before a family name to address a younger person in a friendly, familiar manner, without having to use the title describing the person's position. A person older than oneself should be addressed with '*lao*' or 'old', though '*lao*' is mainly used to address males, again without mentioning specific work-related titles (cf. '*shifu*' or 'master').

their helpfulness by being willing to take place of an absentee. This is evident in a blue-collar interviewee's (BC1) short description of how he cooperates with others:

ZJL: And what do you think of your cooperation with others?

BC1: I don't have any problems because I am quite a humble

[谦和, *qianhe*] person and can cooperate with many people.

ZJL: Give me an example.

BC1: Of what?

ZJL: Of cooperating well with others, what you did.

BC1: For example, when I was a group leader we lacked people in June so I worked hard with others to finish the work.

That workers are expected to obey direct commands from authority figures is also suggested by Wang Ailing who, when asked what workers need to know to perform tasks on the assembly line that she supervises, gives a brief answer, "They do not need to know anything. They are given clear instructions how to put pieces together." A description of "suitable recruits" provided by a manager in Gamble's (2006b) study conveys a similar view of desirable characteristics of workers: they are "obedient" (服从, *fucong*), having no ideas of their own, and "able to endure hardship" (吃苦, *chiku*). Liu Kang's vivid illustration of managers' behavior towards workers attests to its superior-inferior character. As he says, "Like a general who gives you the order and you carry it out." I ask him if managers know about the workers' situation in the workshop and he replies giving a short, scornful laugh, "Ha ha, they don't need to know, they only need to know the production quota they set, if you reached it or not, and it's OK. [...] He only tells you to finish it and it's enough for him, it's like that." Workers are apparently used to being told what to do and do not believe that they or their opinions matter to managers. Statements such as "they don't care" (他们不在乎, *tamen bu zaihu*) (Li Haomin), "they don't care about us, people below, who really do the work" (Liu Kang), "if you don't want to work, there are people who want" (Yu Long), or "if you are willing to work, work, if not, leave" (Liu Kang) point to management's preference for 'my way or the highway' technique over demonstration of concern, affection, and warmth in eliciting discipline. The same sentiment is expressed by workers in Frazier's (2011: 70) and Zhang's (2015: 79) study.

What I observe at Electrico is that white-collar line supervisors and managers do not greet blue-collar employees during brief encounters in the factory, such as periodic walk-around inspections or when managing staff accompanies visitors around the shop floor. Neither do workers go out of their way to initiate a greeting with them. Even if the

idea behind the silent or commanding comportment is to eliminate distraction and ensure efficient, target-oriented work, this superior-inferior type of interaction results in indifference and “exaggerated deference” (Sayer 2007: 575) that permeate through the whole factory floor. Workers behave in an overly submissive and dependent manner, reducing task-related thinking to a minimum, avoiding any kind of open communication or confrontation, and frequently asking their supervisor or manager for assistance and approval. This finding is similar to that of Cooke (2004: 45), whose workers “failed to show enthusiasm or commitment to the company’s goals other than complying with instructions”. In Wang Ailing’s eyes, such behavior equals ignorance and poor work ethic. To my question “Do your workers give work-related ideas?” she replies first by saying that she is the one who usually talks. Then she further elaborates, “You know, they are all very lazy. They don’t have any opinions. One time somebody couldn’t get some parts from the shelf and they called me immediately. They are very lazy, they call me for every little thing. When we miss supplies, they call me. They can’t decide anything on their own. I’m like their nanny.”

Recall how Tom equates being “honest” (老实, *laoshi*) with obedience, which he considers the second most important quality in a worker after skillfulness. “He is very honest. I know that if I gave him order he would listen and do the work,” says Tom having finished interviewing his first blue-collar candidate. Tom’s decision not to select this honest candidate for the position shows that sincerity is the best policy as long as it remains bound to one’s presentation of experience and skills that managers find useful in the workplace. Another plausible answer is having a desire to spend a longer time in the company and try to “save up a little”, which is the answer that Liu Kang gives when I ask him about his future job plans. Just like in the case of passion, speaking openly about own endeavors that are unassociated with ElectriCo means ruining own job prospects in the company. Yan (2003b: 77, 2011: 52) claims that a *laoshi* character, which includes traits of honesty and obedience, is valuable solely in the context of low mobility and close interpersonal relationships with in-group members. Based on her interviews with Xiajia villagers, she concludes that in an unregulated, market-based environment where people deal with strangers the moral quality of *laoshi* “invites aggression and cheating”. Here it is clear that the distinctive characteristics of blue-collars’ moral dispositions and the white-

collars' judgment of them as inadequate rather than being honest *per se* have a negative impact on workers' job prospects.

Blue-collar workers' habit of jumping ship without prior notice may also be regarded as evidence that the overt expression of genuine thoughts, feelings, ideas, and aspirations does not have any value in the blue-collar world. Recall Tao Jun's illustration of the "honest man", which agrees with the workers' inclination to obtain a higher income by leaving the company rather than asking their managers directly for a raise. Cai Lili tells me that some workers turn to the HR department for assistance on this matter. As I talk to Chu Fengqing, another member of the HR team, I realize that these attempts are normally unsuccessful. When asked to describe grievance procedures in Electrico, Chu Fengqing replies:

“White-collar workers solve it with their department manager but blue-collar workers usually come immediately here, because their complaints are about salary levels and 工作压力 [*gongzuo yali*, pressure at work], which they cannot solve with their supervisors. Blue-collar workers work until the work conditions become unbearable for them and then they just leave. When they come to us, they usually want a salary increase and they say that their salary does not match their effort. We have round 500 workers and imagine if we give one worker salary increase, then we have to improve all salaries, then 产品涨价 [*chanpin zhangjia*, product price rises]. That's what economists think about. What we are doing, we explain that if they perform well they will get a better pay, and they get more if they work better but they want to get a raise without effort.”

Blue-collar workers' experience of having their demands ignored has undoubtedly taught them that quitting voluntarily is the most reasonable way of getting their needs met. According to young Chinese vocational education graduates interviewed by Woronov (2011), frequent job-hopping is the only route to achieving valued goals.

Although blue-collar workers give the impression of being detached and solitary, they are united in their tendency to differentiate themselves from managers and other white-collar workers by describing them as arrogant and self-serving, while stressing own willingness to socialize with people at all levels. Liu Kang – whose thorough and critical description of white-collar habitus may be found in the second section of this chapter – is firmly convinced that managers “seek to maximize their own benefits to the greatest extent [他会尽量使他利益最大化, *ta hui jinliang shi ta liyi zuidahua*]. [...] They think that we, ordinary employees, are not important at all [并不重要, *bing bu zhongyao*].” As I talk with

a group of workers with the intention of unraveling the nature of employer-employee relationship, Ding Wei shows up, listens for a moment, and jumps into the conversation with a question directed at me, “What do you think about relationships, are they fine?” I respond by asking for his opinion and he replies, “Alright, in fact relationships or not it is money!” He whispers while rubbing his thumb and fingers together. “Ha, isn’t it so! High salary, don’t need anything else!” All workers laugh merrily while Ding Wei continues his speech, “In fact, let me tell you something...” A worker interrupts him with a teasing comment, “You also need to drink,” which brings on more laughter. I ask Ding Wei whom he goes drinking with. “I’m fine with whomever, whomever! With leaders drinking, drinking together, not a problem at all!” He, however, admits that he has never gone out for drinks with his coworkers. To my question “Do you go drinking with leaders?” he responds:

“You should ask leaders this question, ask leaders, you should ask leaders if they like to drink with people below [下面的人, *xiamian de ren*]. We – we will of course drink. If they invite us [请我们, *qing women*] we are of course very happy [很开心, *hen kaixin*], right? But they are busy, have a lot of own things to deal with, they don’t have time to invite, right, right? He calculates drinks, ‘This group of people several tens of *yuan* for several bottles,’ right? If he gives a small token of his appreciation [如果他意思意思的话, *ruguo ta yisi yisi de hua*],²⁶ if he does not manage to finish his work, how can the company give him such a high [salary]? [...] Management level, managers, they do not need to come downstairs. This is tradition, it is the Chinese [thing]. Like me, I like to drink with Gallians ha ha ha, like to sing songs with Gallian little sisters ha ha ha! [all burst out of laughter]”

Holmes and Marra (2002: 66) write that humor can be used as means of expressing solidarity or as “a subversive strategy especially in hierarchical contexts [...] for conveying critical or negative intent.” Ding Wei’s sarcastic response is therefore more than just an attempt to amuse his audience: it simultaneously affirms his membership in the “people below” group and communicates his group’s social distance from the “leaders” or “management level”. Similarly, mutual heartily laughter that the Ding Wei’s commentary elicits and the worker’s jocular verbal interruption signify the existence of a solidary relationship amongst participating workers and a pure authority relationship between them and management, characterized by economic coolness and instrumentalism (see Seckman

²⁶ Here ‘意思意思’ (*yisi yisi*) means ‘小心意’ (*xiao xinyi*), small token of regard.

& Couch 1989). Griffiths' (2013: 90) study reveals that "inviting" others to dinner plays a pivotal role in cultivating good social rapport and smoothing over status differences. Managers' failure to perform the expected social act of "意思意思" (*yisi yisi*), that is, to show appreciation for workers' effort by "inviting" (请, *qing*) them to drink is offered as justification for workers' instrumental attitude towards the employment relationship and their tendency to maintain distance from managers. The distance between workers and managers is further exemplified by very little cross-group socializing during lunch breaks: workers eat one hour before the managers and the rest of the white-collar staff, who rarely join them.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the first research question concerned with differences in virtues that are constitutive of organizational loyalty. It has shown that two distinct groups of employees emerge from the analysis of ethnographic data: white-collar and blue-collar. In line with the analytical framework, the chapter has been structured around distinctive moral perceptions and practices that are generated by habitus and relate to excellences of character that these two groups valorize, employing them as a type of moral capital – "aces in a game of cards" (Bourdieu 1985: 724) – to achieve valued rewards in their current organization. The instrumental merit of moral character becomes more pronounced as these young people elaborate on the values they pursue in the chapter that follows. Since habitus – a generative force of moral perception and behavior – is a product of history, this chapter has presented key distinctions paying special attention to individual employment trajectories as experienced by interviewees themselves.

The analysis has demonstrated that both groups value expertise and hard work. Yet, they offer different understandings of these two virtues and blue-collar employees mainly seek to enlarge and capitalize on the latter in the workplace. White-collar employees perceive expertise as continuous brain work: these people are proud of their various job-related abilities, which are an application of their theoretical knowledge gained through university education and further reading. Conversely, blue-collar employees' short descriptions of their expertise revolve around knowledge acquired through ongoing execution of manual work. In terms of hard work, blue-collar employees emphasize the quantity of work that they

perform while white-collar employees are more concerned with the quality of their work, claiming that their good performance results from their “love” of their job (Ellie) – that is, their passionate fascination with it. This chapter has shown that the two groups completely differ in terms of how they perceive their workplace relationships, as well as how they actually speak with and behave towards members of the same group. These people’s different interpretations greatly resemble Weber’s (1947: 136-139) descriptions of communal and associative social relationships. Whereas white-collar employees are imbued with a strong sense of community, demonstrating concern and interest for others through acts of humility, openness, and helpfulness, blue-collar workers emphasize the utilitarian significance of the employment relationship. They exhibit individualistic tendencies, focusing on their own job tasks as obedient employees and offering the kind of help that does not affect their own earning capacity, just like Lupton’s (2004) workers.

This chapter has also provided oppositions that underlie employee moral perceptions and are used to distinguish white-collar moral capital from blue-collar moral capital. Bourdieu’s *Distinction* teaches us that oppositions are rooted in class divisions, serving to assert the value of own virtues vis-à-vis members of the other group. The analysis has revealed that blue-collar workers perceive themselves to be unvalued and disrespected by those of the “upper floor”. “If others treat us in an undignified manner, [...] then we may find we have to struggle to maintain our dignity in the face of this treatment,” says Sayer (2007: 568). This chapter has illustrated how blue-collar employees protect their dignity and moral worth on the job through ‘othering’, construing the white-collar ‘other’ “as the repository of all that is despised and feared” (Sayer 2011: 173). For instance, by labeling white-collars “amateurs” and viewing the content of white-collar work as “idealistic” and “relaxed”, blue-collars assert the value of their own version of expertise and hard work. Moreover, perceiving themselves as industrious and accepting opportunities that allow them to exercise this virtue gladly, blue-collars regard slacking off as forced laziness, the only strategy available to people like them, “ordinary blue-collar workers”, when they are treated in an undignified manner to prove that they are not “mere objects of misfortune, deprived of pride, opportunity and dignity” (Hansen & Pang 2008: 91). Similarly, the ‘othering’ of blue-collars defined by their laziness, impetuosity, and irresponsibility, and chaotic career serves to set the white-collars apart as people who are

diligent, perseverant, responsible, with the systematic approach to career planning, people who possess the 'correct' virtues of character.

4. Grounds of organizational loyalty: values that matter in the workplace

In this chapter readers learn about differences in values in the workplace towards which ElectriCo's white- and blue-collar employees direct their virtuous behavior. These young people define and provide an explanation for goals that are 'appropriate' to their position in the organization and morally right to pursue for 'people like us' (Bourdieu 1989, 1990) as they give detailed accounts of their job searches and evaluate aspects of their past and current job. Values that matter to these two employee groups in the work context are most prominently reflected in employees' elaboration of reasons for leaving former employers and staying in ElectriCo. Since interviewees often establish the connection between the workplace and their wider life in their narratives, this chapter offers additional understanding of how work-related values fit into the broader picture of the lifestyle that these people strive to lead. As in the previous chapter, differences in moral perceptions are presented alongside examples of distinctive observable practices in the offices, on the shop floor, and outside of the workplace.

4.1. Leading a 'colorful' life: white-collars' pursuit of self-fulfillment

I drop by Ellie's office to learn more about her life and work. As we speak, her smiling eyes tell me she enjoys opening her heart and talking about her dreams, aspirations, and goals. This young female procurement professional originally comes from urban Liaoning, a province in northeastern China. She is married, lives with her husband in their own apartment in Wuxi, is expecting a child, and has been working in ElectriCo for three years. ElectriCo is, actually, the third foreign company in Wuxi in which Ellie has worked after graduating from a local university. She says she "chose" this city because she wanted to have a fair chance of getting a job that matches her qualifications and merits, "You know usually people in my hometown are very tall and big, but I'm not. I look shorter and not strong or something and some people may think I'm not ready or qualified for some important work." She believes she had "more choices" in the Shanghai region, which means having more companies to choose from and having a better chance of finding an agreeable job. Ellie tells me she did not want to work in one of "those big companies" that are state-owned and in which two generations work together. "I really wanted to see

something new and something more. Then I wanted to go outside to see what's that so I can choose whether I like it or not," says Ellie.

Her decision to study international economics and trade was driven by her interest in foreign 'ways' and enjoyment she gets from talking to foreigners. As she explains, "That will be enjoyable, so I think, I like that, I like to communicate with people and also I wanted to be happy, I did not want to fight to everybody every day. And also I am really interested in communicating with foreigners, so I really wanted to know how they thought about their cases, what's their life, what's the food, the culture and something like this. So yes, that's what I want." It is, therefore, not surprising at all that she insists on being interviewed in English. It was also natural for Ellie to find a job in a foreign company having completed her study. When asked why she applied for jobs in foreign companies, she responds:

"I wanted to learn the working way or the thinking way from foreigners, [...] For example, I'm a Chinese, I know a lot of thinking ways of Chinese and I can get some information how they're thinking, I also know the weak points of them. But for some foreigners I found, because the growing up environment is totally different and value of them are different, so they have some point which are totally different from Chinese. For example, planning, for example the priority, you know, the disposal way, and also the structure, the organization, yes, something was totally new for me, those parts were attractive for me."

Ellie attaches great importance to compatibility between her personal and team values. As she describes her job search experience, she says she has been always openly expressing her thoughts at job interviews to ensure that match. "I just show what I'm thinking, you know," explains Ellie. "I understood I really needed to find some job or a team that matched me, together, otherwise nobody would be happy, unsatisfied with me, also I would not be happy with the work. So I tried to find the team, the boss whose values and working way are close to mine so that we can work together." Ellie's talk about realizing her personal values in the workplace and the feeling of 'fitting' that results from her sharing similarities with team members is a typical example of white-collars' perception of work as a source of self-fulfillment, which they label "colorful life". The experience of self-fulfillment in the workplace – which involves the sense of self-development, security, being respected, and the feeling of balance – drives white-collar

employees to continue their membership in ElectriCo and brings about workplace familiarity described in previous chapter.

Ellie started her first job after graduation as a sales department assistant and, knowing she wouldn't be assistant long, she worked her way to a procurement professional in ElectriCo. Her job pursuits are consecutive steps in a well-thought-out self-development plan. As mentioned in the previous chapter, white-collars who emphasize career development are quite critical of blue-collars for not trying to better themselves in a more well and carefully reasoned way, but just doing a job to make money. With each move Ellie remained in a similar occupation, gained new insights, expanded knowledge in breadth and depth, and learnt new skills that enabled her to – as she puts it – “make the work perfect”. Ellie's clear awareness of her developmental accomplishments is evident in her descriptions of what she had learnt in each of her jobs, such as communicating more assertively:

“My boss at that moment told me I am too nice to suppliers, because I will ask some questions, ‘Whether you can deliver this, whether you can do that.’ For my boss he would say, ‘Inform the supplier you need to do that, you have to do that, you have to finish that by the deadline, meet the requirement. You have to push your supplier to do this because nobody will, you know, easily agree to give you discount or something.’ So at that moment I started to learn some different negotiation skills to different kind of suppliers.”

Ellie has internalized not only the neoliberal idea of freedom of choice in her biographical options, but also the values of self-enterprise and self-responsibility (Hoffman 2006; Liu 2008). She strongly believes that she is responsible for her own growth, “In China usually there is no organization of somebody taking care of you all the time, you have to think for your own life, what you have to do for each stage, you need to know something and make sure you're in the correct step.” Ellie visibly devotes time and energy to her development, proactively seeking opportunities to flourish. She embraces new challenging responsibilities, registers for every possible training in ElectriCo, and seeks coaching by her manager and even foreign colleagues, the latter of whom she evidently holds in high esteem for their professional expertise. Hoffman's (2010: 119) study provides similar examples of young professional “entrepreneurial selves”, who consider their life to be an enterprise with the goal of increasing human capital by means of carefully chosen on-the-job training.

Ellie is not alone in pursuing personal fulfillment through self-development in the company, which involves expanding own job-related knowledge and skills through activities that provide intellectual stimulation and personal pleasure. Take Chen Kai who is firmly convinced that ElectriCo can best cater for his development needs, “ElectriCo is the best firm. The atmosphere in ElectriCo is very good, I can learn a lot, the knowledge is professional.” Xu Ying likes having challenging work that helps her grow. “I want to prove my abilities” (我要证明我的能力, *wo yao zhengming wo de nengli*) is the explanation she offers for juggling two part-time positions at ElectriCo and being “fully booked”, as she jokingly says. As Xu Xiaoyang tells me about her elder sister, a librarian, she proudly says, “She admires me, tells me my life is very colorful and says her job in the library is for old people, not young, because young people need challenges in life.” When asked what he was looking for in his previous employer, Tang Weiye replies by drawing a comparison between ElectriCo and its competitor, “When I first joined the company it was not important for me how much I earned, I just knew that I had to learn more to become a professional engineer. The department in ElectriCo was very young at that time, and I knew Competitor invested more in training and development of its people.” Tang Weiye left that firm because its acquisition of another company resulted in “sitting in the offices doing nothing, no more challenges, we just played computer games. Many foreign companies in Shanghai 裁员 [*caiyuan*, lay off employees] when they change the company structure, but Competitor didn’t. I don’t know about ElectriCo, I think ElectriCo also never laid off employees.” Wang Wei gives a similar reason for quitting his previous job, “I wasn’t able to gain more knowledge there, it’s just same work every day, but the workload was very heavy.” One reason Wang Yang moved to another department in ElectriCo was that she had no chance to rotate and “learn more about every field”. She felt uncomfortable on her previous job, which she describes as “very simple and minor”.

Fang Di confides that her manager insists that she renounces professional tasks and accepts administrative work, and that she has fallen into despair because her first attempt to persuade him to change his resolution was altogether unsuccessful. As she explains, “I discussed it with Fang Le and told him I wanted to continue to work on the design, but he just didn’t want to listen to me. I was so depressed that day that I cried on the way back, and I wanted to quit the job but my husband and my parents convinced me to stay in ElectriCo because my son is still too small.” Two days later I learn that she persistently

fought to keep her position, enlisting her team leader's help in convincing the manager to change his mind. Her persuasive efforts were fruitful and she was in high spirits again. Fang Di gives the strong impression that she does not wish to put family above work in ElectriCo.²⁷ She says she already spends evenings and weekends with her son and husband due to balanced workload she enjoys.

This brings us to the second ingredient to a colorful life: gratifying relationships characterized by respect. Respect means being accepted as an equal member of the team instead of being excluded. This is indicated in Gao Jingyu's and Xu Ying's descriptions of cooperative working relationship among equals and Fang Di's talk about working together and supporting each other in Chapter 2. It also becomes apparent when Wang Yun gives a second reason for requesting internal transfer, comparing the department she left to a "modern" environment that she seeks:

"Here people are not so open-minded, they gossip too much and they think what they do is the best. [...] The outside world has changed, but here people still behave the same. Modern is also 民主主义的 [*minzhu zhuyi de*, democratic], I don't know in English, respecting others and treating them equally, and that concept does not exist here. It is only fake respect for employees who have been here shorter. [...] most employees here are older; there is a generation gap between us. So some employees who have been here for a longer time can do whatever they want and even if they are wrong, managers will not tell them anything."

She says she felt that her former environment did not "fit" with her "character", mentioning that she is "perhaps too idealistic" (可能太理想化, *keneng tai lixiang hua*). Wang Yang concludes by saying, "I left because I could not bear that situation at my work. I hope my life can be colorful or more interesting." Respect also means having a voice, being able to speak up and being heard. Wang Yun transferred to another department because she was not feeling at ease with her new Chinese manager who exhibits a 'do as I say' mentality, giving her no freedom to voice her opinion and do her job in her own way. Wang Yun used to take great pride in her work in ElectriCo because she felt admired by her former Gallian manager for "not just follow[ing] the ideas of the boss" and "do[ing]

²⁷ Fang Di also did not have to, since her mother-in-law has moved in with her and her husband to help with the household and childrearing. Majority of white-collars seem to have a good family-support system, making it possible for them to focus on career development (Aaltio & Huang 2007; Chen *et al.* 2000; Cooke 2005b). A daughter of Cao Lihua, a female engineer, and a son of Tian Wen, a female manager, for example, are living with their paternal grandparents outside the city.

some creative things”. She says she likes him because of “respect”, explaining that “he always encouraged me to speak out, speak out everything I think about. And if I can make the objection, make the objection not always OK, then follow [manager’s instructions].”

Finally, respect means having one’s additional efforts and good performance recognized while considering individual differences. White-collar interviewees’ accounts presented in Chapter 2 show that recognition encouraging organizational loyalty takes a variety of forms. Nevertheless, practices that play the most prominent role in these people’s decision to stay or leave the employing organization are a pay rise or promotion to a higher level in organizational hierarchy, the latter of which is accompanied by a pay rise. Ellie left the first company after three years because she felt that her efforts were not fairly recognized. She equates manager’s failure to take her query about salary increase seriously with a lack of appreciation for the competent and diligent work she had performed three years long on an entry-level pay. “I spent almost half a year to discuss with my boss, ‘Are you going to increase my salary’,” says Ellie. Whereas she enjoyed having increased responsibilities, she resented not getting a clear answer to her question:

“I asked my boss, I actually asked him twice. You know after the first year he gave me, he increased my salary because at the beginning it was too low. You know, it was the first year of my job, and the second year I just got a very small increase and in my opinion I deserved more. So I discussed with him or talked to him if it was possible to get more because I really wanted to do more, and I really did something, and he said he needed some time to think about it and, ‘Not only for you but for the whole team,’ or something, also development structure or direction, actually. But almost after three or four months I got some increase. But the third year I got very small increase because maybe at that moment my salary was not as low as my first year. So it was not so easy to get so much increase. But when I discussed with him and he didn’t give me any clear answer, just took a long time, more time, so actually I get my own [pauses] for the boss, he had lots of projects, he had lots of business and he is nice, but he is not, does not take enough care of my development and I don’t believe he will change, so I made a decision to choose something somewhere else.”

When asked why he left his previous job, Zhang Yin mentions lack of recognition in terms of manager’s failure to deliver on his promise of a pay increase. As he talks, it becomes clear that he nurses a strong sense of betrayal and grievance that his former boss took advantage of his diligence:

“Oh, he cheated on me! When I came I signed a contract and my salary was 2000 *yuan*, that was much less than here, and my boss told me I’d get a 30 percent raise the year after and instead of 30, it was just 5. So he was just promising and not giving us anything. Here it is clear how much I get, there is a procedure. And it is clear which tasks I have and how much I should work. The boss in my previous firm was forcing us to work overtime, and we were never paid for it. We worked even on Saturdays. He should know what salary he should give us and how he should treat us. He promised by himself and then cheated on us. And before we came to the company, we had a talk with their HR department, and the HR department was telling us things which were not true at all. We discovered later when we started working there. They told us we’d have good salaries and good working conditions but none of that was true.”

These people’s subjective experience of working in an environment where criteria for performance reviews, promotions, raises, or bonuses is seldom transparent gives rise to feelings of uncertainty whether their additional productive effort will actually be recognized, as we shall see in the next chapter. Hence they tend to work hard in hopes of their manager noticing and rewarding them for their good deeds. Whereas managers who recognize merit are highly respected, those who do not are not only popular gossiping topics and targets of distancing or exclusive behavior, but also the reason that white-collars give for quitting their jobs. Resentment towards managers who fail to reciprocate is revealed in a great number of angry comments I hear from these people, an example of which is a complaint of an unnamed staff member, “Manager said in front of my colleague that he cannot get the management position. I thought it was unfair and not nice, because I noticed that my colleague really wants to change something in the department, he wants to improve the work of our department.” Chen Kai condemns favoritism, leaving companies in which merit is subordinate to particularistic connections. He quit the Daqo Group²⁸ as he saw no chance to compete for managerial position against family members, “Only those who have relationship with the family can be promoted, because that was a 家族企业 [*jiazu qiye*, family enterprise]. If you work hard or have much effort you can just be a team leader, no chance to become a manager. [...] Many family-owned companies are like that. And here is not this problem.”

²⁸ The Daqo Group (大全集团, *Daquan Jituan*) is Chinese company producing electrical, new energy, and railway electrification equipment for local and global markets.

Ellie defines her next development step in ElectriCo as “more management”, “seeing the whole picture”. Having mastered particular aspects of her profession, she desires that her present position evolves into a managerial role. She has been acting as a team leader for a while, but has not been officially appointed as one yet. Most of the white-collars in the company are consumed by career planning, often understood in terms of vertical mobility. I remember Wang Wei saying a year before becoming a project manager, “I am now planning my career.” When asked what that means, he responded, “To move from technical position to managerial position.” For Ellie, Zhang Yin, Chen Kai, and Wang Wei, new title with an accompanying raise as a material aspect of work has two meanings. We have already seen that these people perceive themselves as having strong work ethic, expecting to receive appreciation for it from their manager. Wang Wei dedicated three years of hard work to his previous foreign employer, tolerating heavy workload, continuous overtime, and having only seven days of annual leave. His later description of his former working life reveals that he endured genuine suffering during that period, confirming Cockain’s (2012: 109) finding that an aspect of young Chinese people’s habitus is “being able to suffer, and to have this suffering acknowledged”. After manager rejected Wang Wei’s request for salary increase within the following three years, he decided to quit, “Wow, it’s time to leave, I think, it’s enough.” He explains that he could not stay because that would also mean earning 3500 *renminbi* just like the “fresh new guy” for six years, and experiencing a decrease in quality of life due to the rising CPI. White-collars see promotions and salary increases both as a fair recognition of their contribution and as a means to maintain their “colorful” way of life outside the workplace, whose foundations are self-development and security in the private sphere. These people and their family members participate in diverse exciting and talent-nurturing activities that are of no direct lucrative effect but require expenditures. Huang Bowen explores neighboring villages and cities with his colleagues by bike, Wang Yun seizes every chance to travel with her husband, Sun Hao and Cao Lihua take their children to “interest classes” (兴趣课, *xingquke*) such as English, dancing, painting, and instruments. According to Xu Xiaoyang, interest classes help the children to become “well-rounded” (全面的, *quanmian de*).²⁹

²⁹ Liu (2011) equates this expression with the cultivation of “*suzhi*” or “quality” that involves “cultural level of knowledge and skills” and “moral and behavioral cultivation conducive to social order”. Chapter 4 discusses *suzhi* as a mark of moral value in more detail.

As I talk with Zhang Jialin and Sheng Jian about their goals in life, Zhang Jialin says, “You must first survive [生存, *shengcun*] before you can talk about higher needs.” For him, “to survive” means to reach a “moderately well-off level” (小康水平, *xiaokang shuiping*), to have at least an “apartment” (房子, *fangzi*),³⁰ “own place to live” (自己住的地方, *ziji zhu de difang*), a “home” (家, *jia*). Sheng Jian adds that “livelihood is not guaranteed without the apartment [没有房子生活不能保障, *meiyou fangzi shenghuo buneng baozhang*]”, which is in line with Wu and colleagues’ (2010) observation that young Chinese people achieve security through home ownership. The desire to earn enough to lead a stable, secure life is echoed by Wang Wei:

“I just want, my target is just to reach some kind of life that I don’t need to be really concerned about money. Of course, I’m not interested in luxury things, I just want normal life, I don’t want to get too concerned about that. If some urgent thing happens, I have enough money to deal with it, for example, some serious illnesses, or something, because people do not feel safe in China, there is no good social insurance in China. So people do not feel safe all the time.”

As he further elaborates on the meaning of “stable life”, he mentions “have a stable work here”, which agrees with Tang Weiye’s peace of mind that comes with knowing that ElectriCo does not have a history of letting people go. White-collars perceive themselves to be in secure jobs in ElectriCo. “ElectriCo is not going to fire anybody,” says Cai Lili. Xu Ying quit her former job because of

“unsafety. As Chinese we should pay social insurance but the school could not give me. They give me cash but I think it is unacceptable for me. Because in China we have such feeling, 养老 [*yanglao*, pension insurance] is very important. Social insurance is so important for us and I am not sure probably you close the school [...] and I have to find a new job. What can I do? I have to 养活自己 [*yanghuo ziji*, feed myself]. And maybe my parents are old, I have to take care of my parents, if I don’t have a fixed job – .”

Their job security notwithstanding, Wang Wei, Zhang Yin and other single non-local males without an apartment might try to change the company if there are no salary increase or promotion prospects, because they firmly believe that they will not be able to realize themselves as husbands if they do not possess the ability to provide for an

³⁰ A general term used to refer to an apartment, a house and any other type of dwelling.

apartment and a car. Although they value the stability of their paycheck each month in ElectriCo, they cannot afford either with their present income. When asked if he is planning to marry his girlfriend, Zhang Yin, originally coming from rural Sichuan, lets out a heavy sigh before responding, “I asked her to marry me but she refused. She said I have to have an apartment and a car first. Because here you have to have an apartment and a car, otherwise nobody will marry you. So I have to work and learn more so that I could collect all that money and become rich.” His experience corresponds to the evidence that young Chinese women select husbands based on their financial standing (Zang & Zhao 2017).

My interviewees spent maximum three years working in companies that expected much and paid little (see Appendix A, Table 3). According to their employment history, their professional development is driven by a combination of non-material and material interests. White-collars’ each job change had a positive impact on their promotion opportunities and financial situation, especially for white-collar males (also Cao & Hu 2007; Chen 2010). This is confirmed by Tang Weiye, married engineer from rural Shaanxi who became promoted to a managerial position a year after his arrival in ElectriCo. He tells me that when he negotiated his original position, he considered not only the “challenges” (i.e., the prospect of more intellectually stimulating work), but also salary and cost of living in Wuxi to ensure that he would be able to purchase an apartment. His family is extremely important to him, as well as his need to provide for it financially. As Hoffmann (2010: 135) notes, “finding a way to secure home ownership reflected on a man’s sense of self and masculinity.” White-collars generally exhibit great thrift and are quite proud of it, trying to be as self-reliant as possible in their pursuit of security. Yang Xiaoling and her fiancée, as well as Cao Lihua and her spouse purchased their apartments jointly, with help of a bank loan and parents who assisted with 30 percent deposit, both of which they are planning to pay back over 20 to 25 years.

Exception are single females like Xu Xiaoyang, female engineer from rural Jiangsu, who spends her whole income on rented apartment and shopping for “expensive” clothes and accessories for herself and her siblings. Shopping is the leisure activity she loves most, “If I had to choose between shopping and other ways to spend time, I would choose shopping. It is very important for me to have pretty clothes.” Xia Meng, department assistant from urban Jiangsu, shares Xu Xiaoyang’s affection for consumption of fashion. This young woman, whose whole body reacts with disgust when I ask her teasingly if her

chair is the only one wearing a blue jacket, asserts her social position and distinguishes herself from blue-collar workers by walking around the shop floor in high heels instead of safety shoes. “They’re ugly” is the reason why she is not wearing them. If she were Veblen (1918: 170), her response would probably be, “It goes without saying that no apparel can be considered elegant, or even decent, if it shows the effect of manual labour [...]”

Finally, colorful life seems impossible without balance, which is reflected in white-collar employees’ efforts to have a job with free evenings, weekends, and holidays that allows them to pursue leisure activities with their family and friends. Wang Wei’s reminiscences of his life and work in his former foreign-invested company reveal that he places great value on private time, quitting jobs with continuously overwhelming workload to protect it. When he says he realized “it’s time to leave” and that he had “enough”, he means that he decided to stop putting up with his entry-level pay and heavy workload that haunted him as he slept. When asked about his private life, he shows me that the question is utterly nonsensical by responding, “Come on!” Later he comments, “Working OT [overtime] was really a regular life for us.” He and his colleague Lisa, who also moved to ElectriCo, had no life but work:

“Actually, first year it was not bad because we didn’t have much pressure there. We were fresh new, we didn’t know the pressure. So we just worked, worked, simply worked. But later, because the real project began, more we had really really really really heavy workload there. Work OT really happens nearly every day, this was really hard, actually last two years in that company were really not good. Sometimes we just worked till the middle of the night. I think, ‘Ah, something wrong about the design,’ it’s strange. It’s even you’re sleeping you think about the design. So that’s a very hard period for us, also for Lisa, we don’t want to get into project designing department anymore, that’s enough for us, last three years. [...] and the management encouraged us to work OT because it was free. Of course, they were happy to see you work OT! [...] We were just driven by the project, the project, real projects were coming and coming, we had no time to finish one design and move to another. Designers who worked on real projects were not so much. In my old company there was really heavy design load. So truly speaking, when I jumped out from that company and came here I said, ‘Wow, this is clear, life here is much easier.’ Pressure is easier, the work pressure is easier. [...] Of course, life is not getting more easier, but the pressure is still different, when something comes I can deal with it calmly.”

Tang Weiye shares Wang Wei’s opinion, “I was very busy. Every day I worked for 16 hours, that means I only had time to eat dinner and go to sleep, I had no time for my

private life.” He also says that the overtime was “voluntary” (自愿, *ziyuan*). Tang Weiye appreciates job in ElectriCo being “easier because the tasks are clear and standardized.” Recall Zhang Yin who was taken advantage of by his former employer, “The boss in my previous firm was forcing us to work overtime, and we were never paid for it.” Similarly, Wu Xiaoling remarks sarcastically that her former team was “too energetic”, calling her often in the middle of the night. She says she did overtime on Christmas day and all other holidays. Xu Ying left her former employer because she “had not time to have a rest”, “to take dinner”, she was too busy because her former boss was overly ambitious. “He work too hard and he would like to get too more. He looks too far away,” says Xu Ying, continuing, “I just want to be happy. I don’t want to make too much nervous, and respect. For example, I am not a machine; I don’t want 24 hours is running. I need respect, for example, Mr Doe [Gallian manager] says [mocks in high voice], ‘Why are you still here? It’s Friday afternoon, go home!’ for example, I feel so good ha ha! Anyway I have to do overtime, but the feel is that I know that is required by normal work but it is respected by top managers.” Wang Ailing tells me she likes her job at ElectriCo because “people here work only eight hours a day and in other firms in Wuxi some work even ten hours and overtime is not paid. Here we get paid, and it is more relaxed.” These young people actively pursue a fulfilling career and are committed to creating a fulfilling life for themselves and their families.

4.2. Blue-collars’ escape from their ‘dull’ life

It required a great deal of self-disclosure on my part to induce Liu Kang, unmarried blue-collar worker from rural Anhui, to shake off his wariness of strangers and reveal his true self to me. My experience of negotiating access confirms the shop floor workers’ tendency to distrust outsiders, as discussed in the previous chapter. Liu Kang is very talkative and curious once he feels comfortable. When asked to describe his employment history, he says he went to Shanghai to *dagong* nine years before, having finished “vocational high” (职业高中, *zhiye gaozhong*). “We children from the countryside all go out to work [出来打工, *chulai dagong*], we have no other choice [没办法, *mei banfa*],” explains Liu Kang. For this young man, migration into the city is not a matter of his own choosing (Florence 2007). His fellow co-worker, who was born in Wuxi, adds, “It’s a Chinese characteristic.” Liu Kang continues on, “Chinese children from the countryside all go to cities after

graduation to work. It is inevitable [必然的, *biran de*].” The co-worker adds again, “Because there is no development in the countryside.” Liu Kang confirms, “Right.” The co-worker once again feels the need to explain further, “There are no factories in the countryside so they have to go to economically developed areas to *dagong*, to other cities.” Before coming to Electrico, where he has already been working for a year and two months, Liu Kang spent eight years in Shanghai working in two different companies. He tells me he loves Shanghai, “Shanghai is a beautiful city, you feel like you are in a developed country.” When he mentions that he ate in KFC every day while living there, his fellow co-workers throw in a teasing comment that he has “high eating standards”, to which he laughingly retorts, “Globalization in Shanghai, can’t fight against it, it will influence you!”

Liu Kang tells me he left Shanghai because of high living costs, “Wuxi cannot compete with Shanghai in terms of economic development and salaries, but the consumption is high.” He believes that Shanghai is suitable for rich people to live. In Wuxi, which he calls “little Shanghai” (小上海, *xiao Shanghai*) for being as developed, his quality of life is better because he can afford a better rented apartment and diet, and enjoy its “international flair” (国际风味, *guoji fengwei*). Like many other young Chinese born in the countryside, Liu Kang is motivated to stay in the city by the thrill of experiencing a cosmopolitan environment and a better quality of life in general (Wu & Xie 2006). He likes watching the Discovery Channel, particularly the “very touching” (很感人, *hen gan ren*) programs about foreign cultures and African wild animals. He says he has never chatted so happily with a foreigner before. When asked what he thinks about his job prospects in the area, he replies, “For ordinary employees like us [普通的员工, *putong de yuangong*], there are many places here to look for a job because the treatment [待遇, *daiyu*]³¹ is similar everywhere, round 2000 *kuai qian*. It can be found everywhere, really many places.”

Yu Long, Liu Kang’s seemingly apathetic and detached colleague from urban Jiangsu with a vocational college degree, says he stayed four years with his former Chinese

³¹ ‘*Daiyu*’ or ‘treatment’ is a term that may be used to refer not only to pay, but also to working conditions and a wide range of benefits in kind (Frazier 2002). My blue-collar interviewees’ accounts show that ‘*daiyu*’ usually means remuneration in blue-collar world. Yu Long additionally mentions ‘welfare’ (福利, *fuli*), though his understanding of ‘treatment’ was the response to my question what ‘treatment’ includes. Also translated as “treatment and rewards” by Lee (2007).

employer in Wuxi. When asked why he left, he says he “had no other choice” (没办法, *mei banfa*) but to leave because the company closed down. Yu Long describes working at ElectriCo as “no different from other companies, it’s just working [干活儿, *gan huo’r*],” “the treatment is similar everywhere.” Liu Kang explains that “just working” means “to earn money” (赚钱, *zhuanqian*), “to earn a bit of salary” (赚点工资, *zhuan dian gongzi*). Yu Long provides the same definition, “earning money” (赚钱, *zhuanqian*). Zelizer (1989, 1997) reminds us of Veblen’s (1918) early writing about many symbolic meanings of money and the goods purchased with it. Indeed, money earned carries many different meanings in blue-collar world, having happiness, security, caring for family members, self-esteem, and respect as its moral dimensions.

“Why do you work? Why do you study?” a blue-collar worker asks me. “Does it make you happy [开心, *kaixin*]? If yes, your family has money. Aiya, one needs money, nothing is possible without money [没钱都不行, *mei qian dou buxing*].” Passing by on the way to his workshop, a blue-collar group leader hears Shen Jian, QM supervisor, telling me that he improves his life by planting trees every year with his son. Then the group leader shares his viewpoint, “I am trying my best to work hard [努力工作, *nuli gongzuo*]. The only thing I can do to change my dull life [枯燥生活, *kuzao shenghuo*] is to work hard. The goodness or badness of your character determines your happiness [性格好坏就决定了你的幸福, *xingge haohuai jiu jue ding le ni de xingfu*]. People who are easily satisfied can easily achieve happiness [快乐, *kuai le*].” The following exchange between Zhang Jialin (ZJL) and his second blue-collar interviewee (BC2) is one of the best examples attesting to these people’s desire to earn in order to escape the mundaneness of blue-collar work and bring excitement into their lives outside the workplace. Readers will also notice that the interviewee, thrown into a state of financial insecurity by his former employer, has no other choice but to seek new employment, preferably a “stable position” (稳定的职位, *wending de zhiwei*) that will enable him, the sole breadwinner, to earn a stable income, provide for his family and establish himself as an entrepreneur:

ZJL: I see you were in Little Swan³² from October 2009 till

³² A private Chinese company in Wuxi producing household electrical appliances (washing machines, refrigerators, air conditioners, etc.).

- November 2011. Why aren't you working there?
- BC2: I don't know now, maybe it will go bankrupt; they have begun dismissing us [解雇我们, *jiegu women*].
- ZJL: I see your job before that one was also not long, the car assembling, you worked one year.
- BC2: I worked a little bit shorter, worked for almost a year and then did that molding a little bit longer.
- ZJL: A little bit longer is two years. Almost two years, not two full years. I wish to know, it is strange to me, you worked one year in previous company, why did you leave?
- BC2: Before you are in the same post the whole time, there is no, ah, it's the same type of job. You are doing the same production line job every day.
- ZJL: Why do you want to come to ElectriCo?
- BC2: First, ElectriCo has a big reputation, it's a foreign enterprise. Anyway, foreign enterprises are all quite good, other I do not know. Anyway, I am interested in this post because I haven't had a similar post before, want to try it out [想尝试一下, *xiang changshi yixia*].
- ZJL: How does this post attract you?
- BC2: How it attracts me, I can't exactly tell how –
- ZJL: [interrupts] You heard ElectriCo is a foreign enterprise and thought, it's certainly good.
- BC2: A – yes.
- ZJL: And if you start working and discover it's not as you thought?
- BC2: It doesn't matter; learning a little bit will be helpful for one's next employment.
- ZJL: [looks shocked] Next employment?!? I see your industry-hopping is quite serious. First is molding, then car assembling, washing machines. What is your future occupational direction [职业方向, *zhiye fangxiang*] or your [career] development plan [发展规划, *fazhan guihua*]?
- BC2: My plan at the moment, because I just got married, I have a child at home, I wish to find a stable position and work three to five years, wait till my wife, my wife has also graduated from a vocational college, together with her, the two of us open –
- ZJL: [interrupts] Open a small store.
- BC2: A – we want to buy an apartment.
- ZJL: So what are you looking for in a job?
- BC2: First, the most important thing for me is still the treatment [待遇, *daiyu*], what that post is bringing me, money [钱, *qian*] or authority [权, *quan*].

Gong Kai, worker originally coming from urban Jiangsu, seems to be the only energetic person on the assembly line. He tells me he is in the process of “trying out” (尝试, *changshi*) different work, just like Zhang Jialin's interviewee. He worked for a year in

Beijing and another one in Wuxi, appreciates moving to different cities and performing different jobs, and wants to “choose the job that is most to my liking” (选择自己最喜欢的工作, *xuanze ziji zui xihuan de gongzuo*). He says he hasn’t found a job he likes yet. Gao Zhijie, intern who was born in Wuxi, feels out of place and does not intend to stay at ElectriCo after graduation. He tells me he would not wish to change the job so fast if he were offered a chance to do something different. “All people wish to have something fixed [固定, *guding*], all have that kind of hope [希望, *xiwang*],” he says. Yet, as he explains, they (i.e., people like him) realize shortly after they begin working in ElectriCo that the company is “not fair” (不公平, *bu gongping*) because it does not grant them an option to do something that interests them. They “remain in the same position” (同一个位置, *tong yige weizhi*) and, as a consequence, “lose interest” (没兴趣, *mei xingqu*) in work, starting to look for something else. Lu Man, assembly line supervisor from Wuxi, also believes that the absence of “hope” (希望, *xiwang*) is the main reason why blue-collar “talents” (人才, *rencai*) seek jobs elsewhere:

“I am getting 2000 *kuai* per month in ElectriCo, other companies 3000 or 4000 *kuai* per month, give me a higher job position, why not go? Because working in a factory, you have to give employees hope, direction for their hard work [一个努力的方向, *yige nuli de fangxiang*]. If they have no hope, no direction for their hard work, if they stay in one post for a long time, they will leave. [...] Which is why many employees decide to jump. Employees have to think of themselves [为自己考虑, *wei ziji kaolü*] and jump.”

Then he borrows my pen to write down a proverb in my notebook, 人不为己, 天诛地灭 (*ren bu wei ji, tian zhu di mie*), and explains, “If you don’t think of yourself, the heaven won’t do that either.” Whereas Griffiths’ (2013: 98) interviewees use the same proverb to convey their perception of serving one’s own interest as immoral, Lu Man considers self-interested pursuits in the context of work as morally justified, for ‘heaven helps those who help themselves’. Unlike Gao Zhijie who longs to do something he finds interesting, Lu Man equates “hope” with “wealth” (利, *li*) and “fame” (名, *ming*), that is, pecuniary motivation and the position with higher status. This man’s materialistic disposition, which is undoubtedly a product of his seven-year-long “history” as a production worker (Bourdieu 1990: 54), leads him to believe that happiness is contingent on achieving one of these two, if not both, “If the company adds some positions, people

will be happy [人家心理都会很开心, *renjia xinli dou hui hen kaixin*], they gained some fame [得了个名, *dele yige ming*]. If there is no fame, give some wealth [给个利, *gei ge li*]. All people seek fame and wealth [人都是为了名利, *ren dou shi weilie mingli*].” Lu Man chuckles as he concludes, “When there’s neither fame nor wealth, you tell me if you would stay.” He is highly pleased with his supervisory position, believing that the promotion he gained is an expression of ElectriCo’s appreciation of his work and ability. For Gong Kai, Gao Zhijie and Wang Yanhui, female worker from urban Jiangsu, journey to self-fulfillment involves changing jobs, trying to find something of interest while maintaining the stability of income to support their lifestyles and families. Empirical research shows that over two-thirds of workers initially employed in low-skilled jobs remain in such jobs, independent of their rural migrant, urban migrant, or local background (Chen 2010). As their employment on the factory floor prolongs and their ‘single’ relationship status changes, these three young blue-collar workers may become like the above mentioned interviewee, Liu Kang, Yu Long, and Lu Man, who emphasize the materialistic aspect of their employment and try to find contentment in focusing on their private life.

Neither Liu Kang nor Yu Long expect much from ElectriCo, perceiving themselves as replaceable “pawns” (一枚棋子, *yi mei qizi*) (Liu Kang) in the company, “two-legged men” (二条的人, *er tiao de ren*) (Yu Long) who are easy to find. The previous chapter mentions their feeling that managers care about them solely in terms of whether they meet the production quota. Apart from Lu Man and Liu Kang’s interviewee, blue-collar participants do seem to aspire to a position of “authority” at ElectriCo. Neither do they consider promotion to a white-collar position because “our education degree does not suffice” (我们学历不够, *women xueli bugou*) (Lu Man, Liu Kang) (cf. Ling 2015). ElectriCo’s blue-collar employees resemble garment factory workers studied by Lupton (2004: 68) in the importance they place on receiving a “fair day’s pay for a fair work” and “a steady supply of work on the table”, which brings security in terms of an adequate stable income, and the feeling of being respected by management. This is made clear by Lu Man when he provides an explanation for workers’ disposition to put in a lot of overtime:

“You noticed they work a lot of overtime [加班加得多, *jiaban jia de duo*] in ElectriCo, right? Why do they work so much overtime? Because their salaries are low. Haven’t you thought about it, the newly arrived workers earn 1250 *renminbi*, and they have to pay 400 – 500 for the rent, also

food and drinks – 1250 is already gone. So they work some overtime, earning additional 500 – 600 *renminbi* that they save up [存下来, *cun xialai*]. Leaders have to allow them, leaders know. If you don't allow them, they will all run away [跑掉, *paodiao*], they will not work. In fact, Chinese style of life is very simple [简单, *jiandan*]. Like us, people who work in a factory, workers [工人, *gongren*], our lifestyle is very simple. Speaking of those who do business, set up companies, their lifestyle is certainly wealthy [有钱的, *you qian de*], certainly very rich [丰富, *fengfu*], right? [...] And it doesn't necessarily mean, 'I have money'. Rather, 'My old man has money,' it is like that."

Lu Man's self-respect clearly derives from his ability to work hard to support his own modest lifestyle (Sayer 2005b). In safeguarding their dignity in the workplace, which is based on recognition of their hard work, these people engage in non-virtuous behavior such as slacking off (Hodson 2001). This subdued type of resistance to demands for additional uncompensated effort was introduced in Chapter 2 through Li Haomin's example linking respect to sticking to agreed quota. Previous chapter also presented another salient aspect of recognition in blue-collar world: giving equal pay and equal bonus for equal work, as mentioned by Tao Jun. Yu Long's superficial emotional detachment escalates into depression and thoughts of quitting once he perceives himself as being subjected to indignities, for example by being ridiculed and implicitly classified by his manager as lazy:

"I am exhausted. The production quota is a bit, well, leader [领导, *lingdao*] tells us, 'Gallians do nine and you three, and you are feeling tired!' Leader is only calculating how many hours you need for one round and tells us and it makes me depressed [郁闷, *yumen*]. I told him, 'You should come and see yourself.' Then he came, spent a month just standing here. But there are times when testing is easy. I wish leaders came more often and saw for themselves if it's tiring or not, how much time is needed, but they are not coming. We say, 'Amateurs are managing the professionals [外行人管理内行人, *waihangren guanli neihangren*].' So we work slowly, not doing nine like Gallians. Chinese people are like that, there is nothing to motivate us. Leaders tell us we should do that much, if we do not finish they will certainly ask us to work on Saturday. We are just ordinary blue-collar workers."

Being deprived of the opportunity to earn enough to lead a "simple" life results in a feeling of "class shame" (Sayer 2005a: 948), which is rooted in the concern about respectability and evoked by a sense of falling steeply short of it. Take Liu Kang, who is terribly worried about losing the income that prevents him from falling into poverty:

“Orders decreased, so did the salary. If we do not have overtime, our pay is only round 1000 *renminbi*. Basic salary is 1400 *renminbi*,³³ really low, it’s the lowest. [...] What we are getting now is according to comprehensive working time, we have 176 hours every month excluding overtime. They [leaders] do not want you to do any overtime, if you are really busy today, they will ask you to take days off because they regard it as we exceeded the hours. I think it is very unfair to us [对我们很不公平, *dui women hen bu gongping*]. [...] Our Chinese people’s pressure is too high, Chinese people have the greatest pressure in the world. This society is constantly putting you under pressure to create wealth [创造财富, *chuangzao caifu*]. To be able to sustain basic livelihood [基本生活, *jiben shenghuo*] you have to earn a lot of money. If you don’t have money you cannot do much. You can maintain the lowest standard of living [维持最低的生活标准, *weichi zui di de shenghuo biao zhun*], very bad standard, eat bad food, rent a bad apartment, cannot earn other people’s respect [不能让别人看得起你, *buneng rang qita ren kandeqi ni*]. So pressure of us Chinese people is too high. Leaders know but they give you this money and say, ‘If you are willing to work, work, if not, leave,’ they will find someone else. They will find new people and train them, what we have in China are people.”

He, however, does not contemplate leaving ElectriCo but patiently waits for the situation to improve, trying to save up as much as he can, “I am not planning [to leave] yet, I am trying to save up a little. We’ll see in two years. If the salary is really low I will leave.” After all, he “approves” of ElectriCo (认可, *renke*) because he knows the job well and the “leaders are not too fierce” (领导也不是很凶, *lingdao ye bushi hen xiong*). I ask what “fierce” means and Yu Long is the first to explain, “They sit in the offices and do not come over often.” In this context, sitting in the offices is evaluated positively since it means having some control over the execution of tasks. Tao Jun, originally coming from urban Anhui and holding a permanent Wuxi *hukou*, likes his “boss” (老板, *laoban*). He describes him as “a little bit better” (好一点, *hao yidian*) than other bosses because “he doesn’t pay so much attention to whether certain behaviors are allowed or not”, such as playing music in the workshop during idle times, which keeps workers working hard and in a happy mood (Chapter 3). Money earned from work at ElectriCo enables Tao Jun to maintain a “peaceful” (安安静静, *ananjingjing*) lifestyle in the city and provide basic education for his daughter. My visit to his home reveals that his approach to parenting

³³ Here ‘basic salary’ (基本工资, *jiben gongzi*) refers to a fixed gross monthly income that includes the employee’s portion of mandatory social security and housing fund contributions.

resembles the “natural growth” described by Lareau (2011: 238), since he emphasizes the importance of having free time for play during holidays, which his daughter spends mostly playing alone. Another local worker whose daughter attends primary school tells me she is having trouble with English and math. Having discussed ways to help her, I realize that he can neither afford private lessons nor help her himself due to his insufficient education and long working hours, as reported elsewhere (Hannum & Adams 2009; Woronov 2016).

When asked about his future job plans, Yu Long says he has “no goals” (没有目的, *meiyou mudi*). Liu Kang also says he has none, he is “doing *dagong*, going wherever jobs are.” However, he is determined to stay in the city and not go back to work on the land (Wang 2001; Yang 2012). I ask him whether he considers running a small business, and he replies that such an enterprise is completely futile, “There are so many small stores here and they cannot compete with big stores.” Neither does he aspire to own an apartment in Wuxi, “I cannot afford it. We will never be able to buy an apartment on the salary we are making.” He continues on by giving a highly reasoned, well-informed explanation of his thoughts on home ownership, linking his perception of the impossibility of purchasing the apartment in Wuxi with a number of factors. Liu Kang talks about the “ever-increasing real estate prices” (房价越来越高, *fangjia yuelaiyue gao*) that rose so high that “we would be able to buy only if we worked several decades without spending anything on food and drinks” (我们不吃不喝都要工作几十年才买得起, *women bu chi bu he dou yao gongzuo jishi nian cai maideqi*). He believes that his job and income insecurity make him an unqualified loan applicant, “To be able to buy an apartment, job has to be stable [稳定, *wending*] and the salary at certain level, for example 3000 *kuai* every month. If so, the bank will give you the loan, if you meet these requirements, if you have a stable income [稳定的收入, *wending de shouru*].” For Yu Long, a “stable income” means “being continuously employed” [一直有工作的状态, *yizhi you gongzuo de zhuangtai*]. “But nobody knows what will happen in the next two-three years,” says Liu Kang, explaining why he does not want to commit himself to repaying the loan over three decades. A blue-collar visitor from the adjacent workshop expresses his agreement with him, sharing that he still lives in a rented apartment, even though he has already been working for more than ten years.

That income insecurity (i.e., earnings being insufficient to maintain the current level of consumption) permeates the blue-collar world is also suggested by Gao Zhijie, whose goal is to “at least pay the rent on time” and pay the treatment when his family members fall ill (Hansen & Pang 2010). Since he adores computer-aided design, he aspires to open a studio with a friend of his. Gao Zhijie believes he needs three years’ experience to be able to work in the design industry, though he has a vague picture of the kind of experience he should aim to gather to leave the blue-collar work behind. It is usually some knowledge, some experience, “learning a little bit” (学习一点, *xuexi yidian*) (BC2) that blue-collar workers hope will be valuable for future employment fitting their interests. “There aren’t any training opportunities for us here,” says Yu Long. He is convinced that development in *ElectriCo* is denied to blue-collar workers and therefore is not sure if he can learn something. Yu Long’s answers, however, also mirror his general apathy towards training, which contradicts previous findings that China’s millennials, including those from rural areas, pursue further education and training courses in the city (Wallis 2013). Recall that when he joined *ElectriCo*, his “leader” brought him to his own specific position in the workshop and taught him briefly the basics of operating the machine he is working with, “I just know that it’s not good when the red light goes on so I’m paying attention to that.” While reading fiction or expanding popular knowledge may provide relief from the mundaneness and frustrations of low-paid factory work, it may also worsen job prospects and life chances.

My blue-collar interviewees exhibit great frugality and strive to improve their living standard by working hard. Both Yu Long and Wang Yanhui say that they do not like shopping, and that they lead a quiet, isolated life. Recall Yu Long defining himself as “introvert”, and Wang Yanhui mentioning that she spends evenings either in her brother’s apartment, dining with him and his spouse, or staying at home and watching television (cf. Ling 2015; Pun 2003). In their consumption style, these people are very similar to Cui and Liu’s (2001) “working poor”; they do not indulge in costly social and leisure activities as their income is only sufficient to provide for essential goods. They also remind me of Chan’s (2002) migrant workers who are entrapped in the culture of survival. Blue-collar workers, who derive their dignity mainly from their hard work and familiarity with tasks at hand, have only two requirements from management: to allow them some independence by easing the disciplinary measures in the factory, and to address their need for maintaining

their lifestyles at a modest, respectable level by increasing their base pay and giving them opportunities to do overtime work.

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the second research question concerned with differences in values that are grounds for organizational loyalty, examining the role that job at ElectriCo plays in the lives of white- and blue-collar employees. Stronger emphasis has been placed on individual cases that are representative of the two distinctive employee groups occupying two different positions in the organization as a field. This chapter has shown that there is a marked difference of the moral perception and practice between white- and blue-collar employees in terms of self-development, respect, security, and balance as values that tie into self-fulfillment in the workplace and are relevant to continuing or ending membership in ElectriCo. These values emerged often intertwined as employees judged the value of their job at ElectriCo, spoke about choices involved in changing employers, and described the kind of life that they aspire to.

While both groups pursue a fulfilling life, white-collars are the ones who organize their occupational biographies following the ideal of individual self-fulfillment in the work context. They view their job as rewarding for its own sake, “as an important avenue to personal happiness” (Hanser 2002: 196), as an integral part of their “colorful” life that involves spending on concerted leisure activities with their family and friends, frequently met through work at ElectriCo (Chapter 3). These people tend to place more emphasis on being in a job they like, which they describe as “important”, “enjoyable”, “attractive”, challenging, and “relaxed” in line with the values of self-development and balance that it embodies. Bad jobs, on the other hand, are those that are “simple and minor” (Wang Yang), “same work” demanding a lot of overtime (Wang Wei, Wu Xiaoling, Xu Ying). Blue-collar workers concentrate on earning an adequate stable income, which is an expression of recognition by management and means to achieve security. Since they have difficulty in finding any other meaning in their utterly boring “same production line job”, they perceive work as the means to bring self-fulfillment into their private sphere. Data analysis has revealed that blue-collars perceive themselves as modest people who are “easily satisfied” and happy with less, just like Stahl’s (2015) working-class students. These Durkheimian happy individuals do not desire what they cannot achieve; their needs are in relation to

their means (Durkheim 1933: 376). Be it “dull”, “simple” or “peaceful”, workers’ perception of their lifestyle is certainly in “harmony” with their modest earning capacity, as Bourdieu (1981: 308) would say. This is also made clear by Li Haomin who, as if he were quoting Pierre Bourdieu, explains that the perception of success concurs with the structural location of the perceiver, “There is self-perceived success [自我情感的成功, *ziwo qinggan de chenggong*] and externally defined success [广义的成功, *guangyi de chenggong*]. If people think you’re successful, that is, you have money, car, apartment, you live a prosperous life [生活富裕, *shenghuo fuyu*], and there is a small personal goal, if I’m poor and I’ve earned one thousand *renminbi*, I think I’m successful.”

This chapter has demonstrated that people living a “simple” life have difficulty in achieving respect and earning sufficient income to successfully meet their simple consumption needs on a continuous basis. It has shown that blue-collar workers experience slack seasons and being dismissed and, as Standing (2011: 20) nicely illustrates, live with “chronic insecurity associated [...] with teetering on the edge, knowing that one mistake or one piece of bad luck could tip the balance between modest dignity and being a bag lady”. On the other hand, people living a “colorful” life have a strong sense of being respected and secure in terms of their job and stability of their paycheck each month at *ElectriCo*. Moreover, they seem to feel confident in their ability to grow their income through raise and promotion if not at *ElectriCo*, then elsewhere.

5. Analyzing fields to explain the differences

Chapter 3 illustrated the differences in virtues as types of moral capital that are constitutive of white- and blue-collar workers' organizational loyalty, while Chapter 4 dealt with the differences in values as its grounds. As suggested by Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Grenfell 2014), this chapter enables a more comprehensive understanding of distinctive employee moral perceptions and practices by presenting kinds of moral capital and values that are embedded in and sustained through managerial practices in *ElectriCo* as a field within which these people occupy different positions. The focus lies on hiring and firing practices, compensation, training, promotion, work organization, and leadership style. The chapter also relates *ElectriCo* to the fields of education, family, and economy to illuminate how virtues and values typical of structure of the relations between positions occupied within different fields complement or oppose each other.

5.1. *Fields of education and family*

A common observation among scholars is that China's curriculum reforms since 1990s have been aiming at cultivation of specific skills deemed necessary for successful competition in global market (Bai 2006; Guo & Guo 2016; Hoffman 2010; Yan 2008). Moral ideals behind these reforms mirror a more holistic style of education centering on the cultivation of the whole person, or, more specifically, the person's *suzhi* (素质, quality or character). In China's neoliberal economy, *suzhi* is associated with the virtues of expertise, continuous improvement and 'lifelong learning' (终生学习, *zhongsheng xuexi*), practical skills, creativity, independent thinking, teamwork, self-discipline, civility, modernity, and a sense and sensibility of the self's value in the market economy (Dello-Iacovo 2009; Yan 2003a; Zang 2011). We should, however, keep in mind that the meaning of *suzhi* is context-dependent and therefore elusive (Woronov 2008). For instance, when one blue-collar participant talks about *suzhi* of Chinese people in general, he borrows a quote from *The Book of the Later Han* "言行举止" (*yan xing ju zhi*) to explain that it refers to the manner in which people speak, behave, and carry themselves. This man's understanding of *suzhi* and Bourdieu's (1990: 70) definition of embodied habitus as "a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking" are very much alike. *Suzhi* can therefore be viewed as a property of habitus, a set of virtues acquired

through familial and educational conditioning. Wang Heng relates Chinese people's *suzhi* to "ability" (能力, *nengli*), "courtesy" (礼貌, *limao*), "all aspects, all-embracing aspects" (各个方面, 综合方面, *gege fangmian, zonghe fangmian*), "learning quality" (学习质量, *xuexi zhiliang*), and "cultivation" (修养, *xiuyang*). When he mentions blue-collar employees' *suzhi*, he provides examples of their bad working habits and incivility, "[they] are not committed, they do not work hard, they leave even without telling goodbye."

According to Hoffman (2010), the ideology of *suzhi* and self-cultivation serves to reinforce the belief that self-improvement and self-enterprise will reap economic rewards. So does the government's decision to charge higher education fees since the 1990s, an explanation for which is the direct connection between investment in degrees and employment opportunities after graduation (Bai 1998, 2006). Bourdieu ([1984]2010) viewed the education system as the primary institution through which class order is maintained. Sayer (2010: 169) explains further that the tacit and subtle nature of class reproduction within education makes social hierarchies appear to be based on merits and skills rather than on capital inherited from the family:

"Unless people have some awareness of the power of socialization according to birth class and embodiment of class position in the habitus, they are likely to think simply that those who do well in the educational and labour markets are more deserving, and those who do not, are not. From this lack of awareness flows the belief that modern society is meritocratic, so that adult class position is seen as a product of merit plus effort, and the dominant classes are seen as entitled to their advantages."

Indeed, the very classification of educational institutions into a hierarchical system, in which only key high schools and universities in cities and regions economically ranked as first or second tier are given special funds for their *suzhi* education whereas others are left to local governments to finance, produces and reproduces social inequalities that are reflected in distinction in personal cultivation (Dello-Iacovo 2009; Rosen 2004; Yan 2008).³⁴ Academic degrees indicate a high *suzhi* in terms of autonomous learning, diligence, individual choice based on interest, spirit of competition, or moral superiority in general. As such, they are an instrument of entry into white-collar expert circles, whose

³⁴ Bai (2006) gives an excellent example of the '211' project and its elite member universities that receive a large portion of their funding from the central government, whereas smaller local universities and colleges have to operate using their own financial means.

members are engaged in stimulating and personally rewarding intellectual labor (Anagnost 2004; Kipnis 2001). This is exemplified by Ellie's decision to study international trade because she thought that working in that field would be "enjoyable". Similarly, Sun Hao says, "In senior middle school I had no idea what future I would take, so after college entrance exam I just picked one from list, chose one I thought had lot of fun. My major is airplane engineering, so at that time I think, 'Oh, it's great, that must be a lot of fun, just like UFO!'" Wang Wei's heart's desire has always been to "do something really, how to say, meaningful," which is the reason why he studied engineering.

Yang Xiaoling and Wang Ailing, on the other hand, say that they had no other choice but to attend vocational college because they scored low on the national university entrance exam (高考, *gaokao*). Vocational education was introduced in the late 19th century to make people accept manual labor as a decent way to afford livelihood and to train "the lower classes in the immediately useful branches of knowledge", as Veblen (1918: 370) says. It carries negative moral value by virtue of its commercialization, reduced pragmatic curriculum, lax discipline, and low effort expectations, confining its graduates to physical labor (Hansen 2015; Schulte 2013; Woronov 2011, 2016). Recall Wang Yanhui saying in Chapter 3 that learning awareness in her college is not strong. During my three-year employment as an English teacher at a Sino-German college program in Wuxi,³⁵ I would continuously hear my English-teaching colleagues complain about the students' frequent sleeping in class and their general apathy towards studying. My co-workers claimed that "vocational college students are generally disinterested in learning" (大专学生基本上对学习不感兴趣, *dazhuan xuesheng jibenshang dui xuexi bu ganxingqu*). Quite the opposite, I thought, as majority contributed actively in each of my lessons – which I was free to design in whatever way I saw fit.³⁶ Woronov's (2012) study

³⁵ I was a part of a Sino-German cooperative study program (3+1) from 2005 until 2008. The joint program was a three-year English-speaking vocational training with business courses designed according to German educational standards. The aim was to educate Chinese students in line with the needs of foreign companies in China. My responsibilities ranged from training students in Business English, which was the base of their business studies, to placing them in internships and jobs in foreign firms.

³⁶ Through observation and exchanging ideas with my Chinese colleagues I learnt that only a small number of teachers involved in language training enriched the prescribed curriculum with student-centered interactive activities based on topics of occupational relevance rather than simply delivered the textbook content according to the one-way 'jug-and-mug' principle. A notable example is an engaging, creative teacher who graduated from the prestigious '211' Nanjing Normal University and with whom I planned lessons and

of educational practices in urban vocational schools confirms that students are taught to withstand years of boring, seldom rewarding blue-collar work and meaningless tasks rather than trained in job-related practical skills.

Yang, Cheng and Bian's (2016) analysis shows that high educational attainment is positively related to career placements upon entering the labor market and the mobility into elite jobs. More specifically, white-collar positions (i.e., professionals, government officials, office workers) require university degrees (Guo & Iredale 2004), whereas lower educational levels secure employment as a production-line worker (Chen 2010). Chen and Hamori (2013) find that this also applies to rural migrants: those with a higher educational level are more likely to secure urban white-collar jobs. A colleague of mine and a class teacher used the idiom for arrogance "has great ambition but little ability" (眼高手低, *yangao shoudi*) to convey his disagreement with a third-year student's decision to refuse the offer of a foreign five-star hotel to hire her on a full-time basis after her internship. That student was a first cohort graduate from the Sino-German joint program. Even though she was one of the best, she never bragged about her top grades. She spent hours studying in cold classrooms and stoically endured pain in her blue frostbitten fingers. I remember her saying, "I only cleaned the rooms." Despite our agreement with the hotel's top management to give her tasks in line with her hotel management major, both her internship and the position offered primarily involved housekeeping. She expected an office job in a foreign company, since the joint program leadership guaranteed all 'good' students a white-collar job after college and discount tuition fees at universities in Europe should they choose to use their German degree to pursue an additional year of study for a bachelor's degree. Conversely, her class teacher insisted that for a college graduate such chances were slim.

Both white- and blue-collar workers believe that hard work should be recognized, which reflects the neoliberal notion of meritocracy and is consistent with prior research (Blecher 2002; Griffiths 2010; Hanser 2002; Yan 2010a). Yet, the objective academic/vocational distinction that these people have internalized leads them to believe

activities. She was publicly criticized at staff meetings for her 'unconventional' teaching techniques and poorly evaluated by college administrators, whereas her students loved her. Woronov (2008) correctly states that teacher assessment and standardized tests covering exactly the same textbook content are two major hindrances to creative teaching.

that a satisfactory white-collar job cannot be obtained without university education, good grades, additional certificates, and diverse job-related knowledge and abilities. This certainly encourages white-collar workers, who claim that their position in ElectriCo is a product of the above plus hard work, to change jobs confidently expecting to improve their financial standing and further develop their occupational expertise. Blue-collar workers, on the other hand, lack the inclination to systematically plan their career, being convinced that their options in factories are blue-collar jobs because they do not possess a university degree. I ask Yang Xiaoling, who is employed as a white-collar on a blue-collar wage, if she has ever been thinking about changing her job and she replies, “No, you know that I have a college degree and it would be very hard for me to find a similar job even with experience.” She says that her classmate Wang Ailing, who is working full-time and taking part-time bachelor’s degree courses at the Nanjing University, is the only other college graduate she knows working in the office, “I don’t know anybody else. All other have graduated from a university.” This is also confirmed by Table 2 in Appendix A. For these people, blue-collar work is a constant variable and they believe they will hold blue-collar job of one kind or another. Like Hanser’s (2002) female interviewees with less education and fewer job skills, blue-collar workers value their marketable job skills required by their current post. They perceive their hard work as the only means available for improving or maintaining their lifestyle, which leads them to seek out a blue-collar job that offers them a greater return on this virtue.

As Shen Jian and I talk about his work ethic, he shares his belief that the environment determines character. According to him, whether or not people are “diligent” (勤奋, *qinfen*) depends on their family background and financial standing in particular, “Lao Zi says, all people at birth are naturally good, 人之初, 性本善 [*ren zhi chu, xing ben shan*].³⁷ All people’s character is the same upon birth. Then through experiencing the environment your character becomes good or bad. If you are born into a rich family, you become lazy because you have everything and you don’t have to work at all. But if you are born into a poor family, this person can be really diligent.” Veblen (1918: 48-49) draws attention to the fact that “[r]efined tastes, manners, and habits of life are a useful evidence

³⁷ It is actually unclear to whom these words may be attributed, but they are to be found in the *Three Character Classic* (三字经, *sanzijing*), which is, according to Liu (1985), the most recited book in China transmitting Neo-Confucian values.

of gentility, because good breeding requires time, application, and expense, and can therefore not be compassed by those whose time and energy are taken up with work.” A blue-collar worker’s remark that studying and happiness resulting from it are correlated with family’s wealth supports Veblen’s argument (Chapter 4). Chen Kai is a man of rural origin whose father takes care of farm chores in his native village while his mother stays with his wife in Changzhou, a city adjacent to Wuxi, to help her look after their child. When asked how his family helped and encouraged him through school, he says that he would have never enrolled at a “famous, very good school” in Zhenjiang (Jiangsu) had his elder sister not worked hard to finance his schooling:

“There are very few children from the countryside who attend a university, and the university which they go to is not a very good university, but this one is a very good university. If there are ten high school graduates, only two or three will go to the university, they cannot pass the entrance exam. So this university is a very good university, it’s a bachelor’s degree, and the percentage of graduates who get jobs after graduation is high. [...] [switches to English] I am lucky because when I go to university, my family was very poor, but my elder sister had no children then and she supported me. When I started going to [general] 高中 [*gaozhong*, senior high] she started supporting me.”

He tells me that his sister has attained specialized secondary education (中专, *zhongzhuan*) and that she does “family work” (家庭工作, *jiating gongzuo*), caring for her own two children and a husband who “has his own business”. Xu Xiaoyang was born in the countryside just like Chen Kai, though her parents are well off, highly educated government employees: her mother teaches math and her father is an architect. She is the second oldest of three siblings, all of whom obtained university degrees. Xu Xiaoyang mentions that her father used connections not only to find her a teaching job at a school in Huai’an, a city in Jiangsu where the whole family lives, but also to arrange a permanent urban *hukou* for all of them. As she explains, the latter allowed her and her two siblings to pursue “better” and less pricey education:

“In a city you have different areas. If you are within an area with a *hukou*, your children can enter kindergarten and school without taking an exam. This does not include high school, for that you have to take an exam, it only includes nine years of 义务教育 [*yiwu jiaoyu*, compulsory education]. Who doesn’t have a permanent *hukou*, they have to pay more than other parents for their children’s education or have 关系 [*guanxi*, connections]. And children who enter these schools go to better

universities, because these schools have better teachers and they have better 升学率 [*shengxuelü*, enrollment rate]. You can also get a *hukou* if you buy an apartment. That is why we say, 中国人头上的三座大山: 房价, 教育, 养老 [*zhongguo rentou shang de san zuo da shan: fangjia, jiaoyu, yanglao*, three mountains weighing down on Chinese people's heads: housing, education, pension]. After [the year] 2000 these new three mountains occurred because prices of apartments have been rising since then. And the education is very important for us. My sister, for example, she has a wonderful four-year-old daughter, I love her so much [shows me the little girl's photos], she is attending many 兴趣课 [*xingquke*, interest classes], like English, painting, dancing, and maybe later she'll learn the piano. [...] Chinese people such as my sister, she is earning a lot and works for the government, so she wants her child get the best education and be 多方能力的 [*duofang nengli de*, have diverse abilities]. The school to which my niece goes costs 10 000 *renminbi* per year.”

There is strong empirical evidence that students from high socioeconomic status families attend higher ranked educational institutions, major in more marketable internationally-oriented majors such as business, economics, international trade, foreign languages, and have an advantage in the labor market when they graduate not only due to their parents' wealth but also due to their family's social and cultural capital (Lu & Zong 2016; Zhang & Liu 2006). Another interesting finding is that urban children's education expenses alone entail 46 percent of their families' total expenses at the lower secondary stage, 51 percent at the upper secondary school, and 52 percent at the university level due to the increase in tuition fees (Liu 2011). Standing's (2011) conclusion that millions of children of migrants with a rural *hukou* have to attend schools in the countryside because their less privileged parents cannot afford the annual tuition fees for private urban schools should therefore come as no surprise. There are a few selected urban public schools that rural children are allowed to attend but fail to enter since school administrators reject them either for insufficient paperwork or under the pretext of capacity constraints (The World Bank 2014). Ling (2015: 115) claims that rural youth who manage to enroll at urban public schools are permitted to take majors that secure “harsh and dirty” manufacturing and service jobs. She also mentions that expensive private urban schools are of dubious quality and therefore do not necessarily prepare students well enough for the university entrance examination.

Blue-collar workers, who come from rural families engaged in farming activities (Liu Kang, Qu Hao), migrant work or petty business in urban areas (Wang Yanhui), or

urban families performing blue-collar factory work or owing petty business (Yu Long), mention neither receiving support or guidance from their parents during their study at a vocational high or college, nor attending any extracurricular activities or classes during their spare time. Reay and colleagues's (2009) study of working-class students presents similar observations. My blue-collar interviewees were apparently free to do whatever they wanted to do, apart from completing homework they had. These people are silent on or disinterested in the topic of self-financed further education and training outside the workplace, preferring to gather popular knowledge. It is plausible to suppose that blue-collar workers' struggle to maintain a basic, peaceful life, which is only a little more than providing for everyday basic needs, leads them to value "what is technically necessary, 'practical' (or, as others would say, functional), i.e., needed in order to 'get by', to do 'the proper thing and no more', [...] what is imposed by an economic and social necessity condemning 'simple', 'modest' people to 'simple', 'modest' tastes" (Bourdieu [1984]2010: 379-380).

Chen Yin, an engineer from rural Zhejiang whose two sisters also hold university degrees, confirms Liu Kang's belief about the naturalness of rural youth working in the cities after a short period of schooling (Chapter 4). As she explains, "[I]n the countryside many kids went to work after they finished 高中 [*gaozhong*, senior high], especially women. People in the countryside are traditional. They think women don't need education." Hansen (2015) observes that rural parents, guided by pragmatic considerations of immediate employability, do not value higher academic education and tend to enroll their children in vocational secondary schools. This choice may also be reinforced by the possibility for rural children to attend vocational high schools without paying fees (OECD 2015). Chen Yin says her parents are an exception because they were ready to send their daughters to university even at the cost of entering into conflict with the majority of disapproving villagers, and falling into debt. I learn that all three sisters fared extremely well at both the senior high school and the university entrance examination (中考, *zhongkao* and 高考, *gaokao*, respectively). Chen Yin's husband proudly states that "University was happy to accept such a good student as her. She achieved it with her hard work." Chen Yin claims that her rural origin gives her advantage rather than disadvantage in the labor market. "Managers think that we from the countryside are even more hardworking than other people," she says. It may be argued that blue-collar workers'

families perceive less demanding non-academic education as more valuable for their children not only because they are uncertain of their ability to afford their child's university education, but also because they have doubts about the child's ability to test well on the two entrance exams (Rosen 2004; Woronov 2016). Surveys show that only 0.7 percent of rural *hukou* holders have a bachelor's degree (PU ISSS 2013), and that only one-tenth of rural migrant workers have attained higher vocational or other education (NBS 2017). Xu Xiaoyang, Chen Yin, their siblings, and Chen Kai are undoubtedly rare examples of rural children who managed to obtain university degrees and secure prestigious urban white-collar jobs. A little less than one-third of my white-collar interviewees are born in the countryside (Appendix A, Table 2).

White-collar families' participation in extracurricular activities is possible due to their "withdrawal from economic necessity", "objective and subjective distance from practical urgencies" (Bourdieu [1984]2010: 46) that allows them, especially mothers, to help children complete school assignments, become more accomplished people, and cultivate their *suzhi*. Ren (2013) and Yan (2008) describe middle-class parenting practices in a quite similar manner. "Our parents were very strict to us, we were brought up according to a clearly set-up plan," says Xu Xiaoyang. "They wanted us to be teachers and my father wanted that my brother is an architect like him. My mother was helping me with my math homework, which is why I was always very good at it." Prior studies suggest that young Chinese are exhausted by their families' investment in improving activities and under tremendous pressure to get good test scores and enroll at prestigious universities (Anagnost 2004; Liu 2011; Woronov 2011; Yan 2008). While Xu Xiaoyang may have detested her parents' "concerted cultivation" (Lareau 2011) at the time, perceiving her parents as too controlling, she and other white-collar seem very grateful for it now and even exhibit pride in having occupations similar or better than their parents. We have seen that these young people have the same tendency towards self-cultivation as their parents, filling their children's leisure time with various systematically planned talent-nurturing activities (Chapter 4).

5.2. China's economy

Chinese government started promoting mobility between employers and personal responsibility for one's own life in mid-1980s by introducing labor contracts, whose

implementation was further encouraged by the 1995 Labor Law. Davis (1992) reports that urban Chinese in their twenties and thirties started to change employers already in late 1980s, seeking to increase the return on their education degrees. The 1995 Labor Law facilitated employment in the expanding private sector, including foreign-invested enterprises (FIEs) that were present across the country by the mid-1990s,³⁸ and massive layoffs in unprofitable, debt-ridden and overstaffed state-owned enterprises (SOEs) from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s (Cooke 2011; Gallagher *et al.* 2011). In 2000, the system for allocating graduates to work positions was abolished and autonomous labor markets were introduced (Guthrie 2002; Hebel & Schucher 2006; Lu & Zong 2016).

Although foreign direct investment (FDI) is present in only 4 percent of the total number of registered enterprises in China (NBS 2016, table 1-8), its contribution to China's gross domestic product (GDP) and employment is significantly greater. In 2013, for instance, the value-added of FDI in mining, manufacturing, and utilities sector was 21 percent of GDP and 16 percent of total employment, whereas the contribution of FDI in the service industry to GDP and employment was estimated to be 10 percent of each (Enright 2017). ElectriCo is one of 6274 foreign-invested companies in Wuxi, half of whom are involved in manufacturing and under Asian ownership. European-invested firms make up 7 percent of the total number, whereas 12.4 percent are financed by Latin and North American capital (WMSB 2017, table 13-3). A wide variety of employment opportunities across regions, industries and ownership types has further reinforced the importance of mobility and belief in the possibility of finding work that is more materially and personally rewarding (Guthrie 2002, 2009; Sheldon *et al.* 2011). Yet, China's economy has been driven primarily by low-technology, labor-intensive manufacturing industries that have been producing cheap goods for export to Asia (mostly Hong Kong), Europe (mostly Germany), and North America (mostly the USA) (Cooke 2005a; Guthrie 2009; 2016). This means that the fastest growing occupations in urban labor markets have been blue-collar jobs, which are more than double the number of white-collar positions (Cai & Wang 2015: 167).

³⁸ In the early 1980s, FDI was allowed only in special economic zones (i.e., Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen) and 14 other coastal cities (Dalian, Qinhuangdao, Tianjin, Yantai, Qingdao, Lianyungang, Nantong, Shanghai, Ningbo, Wenzhou, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Zhanjiang, and Beihai). The investment area gradually expanded to include the entire Changjiang (the Yangtze River) and Zhujiang (the Pearl River) deltas, the South Fujian triangle area, and, finally, the whole country (Chen 2011; Wei & Liu 2001).

Ellie's aspiration to find a job in a foreign company near Shanghai is understandable since education and job-related experience seems to confer greatest advantage for non-manual employees in these market-dependent and profit-oriented firms (Cao 2001). China scholars have found that young Chinese university graduates share a common desire to find a promising job in developed urban areas such as Shanghai, especially in FIEs that they perceive to be more challenging and rewarding workplaces than SOEs in terms of career development chances and compensation packages (Chow & Ngo 2002; Hoffman 2001). The average wage in FIEs in 2015 was officially 15 percent higher than in SOEs at the national level (NBS 2016, table 4-12).³⁹ Nevertheless, Kim and Chung's (2011) survey of American, European, Japanese and Korean subsidiaries in diverse industries, cities and regions makes clear that we cannot rely on national aggregate statistics because they conceal considerable variations between individual sectors, firms, and occupations.

There is another unpleasant side of the coin. According to Gallagher (2004: 15), loose implementation and weak enforcement of the 1995 Labor Law have caused a trend toward dramatic flexibility in managing the employment relationship in firms regardless of their ownership type.⁴⁰ The reason why Wang Wei, Tang Weiye, and Zhang Yin left their former foreign, state-owned and private employer, respectively, is because they were overworked, stressed and not paid habitual overtime (Chapter 4). A diverse mix of employment opportunities therefore means that jobs range from immensely interesting to utterly dull, very stable to extremely precarious,⁴¹ invigorating to health-damaging, relaxed to time-intensive, or well-paid to barely paid, if at all. For instance, Lüthje and colleagues' (2013) study of shop floor relations in 50 flagship manufacturing companies in China under different ownership structures presents five different types of labor regimes, ranging from state bureaucratic to low wage classic.

³⁹ The number refers to companies that are not funded by the Hongkongese, Taiwanese or Macanese.

⁴⁰ In the context of deregulation of employment relations, dramatic flexibility is reflected in the use of fixed-term contracts, if at all, and deterioration of working conditions (e.g., unsafe working environment, long working hours, meager compensation, wage arrears, employers avoiding to pay social security contributions, etc.).

⁴¹ Precarious work involves temporary employment, part-time jobs, independent contracting (self-employed, iPros – independent professionals), and other types of non-standard work arrangements (Lambert & Herod 2016).

The 2008 Labor Contract Law and its December 2012 revisions reflect the state's intention to curb the "race to the bottom" in labor standards and bring greater employment security and social stability (Gallagher 2017: 77). Empirical evidence points to a significant progress in its implementation (Gallagher *et al.* 2015). Employers, however, have been adept at devising creative, law-compliant ways to maintain flexibility and competitiveness at the expense of employees, such as employing less costly dispatch workers in regular positions (Cairns 2015: 235). We should also not forget that local governments have discretion on how to implement and enforce national policies, interpreting and adapting them as they consider desirable to promote the development of local community. According to Cooke (2011: 311), this "opens up opportunities for implementation slippage". Brown (2016: 23) points to the worrisome fact that the number of urban workers in temporary jobs increased twofold between 2008 and 2010, making up 20 percent of all urban workers. China Labour Bulletin (2017b)⁴² writes that 66 percent of strikes and protests in the first half of 2017 were over unpaid wages, that Guangdong, Henan and Jiangsu were the top three provinces by number of worker actions, that the construction, manufacturing, and services sectors accounted for 40 percent, 21 percent, and 18 percent of all protests, respectively, and that labor unrest in Guangdong occurred mainly in private and foreign-owned companies.

"Multinationals have rushed in," says Standing (2011: 28) as he discusses the not so straightforwardly positive role of foreign capital in China's growth, "They have herded hundreds of thousands of workers into hastily built industrial parks, housing them in dormitory compounds, forcing them to work so intensively that most leave within three years." Much has been written about the infamous dormitory labor regime in manufacturing firms predominantly staffed by rural migrant workers and invested by Hongkongese and Taiwanese (Chan & Zhu 2003; Pun & Smith 2007; Siu 2017; Smith & Pun 2006). An extreme example of the factory workers' response to the controlling, coercive and exploitative nature of this regime is the recent spate of suicides in Foxconn, a Taiwanese electronics multinational who has more than 30 manufacturing facilities in China (Pun & Chan 2012; Zhou 2013). We, therefore, need not wonder that Liu Kang evaluates "leaders" on a fierceness scale (Chapter 4).

⁴² A non-profit organization based in Hong Kong, seeking to help Chinese workers learn more about China's labor laws and their rights, and to inform international labor unions about events in mainland China.

Another important strand of research on labor management in foreign subsidiaries in China considers the transfer of home-country human resources management (HRM) policies and practices to its host-country operations. HRM researchers often rely on institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977; Scott 2008) to explain why multinational subsidiaries manage their employees in a certain way. The theory postulates that the adoption of particular HR practices is a result of multinationals' conformity to international, local and home-country institutional pressures, which is engendered by the companies' legitimacy concerns. DiMaggio, Powell (1983), Meyer, Rowan (1977), and Scott (2008) believe that firms that operate in the same environment become isomorphic with each other (i.e., employ similar practices). Case studies suggest that multinationals from Europe and the USA elicit engagement and retain quality employees using high performance work practices (HPWPs)⁴³ that, to a greater or lesser extent, resemble those of the parent company in the country of origin (Braun & Warner 2002; Cooke 2004; Gamble 2003, 2006a; Lüthje *et al.* 2013; Nichols *et al.* 2004). This means that subsidiaries tend to abide by their legal obligations, offer competitive basic wages, use variable pay to reward skill and performance, implement global career development programs, encourage information sharing, invite suggestions for improvement, and, as corporate members of the global community, conduct themselves in a socially responsible and ethical manner wherever they operate. Surveys reveal that HR practices directed to managerial and professional staff are basically the same in European MNCs, and that they also resemble those employed by local Chinese companies (Björkman *et al.* 2008a; Björkman *et al.* 2008b). Case studies of Korean and Japanese multinationals in China also point to the emergence of hybrid HRM systems that are a mixture of global, local, and home-country practices (Gamble 2010; Nichols *et al.* 2004; Taylor 2001; Zou & Lansbury 2009).

⁴³ According to Huselid (1995), HPWPs are practices that ensure the firm's competitive advantage by improving the employees' skills, increasing their motivation, reducing shirking, and retaining quality employees. Arthur (1994) uses a term 'high commitment work system', whereas Guthrie (2001) coined the term 'high-involvement work practices'. Common to all these labels is the idea of replacing the Taylorist or Fordist hierarchical system of control by an HR system that fosters employee identification with the goals of the organization through workers' participation in decision-making, teamwork, and pay linked to organizational performance.

However, labor regimes in foreign subsidiaries in China cannot simply be polarized into “sweatshop” and “blue chip”, to quote Cooke (2004). This view is confirmed not only by Wang Wei who “had really really really really heavy workload” (Chapter 4) but also by the above scholars whose in-depth interviews with managers and workers reveal significant variation among individual plants with respect to the implementation of HR practices. The variation is caused by many intertwined influences on these firms’ operations,⁴⁴ which are underpinned by managerial habits (Björkman *et al.* 2008a) or “taken-for-granted assumptions” (DiMaggio & Powell 1983: 149) about how human resources should be managed and treated. Just a few months ago, a strike occurred in a wholly-owned subsidiary of German STIHL Group in Shenzhen – who is planning to relocate to a smaller adjacent city of Huizhou in 2018 – because the management refused to compensate workers for occupational illness resulting from exposure to chemicals without proper safety equipment that the company was obliged to provide, but it did not (CLB 2017a). Under such circumstances, it is only natural that my blue- and white-collar interviewees are continuously and deeply concerned with finding decent employment and remaining in it.

These people’s concern with the economic capital that their job brings is amplified by the commodification of education, healthcare and housing without reliable guarantees from the state, and the limited provision of non-wage means of support such as free accommodation, canteens, or transportation to work by employers. As Rosen (2004: 32) says, “[M]oney has become such a hot topic for discussion. It has become essential for success in virtually every key area of social life [...]” Chinese state’s neoliberal transformation has been strongly linking Chinese people’s life conditions to their market position, placing them under increasing pressure to create wealth. This is indicated not only by Liu Kang’s explanation why he is worried about the reduction in his current income (Chapter 4), but also by Zhang Jialin’s answer to the question why money matters greatly in China:

⁴⁴ Examples of influences are the degree of international production integration, the nature of product markets (Cooke 2004; Gamble 2003, 2010); industrial sector (Lüthje *et al.* 2013); the level of technological sophistication (Gamble 2006a); corporate strategy (Cooke 2004); company size (Čech *et al.* 2016); size of the ownership stake or level of headquarters’ control over subsidiary (Braun & Warner 2002); composition of the workforce, regional labor markets (Björkman *et al.* 2008b); number of expatriates (Björkman *et al.* 2008a).

“China has a massive population. There is also a strong pressure of survival. Pressure of survival is far higher in China than in Europe. One’s subsistence depends upon one’s diligence [一个人的勤奋取决于你的温饱, *yige ren de qinfen qujueyu ni de wenbao*]. According to the US poverty standards, 80 percent of Chinese people are below the poverty threshold. According to the standards of the Chinese government, there are only few poor people in China. But if we take their income into consideration, they cannot sustain themselves in this society.”

Referring exclusively to rural areas, China’s official statistics say that the poverty rate in 2015 was 5.7 percent (NBS 2016, table 6-35). However, round 9 percent of China’s population lived on less than US\$1.90 a day (roughly 120.7 million people, who come from rural areas) (NBS 2016, tables 2-8 and 6-12). If we push the World Bank’s poverty threshold up to US\$3.20, the number reaches 17.6 percent (approximately 241.4 million rural people). Taking into account China’s withdrawal from public goods provision, a household living on that little certainly has an extremely bad standard of living, even if it is not officially regarded as dire. As we have seen in the previous chapter, my interviewees possess a remarkable sense of responsibility for own situation at work and life in general. Wang Wei doubts the reliability of China’s public welfare system concerning protection from any risks or dangers he might face in the future. When asked how much pension he will receive on retirement, Wang Heng explains that the system is fragmented and expresses his lack of faith that the State will support him adequately once he grows old:

“[T]here are three types of retirement systems. 公务员 [*gongwuyuan*, civil servants], so these are government employees, they receive the same pension as their last month’s salary. There are differences, of course, according to their years of service and position, but they get either 100 or 80 percent. Then there are 国有企业 [*guoyou qiye*, SOEs], pensions depend on the company’s power or influence and how much money they have, but it is still high. Finally, there are 企业 [*qiye*, other types of enterprises], and this retirement fund is the weakest. One of our retirees, he used to be a department manager, gets only 2000 *renminbi* per month now.”

Saich (2017: 90) confirms that benefits, which depend on the workplace and place of residence and are generally meager, cannot provide sufficient protection. Recall Wang Wei being worried that the increase in the CPI will significantly reduce his quality of life (Chapter 4). Lardy (2012) observes that the high consumer price inflation in 2011 was

caused by a more than 10 percent increase in food prices.⁴⁵ Wang Wei attempts to counter his sense of insecurity by climbing the corporate ladder and obtaining a higher income. Lu Man's conviction that blue-collar employees have to protect their own individual interest and jump if they are not given any "hope" (Chapter 4) also reflects the perception that a proactive approach to improving one's financial condition such as seeking out a new job is the best one. This view is shared by Blecher's (2002) workers, who believe that their destiny lies in their own hands and therefore take care of themselves primarily through their own responsibility. All of my interviewees – though blue-collar to a greater extent than white-collar – find it necessary and natural to consider materialistic ends when they job-hop because their ability to support their lifestyle and provide for their families depends upon the market. Fu and Tsui (2003) point out that Chinese media have also been playing their part in transmitting dominant values through stories of ambitious, competent, energetic presidents of business corporations, managers and government leaders who became successful, that is, wealthy and famous, by seizing opportunities and working hard for their companies and organizations. Hard work, expertise, and materialism are therefore legitimized by China's political and cultural elites who have achieved great economic success by establishing own enterprises and engaging in commercial activities (Yan 2011: 44).

Blue-collar's need for a stable income (Chapter 4) must have grown these past three years as China's economy has been experiencing a slowdown, with factories downsizing, closing or relocating because of falling demand for Chinese goods (Allen 2016; CECC 2016; Leng 2016). Furthermore, Chinese government started to restructure its steel and coal enterprises in 2016 and will probably move quickly to restructure its other industries, which should result in massive layoffs of millions of people (Kang *et al.* 2016; Reuters 2017). China is well aware that in order to ensure sustainable growth in the long run, she has to relinquish her old development model and foster technology, innovation, quality, domestic consumption, and services (Ma 2017; Xinhua 2017a, 2017b). Employment in the service sector has been steadily increasing, representing 43.5 percent of total employment in 2016 (Xinhua 2017c). These jobs, however, seem to be lower-paying and less covered by labor contracts than manufacturing jobs (CECC 2016; Gallagher *et al.*

⁴⁵ At the national level, consumer price index for food in 2011 was 111.8 percent (NBS 2012). In Wuxi, the index for food increased 11.1 percent in 2011 (WMSB 2012).

2015). Taylor (2011) doubts whether China's domestic consumption can expand enough to keep its economy growing, since the absence of a reliable social security system combined with rising educational, healthcare and retirement costs and the threat of unemployment has led to the high rate of China's household savings. Frugality, a very desirable trait in China, is reflected in my interviewees' disposition to spend their earnings prudently and their habit of saving for the future (Chapters 3 & 4). One may notice that white-collars' long-term strategy for accumulation of economic and cultural capital is similar to Bourdieu's ([1984]2010: 331-32) description of a rigorous ascetic habitus of an upwardly mobile petit-bourgeois. These people urge a morality of self-development and a colorful life as a duty having acquired enough material possessions to rid themselves of survival anxiety. Conversely, blue-collars' lifestyle seems to be ascetic by necessity rather than by choice due to their comparably lower income.

Prior research shows that uncertainties such as the inability to afford high tuition fees, the difficulties of seeing a doctor when ill, the rising prices of real estate, and even the economic poverty have been forcing young Chinese people to guard against such risks through competition in labor markets and active investment in their own expertise (Han & Shim 2010; Hoffman 2010). Harrell (1985: 216) has long noted that the dominant ethic in China is the "ethic of entrepreneurship", which drives people to invest their resources in a long-term pursuit of well-being and security. Similarly, Yan (2010b) points out that neoliberal processes have given rise to "enterprising self" (Rose 1996) or "neoliberal subjectivity" (Rofel 2007), understood as a responsible, proactive, autonomous, and diligent individual who engages in various forms of self-development to become more competitive in the labor market and avoid getting "weeded out" (淘汰, *taotai*). As has been discussed in the previous section, socioeconomic position has an important influence on the quantity and quality of undertaken cultivation activities, leaving blue-collars at more of a disadvantage than white-collars in terms of education and employment conditions.

Rofel (2007) labels her variant of a neoliberal moral character "cosmopolitan desiring self", having observed that individuals pursue self-fulfillment and, striving to create own life plans according to own values, tend to express their aspirations, needs, or emotions publicly without hesitation. However, this study shows that white-collar interviewees are the ones talking about finding a job in line with their interests and exercising freedom of choice among different job opportunities (cf. Guang 2007; Kleinman

et al. 2011; Pun 2005). These university-educated individuals are more likely to choose among satisfactory white-collar jobs and achieve a higher level of financial security and happiness in their work environment. Ellie's story about refusing a job in a company where her parents work and holding jobs that match both her qualifications and her values reveals her dedication to proving that individual skills and hard work matter, her belief that she is free to choose a job she likes, wherever she likes, and her commitment to pursuing self-fulfillment through work. Conversely, blue-collar workers' stories suggest that their weak financial situation forces them to engage in long hours of dull blue-collar work, with their choices revolving around regions, cities, and the length of stay (Hansen & Pang 2008). For Liu Kang, Yu Long, and Zhang Jialin's second candidate, 'leaving' was a decision motivated by necessity rather than pursuit of freedom (Chapter 4) (Fan & Chen 2014; cf. Hansen & Pang 2010). The alternative rewards that my blue-collar interviewees pursue, their frequently expressed feeling of dispensability, job changes out of necessity, even their brutally honest confessions about the tedium of their labor reflect their inability to find financially sufficient, fulfilling jobs – even their precarious situation in general. Workers' disadvantaged situation involves a history of work experience that contributes to the permanence of their underprivileged socioeconomic condition.

My fieldwork reveals strong evidence of the differential treatment of white-collar and blue-collar employees in companies that perpetuates social distinctions, particularly in terms of “permanent temporariness” of both rural and urban blue-collar workers (cf. Swider 2011: 152). In her study of Chinese, German and Japanese car manufacturing companies, Zhang (2015: 63) mentions the existence of “institutionalized status distinctions between white-collar staff and blue-collar workers” which go beyond income to include training and promotion opportunities. Zou and Lansbury (2009) observe the same distinction in Hyundai, particularly in terms of training and advancement. Cooke's (2004) research in an American toy manufacturing company reveals the shop floor – office divide based on accommodation provided by the employer: workers sleep in small dormitory bedrooms that accommodate 12 workers, whereas office staff and their families are given multiroom apartments. Since particular work-related behaviors and attitudes are a consequence of the interaction between the interviewees' own habitus and organizational practices, the remainder of this chapter outlines the most salient factors inherent in the

organization that explain differences in dispositions: compensation, job features, career development opportunities, and leadership style.

5.3. ElectriCo's structure of employee positions and related practices

According to the numbers that the HR staff allowed me to look at but not take home with me, the number of employees in the company rose from 688 employees in 2008 to 842 employees in November 2011: 529 of them were classified as “blue-collar employees” (蓝领员工, *lanling yuangong*), whereas 313 were employed as “white-collar employees” (白领员工, *bailing yuangong*). HR staff members used categories such as “basic blue-collar employees” (基本蓝领员工, *jiben lanling yuangong*), “skilled employees” (技能员工, *jineng yuangong*), “multi-skilled employees” (多技能员工, *duo jineng yuangong*), or “group leaders” (班长, *banzhang*) to describe the composition of the blue-collar group. According to HR records, “managers” (经理, *jingli*) and other white-collar employees usually had a “bachelor’s degree” (本科, *benke*), whereas blue-collar workers had a “vocational college degree” (大专, *dazhuan*) or lower. Although details about age or gender of employees of these two employee categories were not available in HR department, one could see quite a young workforce in both offices and workshops. While female to male ratio of office employees seemed balanced, production and assembly employees were mostly male. There was a small group of female assemblers in a tiny workshop that I visited. This encounter happened only once and briefly, though, as I sensed their unease having both me and their manager observe them.

As mentioned in the previous section, global market competition induces companies to adopt flexible modes of work organization and wage systems that allow them to adjust personnel costs quickly in business downturns (Lambert & Herod 2016; Sheldon *et al.* 2011; Zhu 2005). How does flexibility play out in practice? ElectriCo seeks to recruit younger candidates with vocational college or lower education, skills and experience exactly needed for the narrowly designed blue-collar job on a monthly basic salary that is 30 percent higher than a minimum wage.⁴⁶ Dong Can and Li Haomin are exceptions to the

⁴⁶ According to ElectriCo’s HR department, average gross salary for blue-collar workers in 2011 was round 1500 *yuan*, which was 360 *yuan* higher than the then minimum wage in Wuxi (WCNB 2011). After taxes,

rule since they earn almost as much as white-collar newcomers (also Zhang 2015); they belong to the one-fifth of all blue-collar workers classified by ElectriCo's HR department as "multi-skilled" and have been working in the company for five and six years, respectively. Basic pay is coupled with small positional and shift allowances,⁴⁷ paid overtime, and quality, safety and attendance incentives, as observed in other firms (Frenkel 2001; Kang & Shen 2015; Taylor 2011; Zhang 2015; Zou & Lansbury 2009). Cai Lili tells me that the maximum total sum that workers can receive per month outside busy periods is 2200 *yuan*, meaning that the variable part makes up round 46 percent of their total salary. Overtime payments contribute most substantially to workers' earnings. All employees receive a fixed transportation allowance of 150 *yuan* if they choose not to use the company-provided shuttle bus, and a bonus that is paid at the end of the financial year and linked to individual and business unit performance (Gamble 2003; Jaussaud & Liu 2011; Zou & Lansbury 2009). Blue-collar workers' annual bonus usually equals their monthly basic salary, whereas white-collar workers receive double or triple their basic pay.

We learn from Cao Lihua that new white-collar hires do not start with salaries below 4000 *yuan* (Chapter 4), which is twice the salary of a blue-collar worker. ElectriCo's white-collar employees belong to the highest income group that comprises one-fifth of urban households in Wuxi receiving an average monthly *per capita* salary of 2843.5 *yuan* (WMSB 2012, table 3-3). Great wage differentials between shop floor workers and professional staff including managers are also present in other firms (Gamble 2003; Zhang 2008a). When asked about flexible parts of the monthly wage, Zhang Jialin responds, "没有太多的灵活性 [*meiyou taiduo de linghuoxing*, there isn't much flexibility]. Sometimes, I don't know how about Germany, but in China sometimes we say salary is about month's salary." Xu Xiaoyang informs me of wage differentials associated with education and experience, attesting to white-collar workers' awareness of the exact monetary value of their educational credentials and previous work history, "Wang Cheng also left his contract in the office so I saw he got 5000 *renminbi* because he has some prior working experience. And Zhao Qiang is also getting something like that even though he is only a fresh graduate,

these two are almost equal and less than adequate when compared to the average net monthly salary of round 1610 *yuan* (WMSB 2012).

⁴⁷ Positional allowance of 100-200 *yuan* is given to those holding a group leader position, being exposed to hazards at work such as noise or chemicals, or performing skilled work.

because he has a master's degree and master's degree equals two years of experience.” Managerial salaries are unfortunately not easily revealed. “Much more,” says Cai Lili as I enquire at the HR office. Chen Yin's husband, who used to work at ElectriCo, estimates that a manager's monthly income is approximately 10 000 *yuan*.

While talking about ElectriCo's business strategy, general manager says that “safety, delivery, reliability, cost competitiveness, innovation, and quality” are the drivers of ElectriCo's competitive advantage, and pillars on which its own version of lean manufacturing system rests. Since ElectriCo competes on the basis of reliability, delivery and quality in the context of just-in-time production, its adaptability depends on stable and cooperative workforce (Thelen 2001: 76). Cai Lili assures me that ElectriCo signs four-year contracts with all regular employees, that contracts are generally extended, and that ElectriCo's number of dispatch workers and interns does not exceed the permissible scope under the 2008 Labor Contract Law.⁴⁸ “We almost are not allowed to have temporary people,” says general manager when asked how ElectriCo manages demand fluctuations. Case studies and surveys of domestic and foreign-owned companies show that the direct result of the implementation of the Labor Contract Law is the increase in personnel costs, as the law obliges them to pay a part of social security contributions (pension, medical, unemployment, work accident, and maternity insurances) and housing funds (Gallagher *et al.* 2015; Sheldon *et al.* 2011). Offering stable but lower blue-collar salaries is therefore probably the most tenable way for ElectriCo to decrease its overall personnel costs and remain cost competitive. Continuous influx of rural migrant workers into cities and their employment mainly in blue-collar jobs help keep urban wages of both skilled and unskilled workers low (Chen & Hamori 2013; Pun & Chan 2012). Provinces in eastern China (including Jiangsu) have been the main destination for rural migrant workers. In 2016, more than half of all migrant workers – 48.7 percent of whom were born after 1980 – sought employment in eastern regions and in manufacturing sector (NBS 2017). Blue-collar workers' necessity to work on weekends and pursue overtime pay to improve basic earnings

⁴⁸ Security guards and cleaning staff are hired through a labor dispatch agency (Zou & Lansbury 2009), whereas interns are hired for manufacturing and office positions. Other firms reduce labor costs significantly by employing interns because these ‘workers without benefits’ are excluded from coverage by virtue of their student status (Brown 2016; Brown & deCant 2014).

may well be explained by their low net income, which is further reduced by rental costs, as Lu Man mentioned in Chapter 4.⁴⁹

As part of its effort to cope with demand fluctuations, ElectriCo implements a comprehensive working-hour system for blue-collar workers (Zhang 2008a; Zou & Lansbury 2009), which enables employers to deviate from the maximum of 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week.⁵⁰ During slow periods, workers only receive their meager base salary because the overtime pay is nonexistent due to reduction in hours. Monthly income of white-collar staff working under the standard working hour system (i.e., 40 hours per week, Monday through Friday, 8.30 A.M. to 5.30 P.M. including lunch break) remains entirely unaffected by fluctuation in orders. Wu and colleagues (2010) warn that low-income urban households live on the edge of poverty and are extremely vulnerable to negative shocks. According to official local statistics, one-fifth of urban *hukou* households in Wuxi lived on less than US\$4 *per capita* per day in 2011 (WMSB 2012, table 3-3). The same source shows that all rural households were able to have round US\$7 per person per day mainly due to their engagement in paid labor that helped them double their income, which was originally also less than US\$4 (WMSB 2012, table 3-9). This is confirmed by the local worker who has to take the transportation job on the weekends to make ends meet (Chapter 3). The same can be said for Liu Kang and other rural migrant workers, who are unable to meet their own basic needs once the orders decline or the broader economy suffers a setback, such as the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in 2008 (Chapter 4). Tom's disparaging remark about his blue-collar candidates also points to these people's bad financial situation, "Their social position is very low and they need money to survive."

⁴⁹ In 2012, rental fees ranged from 500 *yuan* at the city outskirts away from industrial districts to 1000 *yuan* in the vicinity of the company. Chen Yin and I paid a little bit over 1000 *yuan* for our modestly furnished shared apartment in a district in which ElectriCo is located. Whereas each of us had our own room, Liu Kang had two roommates in the apartment that was an hour's ride from the company. ElectriCo does not provide free accommodation to its employees. Its canteen, on the other hand, provides free meals, which is quite common for companies in China (Gamble 2003). Cooke's (2004) case study of an American toy manufacturing firm shows that a wide range of non-wage benefits provided by the employer has a positive effect on employee retention, clearly because of their positive effect on personal savings.

⁵⁰ Comprehensive working-hour system is particularly useful for companies that have work shifts and experience seasonal fluctuations. In this case employers may request employees to work longer hours during peak periods and take time off afterwards in order not to exceed the allowed maximum hours within the calculation period (e.g., month, quarter, or year). The legal maximum for overtime work is 3 hours a day and 36 hours in a month. Payments for overtime on a standard working day, rest day or a day off, and statutory holiday are 150, 200, and 300 percent, respectively (Brown 2010).

Interviewers try to prevent early turnover among workers by making sure they hire applicants that have few or no dependants and are not in a dire financial condition. This is revealed in an example of an interview conducted by an unnamed female manager, which Chu Fengqing uses to explain what she means by saying that the key to employee retention is “management by sentiments” (用感情管理人, *yong ganqing guanli ren*)⁵¹ rather than “management by rules” (用制度管理人, *yong zhidu guanli ren*):

“She is very meticulous [细致, *xizhi*]. When she recruits her employees, she learns about every aspect of their lives. She asks about the employees expectations, family. [...] There was a candidate whom she met three times. Once they talked for an hour and a half. She wanted to get to know him better and found out that he really needed a higher salary because he took care not only of himself, his wife and child, but also of his parents. They were ill and he was the only one working. So she decided not to hire him. She meets candidates several times, trying to learn as much as possible about them. She knows each employee’s life situation, she knows about their hardships, she cares about them, and nobody left her department.”

General manager tells me that workers show little concern for quality, whereas ElectriCo’s customers are extremely quality conscious: some send products back even when stickers are not put on straight. HR department claims that the flexible parts of the salary serve to reinforce additional effort and superior performance. According to Wang Heng, “They know if they mess the quality up, they won’t get extra 200-300 *renminbi* that month.” Conversely, my blue-collar interviewees seem to regard variable bonuses as part of their expected monthly compensation, seeing no connection between the incentives and the important goals that are supposed to be directly rewarded by them. We have seen that ElectriCo’s allowances and incentives objectively do not result in much pay variability at all. None of my blue-collar interviewees mentions any kind of rewards or sanctions for (not) wearing readily available protective equipment, which agrees with the general manager’s statement that “ElectriCo doesn’t punish” as he explains that the “harsh” style of his predecessor resulted in a strike by workers. I observe that many factory workers do not use protective masks and goggles when these are required. That workers think of

⁵¹ ‘*Ganqing*’ is best understood as an affective and ethical dimension of a relationship, whereby people exhibit behaviors that demonstrate care and concern for others “rather than the selfish yearnings of an individualized heart” (Kipnis 1997). These other-oriented actions, in return, evoke positive feelings that are essential building blocks of a non-instrumentalist relationship, which is accorded high moral worth.

incentives as an entitlement is also evident from their tendency to increase their earning potential at the expense of efficiency (Chapter 3), which is facilitated by ElectriCo's use of manually operated equipment and machines.⁵² In other words, workers are unwilling to go the extra mile unless there is an additional bonus. After all, they argue, when job requirements and standards are set and converted into a salary that is already low, it is unfair and disrespectful to raise them without renegotiation. However, ElectriCo's managers do not recognize how their compensation routines contribute to workers' so-called 'laziness' (Collinson 1992). The investment of effort and cooperation among workers – who perceive themselves as being “ordinary” and therefore no different from other workers – are further discouraged by individualized and discretionary manner of reward allocation. This becomes apparent when Tao Jun expresses his dissatisfaction with the way an unnamed manager awarded year-end bonuses:

“At year-end there is a certain proportion to be added to salaries and everybody receives the average. But he can give more to some, give them a bit more. Some of our people got 80 to 90 percent of their original salary. One group leader, for example, earns 1100 *kuai qian*, this low, and after the increase he got 1900 and many others couldn't get so much, right? Gave him 80 percent, didn't give that much to others, just like this. Manager likes you and gives you a high pay – it's as simple as that. He doesn't say, 'It's because you worked well.' There is one doing testing, his manager hasn't given him a raise in two years. We all said it's not okay. He talked to our big manager, and he just postpones, ignores him [不管他, *bu guan ta*]. The manager of that department just says, 'I will give you, I will give you,' but if the manager does things like that, how can people obey him [服从他, *fucong ta*]? There are principles. [...] He's just not being fair. In the last couple of years, the salary of new employees has become higher than the salary of old employees.”

Tao Jun and his fellow team leaders believe that workers doing the same work should receive the same pay (Chapter 3). Studies show that adherence to the principle of equal pay for equal work and equal distribution of annual bonuses among workers doing the same job contributes to felt fairness and minimizes contention (Cooke 2002; Zou & Lansbury 2009), whereas pay differentials – especially between long-tenured and newly hired workers – perpetuate differences between workers, leading to resentment,

⁵² There are assembly workshops in which the assembly is performed manually without any equipment at all. Workers that Zhang (2008a, 2015) observed in highly-automated automobile factories felt that they were not able to influence the production speed.

demotivation, and self-interested behavior (Jin *et al.* 2012; Lupton 2004; Siu 2017). Tao Jun's words suggest that skill- and performance-based pay system would engender fewer bad feelings if managers clearly explained how differences in job responsibilities, skills, individual performance, or firm profitability caused salary discrepancies. Li Haomin says that performance in ElectriCo is not evaluated in a "scientific" way (科技, *keji*). ElectriCo's lean and non-transparent approach to compensation evokes the feeling that managers act out of favoritism. Workers often use the expression *paimapi* (Chapter 3) as the spelled-out version of the acronym PMP instead of its original form, Performance Management Process. They ask themselves, why do better work when managers don't care, we will get paid the same and their favorites will get more. Yao Yuan's explanation of the grievance procedures shows that it is usually futile for factory workers to engage in salary renegotiation (Chapter 3). Competition on the basis of cost makes it hard for ElectriCo to provide enough funds to acknowledge all workers who perform well or avoid pay compression.⁵³

Pay compression is particularly visible in the white-collar context due to much broader salary ranges. Recall Cao Lihua mentioning that her 2000 *yuan* salary is half the salary of a newcomer (Chapter 4). The answer to the question why white-collars talk about promotion as a next career step is therefore quite simple: it is usually the only route to a substantial raise besides finding another employer willing to pay them more. When Sun Hao says that the manager "could not give each employee what they want", he reveals the fact that limited budget prevents managers from awarding wage increases to all employees, even when they wish to do so. ElectriCo's PMP is, therefore, just as lean and opaque for white-collars as it is for blue-collars. This is also suggested by Ellie when she responds to my question about ElectriCo's promotion criteria, "No, they will not tell you. There is no testing or something so that you know, 'OK, if I achieve 1, 2, 3, then I can get a team leader or a supervisor title.' There is no clear rule for that. You have to finish every job or everything at this moment, then maybe later your boss will inform you maybe you have an opportunity for what, but maybe not."

⁵³ One type of pay compression, which often happens due to the increase in the market pay rate or minimum wage, is when new hires with less experience are equal to or paid more than employees in the same position who have more tenure in the company, receiving low annual pay increases. According to Wang Heng, ElectriCo's annual wage adjustment is 10 percent.

Zhu and colleagues' (2013) survey of non-managerial employees in American, German, and Japanese firms captures similar perceptions regarding the implementation of performance-related pay and career development programs. A little more than half of the respondents reported being clear about the link between pay and performance. Only one-third agreed that a monetary penalty was used for poor performance, whereas less than half were unaware of the policy on internal promotion, including its criteria and procedure. The results of ElectriCo's Employee Engagement Survey⁵⁴ show that employees disagree with the statements that the compensation they are receiving for the work they perform is reasonable (合理报酬, *heli baochou*), and that their managers provide a clear direction for development (明确的发展方向, *mingque de fazhan fangxiang*). To ameliorate employee discontent and try to reduce the annual blue-collar turnover of 20 percent, Wang Heng is designing two more transparent and equitable salary scales for blue- and white-collar employees⁵⁵ based on the results of the Mercer's Total Remuneration Survey.⁵⁶ Summarizing weaknesses that need to be dealt with, Wang Heng says, "And we will redo the development steps and transparency for communication. For this item we want to make people know we pay for positions, if you are in this position, you get this, it is fair. It's not you think you're low. Your ability, your position is here, we pay for this. If you want to get more, you should prove yourself."

Yet, the highest level to which blue-collar workers can be promoted is a group leader, which is the second (and final) grade on the blue-collar scale having a worker on the bottom. When asked if ElectriCo promotes blue-collar workers to white-collar positions, Wang Heng replies, "It is possible, but not common. [...] Well, one blue-collar employee in Xu Cheng's team was promoted to a test engineer. We wanted to set a good example with it, that everyone who's qualified and performs well has equal promotion opportunities. But the problem is that talent of blue-collar workers is not so good, when they graduate they

⁵⁴ ElectriCo runs employee engagement surveys in all its operations worldwide, trying to identify and address all areas that need improvement. Some of the variables covered are commitment, satisfaction, collaboration, personal development, empowerment, and compliance.

⁵⁵ The new pay scales consist of salary bands within blue-collar and white-collar occupational groups that are based on career ladders and assigned salary ranges reflecting the level of education, skill, experience, and responsibility involved in the position.

⁵⁶ The Mercer's survey provides information on market pay rates and benefits in different industries in 18 cities in China.

don't possess specific technical knowledge and skills." Wang Heng's statement corresponds to what has been mentioned in the first section of this chapter and found in previous research: employers use university degrees to control access to white-collar positions, which may be another explanation for blue-collar workers' lack of aspirations to office jobs (Jürgens & Krzywdzinski 2015; Zou & Lansbury 2009). This is also expressed by Cai Lili's husband Zhou Weimin as he offers an explanation for a huge basic salary discrepancy between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers, "The problem is that there are some graduates from technical colleges who are really skilled, but nobody believes that because there is this widespread belief that university graduates are the only ones who possess talent and can be trained." Along these lines, Tom states that his interviewees' "*suzhi* is very low" (素质太低, *suzhi tai di*) and that "they know nothing, so I take them, then teach them, and then again they don't understand anything." One of ElectriCo's former Chinese managers describes Wang Ailing and Yang Xiaoling as "people with horrible *suzhi*". He explains further, "Because if they tried so hard, and learnt so hard, they could hardly match a student from one of good universities in Beijing, Nanjing, or Shanghai. You never taught these students, so you do not know, they are really much better. So I never liked these two girls." By construing blue-collar workers as people with low or horrible *suzhi* in terms of their diligence or ability to learn managers suggest that workers are morally and socially less deserving than their university-educated white-collar counterparts (see Otis 2007: 115).

Blue-collar interviewees give a negative response when asked if they heard about the aforementioned blue-collar worker's promotion. Recall Chu Fengqing implying that salaries are not negotiable (Chapter 4), which is also observed by Gamble (2006a). Since blue-collar basic salaries are low, order fluctuations common, and the hierarchical structure of the shop floor is quite flat, blue-collar workers have very little chance of improving their income and getting into a supervisory position if they stay. It is, therefore, understandable that they are continuously searching for better paying jobs elsewhere. It is found that employers who offer workers clear career opportunities have lower turnover rates and a motivated shop floor workforce who proactively pursues further education (Jürgens & Krzywdzinski 2015). Lu Man's talk about giving employees "hope" suggests the same (Chapter 4).

Whereas white-collar workers' salaries are not flexible, their responsibilities are sometimes too flexible. When managers speak of 'talent', like Wang Heng does, they usually mean

university-educated office employees and their enjoyment of ongoing learning. Recall that being the best in class is a correlate of being more knowledgeable, more skilled, and more adaptable to changes and new roles (Chapter 3). This lends support to Hanser's (2008) belief – though only in the context of office employees – that companies look for people who self-develop and possess competitive work ethic. White-collars' accounts reveal that their job involves performing a wide array of tasks, being trained, taking on more responsibility, even changing teams and rotating through the department (Chapter 3). As Wang Yun describes her previous job, she draws a connection between “laborers were not sufficient” and “I had to do everything”, implying that organizations seek to accomplish a lot with fewer staff. Another example of the disproportionate ratio between manpower and workload is given by Wang Wei who says, “Designers who worked on real projects were not so much. In my old company there was really heavy design load” (Chapter 4). White-collars work in an environment where a high level of extra-role behavior that benefits the employer is highly desired but tends to be improperly appreciated.

“If you want to get more, you should prove yourself” or the assurance that was given to Zhang Yin by his former deceptive boss that he would get a 30 percent wage increase after one year (Chapter 4) are versions of a signal to employees that their dedication, hard work and other valued traits will be rewarded. White-collars' willingness to go beyond the call of duty is, therefore, further bolstered by a variety of verbal and nonverbal cues used by employers to signal that outstanding conduct will be reciprocated. These people are also ready to forego better pay now for the possibility of career advancement and a higher pay later. In a society that promotes the meritocratic ideal, it is legitimate to expect that the increase in effort, experience and skill is accompanied by an increase in rewards. However, uncertainty regarding promotion opportunities leads them to employ assertive tactics in pursuing their career goals, which is displayed by Ellie and Wang Wei when they try negotiating a pay rise (Chapter 4). White-collars do not refrain from asking their managers what they need to do to advance in their career. Nor do they stay in their current job long if their employer does not offer any opportunities for advancement, because being too patient results in missing out on a more rewarding position elsewhere. Research shows that firms promote employees rapidly, every one to two years (Gamble 2006b). These people's belief that Electrico will do the ‘right thing’ and reward their accomplishments encourages them to work hard and stay in the company

over a longer period. They believe that favoritism is overcome by merit in foreign companies, including ElectriCo (Gamble 2006a). Recall Chen Kai claiming that ElectriCo does not engage in nepotistic practices and Sun Hao stressing the importance of being a fair manager (Chapter 3). This is also confirmed by Wang Yang and Yao Yuan who say that 任人唯亲 (*ren ren wei qin*, nepotism or favoritism in appointments) does not apply to ElectriCo. That being assertive pays off in ElectriCo is confirmed by Wang Ailing, who says that her new position is a direct result of her telling the manager, “I want to get promoted,” and proudly concludes, “I am not shy anymore.” Contrary to blue-collar workers who earn less than half as much as them, white-collar workers with a few years of experience can literally afford to be more patient.

ElectriCo seeks to maintain functionally flexible and stable white-collar labor force by investing heavily in their skill development, offering career options, and demanding fines for training in case of early turnover (Sheldon & Li 2013; Zou & Lansbury 2009). When asked to compare her previous Taiwanese company to ElectriCo, Wang Yang mentions that “the Taiwanese were 小里小气 [*xiaoli xiaoqi*, penny-pinching] concerning training [...] here in ElectriCo it is more serious, there are training programs.” Prior research confirms that these practices are typically used by companies that focus on innovation and quality (Chow *et al.* 2008; Ding & Akhtar 2001; Frenkel & Kuruvilla 2002; Gallagher 2004; Taylor 2011). Since shop floor work in ElectriCo is fragmented into simple tasks, which allows the company to quickly fill empty positions without disruption, blue-collar majority is provided only with basic training that corrects their skill deficiencies and instructs them in health, safety, quality, and productivity standards (Chow *et al.* 2008; Ding & Akhtar 2001; Frenkel 2001; Taylor 2001; Zhang 2015; Zou & Lansbury 2009). Long-term training programs and variegated work are offered to a small minority of long-tenured skilled workers who operate high technology equipment and have been sent several times to ElectriCo’s headquarters abroad for training, like Qu Hao, Li Haomin, Dong Can, and Tao Jun. Job rotation among shop floor workers does not seem to be a common practice in companies in China (Cooke 2004). This is implicit in Wang Heng’s answer to the question about the skill composition of ElectriCo’s workforce, “There are also 多技能 [*duojineng*, multi-skilled] workers who rotate through jobs, but there aren’t so many workers like this in the market, so we have been trying to develop them.” Yet, recall Tao Jun pointing out that rotation is organized on intradepartmental

basis and depends completely on the respective manager's preferences, or Gao Zhijie saying that workers leave because they do not have the chance to try something new, something "different", "interesting" (Chapter 3). Brown and deCant (2014: 151) write that multinational companies strike deals with vocational schools to hire interns to do unskilled, manual, subminimum-wage work that is "devoid of educational, technical or vocational content and often unrelated to the vocational aspirations of the students."

The absence of the training component of factory jobs is also confirmed by Cai Lili as she makes a sarcastic comment about managers who, as she claims, shirk their responsibility to train production workers, "Our line managers have too many tasks and they should be given higher salary!" Indeed, Tom perceives workers as people with low *suzhi* who are untrainable. The lack of incentive to train blue-collar workers may also result from workers' frequent job hopping (Lambert & Herod 2016) and their tendency not to acquire further skills and certificates, for whatever reasons – lack of time, insufficient financial resources, seeing no prospects of finding a better job. The well-established poaching habit might be another factor contributing to the unwillingness to train workers. Sheldon and Li (2013: 187) report the interesting finding that companies poach workers of relatively low but transferable human capital to satisfy "their immediate *quantitative needs* for appropriately skilled workers". The inside joke goes, "ElectriCo is a training school for Bosch and Caterpillar's employees." Joking aside, these may be the driving forces of a vicious circle of skilllessness and precariousness that operates principally to the detriment of blue-collar workers.

ElectriCo's shop floor appears to be more Taylorist than lean, as it is characterized not only by a high degree of division of labor – which resembles Braverman's (1998: 321) "scraps of duties" that quickly turn into "sheer and mindless drudgery" – and a lack of commitment from management to implement continuous training and rotation, but also by minimal interaction among workers and a low degree of worker discretion and involvement (also Cooke 2004; Zhang 2015). In reality, many of ElectriCo's managers are seldom present or involved on the shop floor; they respond to the demand for efficiency and waste avoidance in production processes by communicating tasks, daily production quotas, and exact and detailed work instructions in a time-saving, top-down manner (cf. Nichols *et al.* 2004). Quality circles, teams and requests to make suggestions are unknown to workers, who are firmly convinced that their opinions do not matter. Wan Xiaomei's

happiness at the prospect of directing the implementation of the 3I suggestion system means that ElectriCo intends to begin soliciting workers' improvement ideas (Chapter 3). It is unfortunate that in a time when participative, empowering, and inspirational manner of interacting with workers is found to bring more benefits to both parties (Chen & Tjosvold 2006; Miao *et al.* 2012), authoritarian type of leadership with a pinch of paternalism and laxity remains popular with ElectriCo's Chinese managers.⁵⁷ Cooke (2004) draws the similar conclusion about the preferred leadership style. "Leader" or *lingdao*, what workers call their manager, is not expected to be empowering. Being a product of China's patriarchal historic tradition, the leader is accustomed to exercising power, closely monitoring subordinates, and making final decisions (Ren *et al.* 2015).

Statements that workers have no abilities, that they are lazy and do not care about their work, that they need to be closely supervised to ensure compliance, and that they have two choices: to accept conditions as they exist or to leave, are all expressions of managers' domineering habitus. So is their staying in the offices, at their high level (Gamble 2003). Recall the attempt to discipline and control workers by installing surveillance cameras (Chapter 3). Nevertheless, it is possible that managers' awareness of blue-collar's ease of finding a new blue-collar post (Chapters 3 & 4) and ElectriCo's vulnerability to disruptions in the flow of production induces them to supplement hard measures with softer techniques to elicit the desired behavior from workers (Siu 2017). According to Wu and Li (2017: 246), "Workers can become less proactive over time if they are in an unfavorable work environment, such as in jobs with lower complexity and autonomy." This is corroborated by the fact that blue-collar, being well adapted to a "fierce" (凶, *xiong*) management style, remain unconcerned about productivity and quality issues, calling upon their "nannies" to deal with any problems that arise in workshops, no matter how menial these may be (Chow *et al.* 2008; Huang 2012). That blue-collar's

⁵⁷ Leaders who empower listen to what employees have to say and incorporate the employees' views into decision-making even when those views differ. Moreover, they allow employees discretion in fulfilling their role (Tsui *et al.* 2017). Authoritarians, on the other hand, give orders and demand obedience. Paternalism is a softer form of authoritarianism, as leaders demonstrate benevolence and concern for workers' well-being by, for example, asking them about their lives, families, and hardships, by sharing reasons for own actions, and by showing that decisions are made in workers' best interests (Farh & Cheng 2000; Zhang *et al.* 2015). The female manager whom Chu Fengqing admires exhibits characteristics of a paternalist leader. Tao Jun's manager demonstrates laxity in enforcing compliance with rules by allowing workers to listen to the music while working.

habitus is inclined to accept the necessary and turn it into a virtue is reflected in these people's appreciation of little autonomy that they have in ElectriCo, since necessity means that they are actually deprived of it (Bourdieu [1984]2010: 373).

Collinson (1992) argues that workers' suspicion and propensity to withhold or limit cooperation result from being treated as disposable goods in the pursuit of profit maximization. Indeed, the word "fire" is used by white-collar workers exclusively in relation to blue-collar workers. "Six people left together because maybe they disobeyed some company rules and then we fired them," says Cai Lili. Yang Xiaoling shares her observation, "Here managers have been changing a lot recently and whenever a new manager comes, they transfer all blue-collar workers to other departments or they fire them." HR staff members tell me they feel strongly against dismissals without good cause and make great efforts to prevent them. According to Cai Lili, firing at will is quite expensive, "In that case ElectriCo would have to pay them 10 000 *renminbi*. If we could prove that a worker violated discipline policies, we would have the right to fire him right away without paying anything. That is according to the law." Chu Fengqing adds that "we cannot fire workers because ElectriCo is a big, well-known company and if we did something like that, it would have a negative impact on ElectriCo's reputation." It is very probable that ElectriCo avoids workforce reductions not only due to the high prestige it enjoys in the public eye but also due to government pressures to increase local employment and stimulate local investment (Frenkel 2001; Frenkel & Kuruvilla 2002). ElectriCo is one of the most honored companies in China, praised and repeatedly rewarded for its steady operations, management model, corporate social responsibility, sustainable innovations, participation in charity activities, and contributions to sustainable development of China's economy and society.

When looking at the office employees, a different picture emerges. ElectriCo encourages openness and helpfulness amongst its white-collar staff, especially in departments headed by Gallian managers. There is evidence that expatriate managers are very approachable and egalitarian, spending substantial time talking with and coaching their employees (Gamble 2003, 2006a). Collaboration preference is manifested in the open office design that fosters teamwork and exchange of ideas. Desk clusters are used to break up the feeling of being isolated or tied to one place. Upon entering ElectriCo's offices, one is pleasantly struck not only by the abundance of natural light and green plants, but also by

the dynamic interaction between staff. Team members frequently swivel their chairs to consult their team and, when required, easily leave their primary workspace to work at other colleagues' desks. Conference rooms that are adjacent to the offices offer a quiet, segregated working environment to which individuals or groups spontaneously move when they need privacy or do not wish to disturb others. Job rotation and intensive cross-team communication facilitate information sharing and the transfer of knowledge. Master-apprentice relationships, knowledge databases, visits to other subsidiaries, and team building activities involving creative collaborative tasks are additional mechanisms used by managers to pass on the accumulated expertise to newcomers and reinforce the sense of community (Chow *et al.* 2008; Ding & Akhtar 2001). My observation is that ElectriCo's white-collar employees are generally allowed task-related autonomy and asked for improvement suggestions at weekly meetings, which corresponds to their descriptions of managers in ElectriCo as "kind" and "open" (Chapter 2).

In her study of the French and the American upper-middle class, Lamont (1992: 147) rightly argues that her interviewees value "self-actualization and intellectual development" because their occupation "requires the intensive use of intellectual abilities". It is therefore reasonable that my white-collar interviewees emphasize the value of learning and feel at ease in an environment conducive to self-development. And it is likewise no wonder that they view helping as a normal feature of their working lives, feeling obliged to instruct their colleagues both in professional knowledge and morality as Tang Weiye, Chen Kai, Zhang Yin, and Wang Bing do. These people's "opinionated habitus", to borrow Bourdieu's ([1984]2010: 416) term, most obviously expressed in their eagerness to openly share their personal views, values, needs, and emotions, may be explained in a similar fashion. Wang Yun sees herself as an authentic person who always says what she genuinely feels and believes. "I like telling the truth, I never lie!" she claims. "I think some of the company culture is just to encourage the employees speak out, speak out and show own characteristics, show your own style." By requesting internal transfer, both Wang Yun and Wang Yang display not only an evidence of their efforts to stay true to their honest, open personality, but also their conviction that there are departments in ElectriCo that cherish such a disposition (Chapter 4).

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the third and the fourth research question by identifying forms of moral capital and values that are specific to opposing positions in *ElectriCo* as a field, and by illuminating how *ElectriCo* relates to the fields of economy, education and family. The chapter has demonstrated that differences in moral dispositions of China's blue- and white-collar millennials are reinforced through *ElectriCo*'s managerial practices, which embody moral virtues and values that are transmitted in the related fields of economy, family and education. Returning to the introductory question why stability (i.e., spending entire or a larger portion of one's career with one company) is seldom attainable, data analysis has shown that the organization and wider social space reinforce the link between people's mobility between employers and their ability to realize self-fulfillment. Monetary rewards are a primary dimension of recognition in the workplace for both groups since they determine these people's capacity to attain security in terms of gaining access to medical care, housing, education, and financially securing one's old age. The importance of mobility between employers is further strengthened by variations in compensation practices across regions, industries, and individual companies. Nevertheless, there are differences in the degree of emphasis that white- and blue-collar employees place on the monetary aspect of their job; these mirror the differences in values that are reinforced by practices typical of their occupational position.

This chapter has shown that blue-collar workers' pursuit of monetary rewards – which are pivotal to self-fulfillment outside the workplace – and perception of hard work as good if not the only means to acquire them are promoted by the company's hiring and compensation practices. White- and blue-collar employees are under different compensation structures, which reflect the high and low value of expertise and hard work of “those who use their minds and those who use their muscles”, as Mencius says.⁵⁸ Since blue-collar jobs pay a very low basic salary, their occupants can easily become the disrespected poor if they do not work excessively hard. The blue-collar workers' internalized understanding that “The only thing I can do to change my dull life is to work hard” (Chapter 4) may be explained by the fact that too much hard work provides insufficient financial resources and leaves insufficient time and energy for the acquisition of a well-

⁵⁸ Cited in Hill (2013: 9).

paid type of expertise – academic knowledge. The relevance of “material conditions of existence defined by distance from necessity” (Bourdieu 2010: 173) to the disposition to self-develop is evident in white-collar families’ self-development practices. Contrary to blue-collar families, who are exposed to the economic necessity of making ends meet, white-collar families can afford and have time for “famous, good” schools (Chen Kai), master’s degrees, and further certificates that, in return, provide access to white-collar occupations that generate higher income and offer better career prospects.

The use of different leadership style and training, promotion, and work organization practices also helps to perpetuate differences in moral perceptions and practices of white- and blue-collar employees. In the white-collar world, they embody values of self-development (the chance to learn new job-related knowledge and skills and perform different kinds of intellectually stimulating work), advancement (having the chance for salary increase and promotion to a higher level in organizational hierarchy), autonomy (having a voice or the chance to exercise independent thought and action in the job), cooperation and interdependence (being an equal member of a cooperative and interdependent team with members performing tasks that require a great deal of coordination and communication between team members), and balance. In the blue-collar world, however, the dominant values are the opposites of the above: separation, independence and discipline, with self-development by means of training and challenging tasks being extremely scarce, if not non-existent.

6. Conclusion

This dissertation explored variations in moral perceptions and behavioral displays of organizational loyalty of young Chinese white- and blue-collar employees, including the differences in moral imperatives that underpin their staying with or leaving their employer. Through a Bourdieusian lens, it examined how distinctive experiences of occupational and social position in postmodern China lead to different understandings of virtues and values as content and grounds of loyalty to the company, respectively. The analysis of ethnographic data uncovered the differences in young people's views of themselves and their peers as employees, their employment moves, expectations about how their colleagues and supervisors should treat them, and the moral value of their jobs in relation to the broader life goals that they seek to accomplish. This dissertation also took into account the effects of contemporary neoliberalization and individualization processes in China on the content and grounds of organizational loyalty. Young Chinese people's demonstrations of virtues and choices involved in changing jobs are therefore considered in the broader context of their definitions of own individuality and their attempts to lead respectable, fulfilling lives. Furthermore, the dissertation documented the influence of the organization, economy, family, and education as fields in shaping moral selves and the individuals' ability to reach self-fulfillment inside and outside the workplace. This chapter begins by summarizing the key features of two possible distinctive types of postmodern habitus that were derived from individuals' accounts and my observations: Voluntary self-developing settlers comprising white-collar employees, and non-voluntary common wanderers comprising blue-collar employees. These two types of habitus are based on distinctive perceptions and practices related to virtues that employees use as type of moral capital to achieve their valued goals in their workplace and life. The second section of the chapter outlines the contributions of this study to theoretical knowledge, revisiting postmodern and individualization theories, Pierre Bourdieu's habitus and the conceptualization of organizational loyalty with particular regard to Chinese peculiarities recorded by China scholars. The final section gives recommendations for future research.

*6.1. Voluntary self-developing settlers and non-voluntary common wanderers:
summary of key features of two types of distinctive postmodern habitus*

The third and the fourth chapters presented how young Chinese employees differ with respect to virtues as types of moral capital that the employees exhibit, acquire and draw on in the workplace and values that they pursue in their current job. The two chapters showed that workplace is populated with two different types of individuals. Individuals belonging to the first type are imbued with ethos of continuity, occupying white-collar positions, pursuing self-development in the workplace and carefully designing own career trajectories. Individuals belonging to the second type are imbued with the ethos of discontinuity and hold blue-collar jobs. These are apathetic toward further job-related training and change employers frequently without having any specific plans for their future employment.

White-collarers are committed to fully realizing their talents and potentials within their occupation, proactively seeking out help from a variety of sources to acquire and grow competencies necessary for achieving targets at work. Their ideal of expertise enhancement and being the best at what they do involves self-initiated efforts to grow job-related knowledge and skills through challenging and pleasurable activities in the workplace and a long-term career outlook with devotion to a specific profession. They display passion for their jobs, aim for perfection in task performance, and demonstrate industry and perseverance in the face of heavy workload, separation from family, or when their ideal seems unattainable. They recognize that how they perform their work might not be the best way and are eager to improve the way it is done by learning from others. These young people's role models are peers and executives who are experts in their job, who do not leave office until work is done, who ask for and listen to their suggestions, and who never fail to reward them for going beyond their job role. They therefore respect and stick with colleagues and supervisors who accept them as an equal member of a cooperative team, which is characterized by helpfulness and mutual mentoring, open communication, and manifestations of recognition for their additional voluntary efforts and good performance. After all, white-collarers seldom lack assertiveness: they do not hesitate to ask for what they really desire and expect to be heard. They value greatly job security and a stable paycheck each month, being confident in their ability to grow their income through raise and promotion. Loyalty to the aforementioned moral values is a part of their own

being, expressing itself in loyalty to the organization that fosters and nurtures employment relationship grounded in them. For white-collars, job is an important component of a colorful, fulfilling life they seek to lead with their families. They achieve this ultimate goal by selecting companies where they believe they can be true to their developing, respected, secure, and balanced selves. They do not bear long with what they take to violate these norms, such as authoritarian managers who neglect their voice in the conduct of employment relationship or having continuously heavy workload, which prevents them from pursuing leisure activities with their family and friends in the evenings, on weekends, and holidays. If so, these young people decide to transfer to another department or choose another employer in line with both personal and broader family interests. Their employment itinerary comprises a few strategically planned stations around the destination in which they settle and eventually return to.

For blue-collars, it is not a sense of free choice but the redundancy, mundaneness of a factory job, and the feeling of being disrespected that force them to move to another company. Changing employers is accompanied by the desire to earn a salary that protects them and their families from poverty, and offers hope of escaping boredom that permeates their everyday lives both at and outside of work. They proactively seek opportunities for paid overtime work to improve their lot and admire similar people who work hard to provide for their family members. Their dignity leads them to pursue jobs with a stable income that is good enough for a simple, respectable lifestyle and management that is not placing them under close scrutiny and control. Blue-collars obey managers who ensure that these two conditions are met in the workplace. Otherwise they either occasionally unite in slacking to obtain what they believe is rightfully theirs or look for another company, rarely engaging in direct discussion with management beforehand. Quite contrary to white-collars, blue-collars are uncertain about their ability to achieve respect and security in terms of ensuring sufficient earnings to meet their simple consumption needs on a continuous basis. These people are socially detached at work and solitary. Blue-collars do not exhibit assertiveness in the workplace in the way white-collars do, as they consider themselves easily replaceable and do not expect managers to listen to or address their concerns and personal issues. Unlike white-collars who feel secure in their jobs, they do not know how long they will remain in the company or what their next employment step will be. Some see their current job as a stepping stone to something better, but they are not sure towards

what. What the majority is certain about is that they will always be able to find another factory job, for which their ability to complete the immediate tasks will suffice. They spend their limited free time engaging in modest and affordable activities, which simultaneously offer an escape from the mundaneness and frustrations of meaningless, poorly paid factory work, and satisfy their curiosity about the world.

The fifth chapter presented ways in which organization as a field reproduces the differences in moral perceptions and practices that are generated by young Chinese people's habitus. More specifically, it showed that different forms of moral capital and values operate within the organization, being embedded in and sustained through managerial practices. The fifth chapter also established the connection between the organization and the fields of economy, family, and education in relation to the desired virtues and values, demonstrating that values and virtues typical of structure of the relations between positions occupied within the organization mirror those within broader social space. Virtues that constitute organizational loyalty and values that hold employees to their organization are therefore supplied by experiences in the fields of education, family, economy, and reinforced by experienced realities of past and current occupations. Young Chinese people's awareness of how their job helps them to realize or prevents them from pursuing some moral values agrees with objective conditions of their position in the organization. Concerted self-cultivation outside the workplace – which requires free time, financial investment, and is an important ingredient in white-collars' fulfilling life – is the most notable example. The fields advocate hard work and earning as much as possible to be able to afford not only leisure activities, but also good food, schooling, medical treatment, and housing, since the employer-provided accommodation is not available. Compensation strategies with low basic pay and overtime pay are designed to make blue-collars work harder rather than encourage them to take more time off. Conversely, higher basic salaries and balanced workload pave the way for white-collars to endure occasional pressure at work or heavy workload, and follow through on assignments without experiencing burnout and related physical problems. Moreover, they allow them to pursue self-cultivation activities more easily, helping their children become virtuosic people by taking them to after-school dance or music classes, or teaching them to be better community members by planting trees in the neighborhood. These young people proudly spoke of their families' concerted self-development efforts. This spirit was further

intensified in their workplace. Chapter five highlighted the intricate intertwining of fields and moral dispositions, showing that a comprehensive understanding of distinctive employee moral perceptions and practices necessitates the examination of links between personal and work lives. White-collars were members of a smaller, caring collective in the company that sought to address each individual's unique needs, nurtured camaraderie, provided practical and emotional support for both personal and work-related issues, and gave the sense of longevity. Contrary to white-collars, there was a clear boundary between blue-collars' private sphere and the densely populated, aloof social environment at work that encouraged minding one's own standardized business and following supervisors' instructions. All of the above supplemented by years of comparable experiences at former factories gave rise to a sense of meaninglessness, apathy, dispensability, transience, and everyone thinking for themselves.

6.2. Theoretical and empirical contributions

This research complements the available theoretical literature in several ways. As an empirical assessment of postmodern and individualization theories, which were presented in the introductory chapter, this dissertation testifies to the prevalence of structural constraints on the ability of some individuals to select freely, achieve security, learn new knowledge and skills, and realize other values that are essential to leading a fulfilling life. This dissertation documents a variety of practices experienced by young Chinese people as they move across fields that cause them to maintain similar habitus, which, in turn, leads them to value similar sets of virtues and rewards that are useful, natural, and accessible to people of their standing. Classed distinctions are articulated in these people's different perceptions of freedom of choice, security, fulfilling life, as well as the forms of moral capital that they mobilize to pursue their pathways through employment. Young Chinese people often define themselves in opposition to their hierarchical others, identifying with those who are endowed with similar compositions of moral capital, placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings in the workplace (Bourdieu 1985, [1984]2010; Bourdieu & Thompson 1991). They possess a strong sense of their place, as well as a sense of the place of others (Bourdieu 1989), and "shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and the inaccessible, of what is and is not 'for us'" (Bourdieu 1990: 64). As mentioned in Chapter 5, blue-collar employees are

docile at work likely because their continuous exposure to structural influences both inside and outside the workplace, which deny them the opportunity to decide what tasks to do and how to do them, taught them it is unreasonable and even harmful to their positions in the factory to display the virtue of openness. Habitus, a product of structural conditionings, also explains why white-collars choose intellectually stimulating work over job security, and why blue-collars valorize their own “simple” and “peaceful” lifestyle that is in line with their modest earning capacity (Chapter 4). Conversely, Beck (1992), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), Giddens (1991), and Bauman (1997) argue that postmodern times are characterized by an absence of stable, taken-for-granted identities, roles and status positions, as individuals continuously re-define their personhood and modify their biographies to be able to cope with ever-changing circumstances. The four theorists claim that the main culprits are contemporary individualization processes, which not only liberate individuals from prescriptions for desirable attitudes, behaviors, orientations and lifestyles that their families, collectives and other institutions used to impose on them, but also force them to re-design themselves by choosing from a plethora of available values and life options. Concepts such as personal choice, self-identity or reflexive biography that are used by these scholars convey their conviction that individuals actively and consciously define who they are, and select particular lifestyle from a wide range of options in line with their preferences. It is therefore no wonder that Beck and colleagues propose several distinct, contradictory models of moral selves who possess different virtues and seek to attain different goals. This line of research will certainly benefit from further contextually and historically specific ethnographic inquiry into the ways in which hierarchically organized social positions that offer different resources, experiences, and chances to people who occupy them join forces with broader moral individualization imperatives to mold postmodern personalities.

This dissertation enriches the well-established research of Pierre Bourdieu, Michèle Lamont and Andrew Sayer on distinctive moral values by providing insights into perception and production of moral distinction in contemporary China. Apart from demonstrating that dispositions of individuals who hold similar occupations and share similar life experiences have similar moral elements, interviews and observations reveal the sense of normality in individuals’ moral perceptions and behavior as they assert their moral value through ‘othering’ or engaging in various forms of exclusive behavior (e.g.,

blue-collar workers being reserved and quiet in the presence of white-collar workers or white-collar workers reacting with disgust to blue-collar uniforms and refusing to wear them in the workshops). The sense of normality and the struggle over definitions of morally proper, respectable behavior and lifestyle attest not only to the pivotal role that class plays in the workplace, but also to Andrew Sayers' argument that people are strongly committed to having a respectable identity and defending their dignity. Liu Kang's explanation of the difference between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers in Chapter 3 functions simultaneously as a description of white-collar workers' arrogance and weak work ethic and as an attempt to relationally distinguish the blue-collar group he belongs to as humble and hardworking, and therefore morally superior. This research attests to the salience of investigating moral capital as a marker of social distinction, which is unfortunately largely missing from Bourdieu's theory.

White-collar workers as the privileged group in neoliberal China have their own version of virtues that constitute organizational loyalty and values that are its grounds in *ElectriCo*. This version echoes the dominant moral prescriptions mentioned in the literature on neoliberal and individualization processes. Blue-collar workers, on the other hand, differentiate themselves from white-collar workers by providing an alternative understanding of the desired moral character in the workplace and the moral dimensions of their job in *ElectriCo*. Findings of this study agree with the results of Lamont's (2000) inquiry into the values of American working men that these alternative definitions are a demonstration of blue-collar workers' mastery of dimensions of morality that are useful or valued in their employment context, pursuit of rewards that are within their reach, and a consequence of their quest for respect as human beings and workers rather than the rejection of the dominant moral code. Self-development, for example, which is preconditioned by job-related academic qualifications, theoretical knowledge, and a number of practical abilities, and involves company-organized training and variegated tasks, is regarded by white-collar workers as natural and essential. Similar stance is taken by the members of the French and American upper-middle class that Lamont (1992) studied, who seek to involve themselves in activities that require intelligence, curiosity and develop their potential to its maximum. Explaining through Bourdieusian (1977: 77) lens, blue-collar workers exhibit "disinterest" towards further academic study, skill training in or outside the workplace, or challenging tasks because they do not recognize these as the stakes at play in their game. Their state of

disinterestedness has been continuously reinforced by their economic necessity and their experience of lack of such opportunities in their occupational milieu. Blue-collar workers can only find some of these resources at work (in this case, salary) because division of labor causes their unequal distribution, as Sayer (2007) has long noted.

At a younger age blue-collar workers are idealistic regarding their futures, like the young intern Gao Zhijie or young workers Wang Yanhui and Gong Kai who hope that their next job will be more interesting and allow them more opportunity to develop themselves. However, their job experiences will contribute to a deeply entrenched certainty about their badly paid blue-collar employment, because work they have been securing has essentially been the same boring factory work and they are *de facto* excluded from more rewarding positions that require university education. Blue-collar workers' habitus therefore generates quite modest aspirations that do not cut across class lines. According to Bourdieu (1977: 77), propensity of the working class to accept exclusion or to exclude themselves rather than strive to achieve what is denied to them occurs because the dispositions – engendered by habitus and inculcated by “objective conditions” in terms of constraints or opportunities framing their earlier life experiences – cause them to reject the most improbable practices as “*unthinkable*” and “make a virtue out of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable”. Hence the ethos “*necessity made into a virtue*” (Bourdieu 1977: 77). Blue-collar workers put income – both its amount and reliability – above fulfilling development desires through work in evaluating their job in ElectricCo, as the former is more within their reach than latter. Salary is therefore, as Lamont (1992: 176) pointed out, a “form of advancement to compensate for the absence of real mobility, [...] advantageous career patterns, or satisfying fit between job, personality, and interests”. For blue-collar workers, a respectable job is the one that offers the chance to earn high and stable wages and mild management. “People think that blue-collar job is undignified [没面子的, *mei mianzi de*], nobody wants to be a blue-collar worker. They earn little, in ElectricCo salaries are middle-range,” comments Wang Yang. “You know that social level does not depend only on salary. Take taxi drivers for example, they earn a lot, but others still look down upon them.” What Wang Yang means is that occupation and respect are intertwined. Wang Yang's understanding agrees with Weber's (1978: 932) “status distinctions”, where status is linked to a “social estimation of honor”. Sayer (2007) agrees that a job which anyone can do, which involves no further training or autonomy,

and which is insufficiently paid is not a strong source of dignity and does not engender respect from others. Blue-collar interviewees therefore do exactly what Sayer (2005a, 2005b, 2007) suggests: they provide their own interpretations of expertise, actively seeking to assert their dignity and rid themselves of feeling of inferiority about their position in *ElectriCo* by valuing traits that are respectable and advantageous for people in their position.

There is one point of note about Bourdieu's concept of habitus that is important to mention. Habitus as a theory has been subject to continuous criticism (e.g., Archer 2007; King 2000). Main critical remarks are that habitus is deterministic, providing little space for agency and excluding the possibility of social change, and that it portrays people's activities without considering their conscious and reflective attitude to their actions. Formulations such as "habitus, systems of *durable, transposable* dispositions, *structured structures* predisposed to function as *structuring structures*" (Bourdieu 1990: 53, emphasis added), "schemes of habitus ... owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they *function below the level of consciousness* and language, *beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny* or control by the will" (Bourdieu [1984]2010: 468, emphasis added) give credence to critics' concern. Yet according to Bourdieu, "Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal!" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 133) This dissertation contributes to the clarification of Bourdieu's notion of habitus by using it as a method and operationalizing it as moral perceptions and practices, interplay between past and present (Reay 2004), and oppositional polarities (Bourdieu 1989). This decision was based on a conviction that the greatest strength of habitus lies in identifying variations in people's constant perceptions and actions, and objective societal circumstances that make them possible. When used as a method, habitus is sufficient for capturing social distinctions and illuminating their (re)production in different fields. More research is needed to unravel the transformative property of habitus, identifying the practices in the field that transform it.

This dissertation provides Western business ethics literature on organizational loyalty with an empirical example that discloses one peculiarity of Chinese context in terms of the objects of organizational loyalty. Interviewees' accounts of their reasons for

job change reveal the importance of value matching between the group and supervisor as representatives of the-company-with-those-values and values that employees bring to the company as an object extending beyond the current workplace. This concurs with the important role of particular groups or persons as the object of loyalty in literature on China. In *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority*, Pye and Pye point out that loyalty calls for dutiful conformity to group norms, identifying paternalistic authority figure as the object of loyalty who sets them. The results of this dissertation confirm that supervisors play a pivotal role in promoting virtuous behavior and encouraging or preventing employee exit. Yet, they also highlight the need to reevaluate the notion of loyalty as blind obedience to supervisors as its object and “sticking by a relationship even when the bonds are harmful” (Pye & Pye 1995: 297) by considering how the types of moral capital that supervisors desire and reward in the workplace have changed and whether these are in line with the types of moral capital valued by employees and broader social space. While blind obedience to authority used to be valorized over expertise, devotion, sincerity, faithfulness, and conscientiousness in Mao era (Schubert & Heberer 2009: 36), the interviewees respect and obey authority figures who exhibit and require the latter.

6.3. Recommendations for future research

Complement to my research would be a closer investigation into gender differences in terms of work values. Ellie’s former colleague told me she accepted an income slightly higher than a blue-collar basic salary as a strategy to ensure that she obtains a job in the city where her partner works. Fang Di would have probably exhibited altruistic behavior of putting family above self-fulfillment through work and stayed at ElectriCo, where she had a stable job, if her supervisor had not addressed her task-related concern. Surveys, on the other hand, suggest that Chinese women value achievement as much as men do (Granrose 2007), and that they do not prioritize job stability and job security over self-fulfillment or wealth (Li *et al.* 2008). In their study of male and female workers in the United States, Rowe and Snizek (1995: 215) claim that “alleged differences are minimal, at best”, believing that the “continued emphasis on differences merely serves to reinforce traditional gender-role stereotypes and to perpetuate gender inequality in the workplace.” We, therefore, also need to reexamine the neoliberal view of importance of pecuniary

incentives in light of individualization processes that simultaneously encourage people to be industrious and rewarded for their diligence, and guard them against becoming *homines oeconomici* by legitimizing and encouraging the realization of other personal, family or community values. “In economic behavior, we find a gradual shift in what motivates people to work: emphasis is shifting from maximizing one’s income and job security, toward a growing insistence on interesting and meaningful work,” says Inglehart (1997: 327), insisting that individuals pursue postmaterialist or post-modern values as their countries prosper and become more stable. There are many examples of white-collar males and females such as Ellie’s former colleague who drastically reduce their economic pursuits for the sake of other value commitments. On the other hand, given the blue-collar workers’ “living in the present, without a [...] sense of development achieved through work and lifestyle” (Standing 2011: 16), we should also reassess the individualization theory that emphasizes individual’s preoccupation with non-material quests (i.e., self-actualization, autonomy, self-assertiveness, authenticity, etc.). This reconciliation work may be carried on by acknowledging that non-material and material pursuits are intricately interlaced and difficult to separate.

Appendix A. Background information on the interviewees

Table 1. Percentages across year of birth, gender, and province of birth categories for white-collar employees (WC, N=28), blue-collar employees (BC, N=13), and the total number of interviewees (TNI=41)

	% within WC	% within BC	% within TNI
year of birth			
before 1980	10,7%	n/a	7,3%
1980 – 1990	89,3%	84,6%	87,8%
after 1990	n/a	15,4%	4,9%
gender			
male	46,4%	92,3%	61,0%
female	53,6%	7,7%	39,0%
province of birth*			
Jiangsu	57,1%	61,5%	58,5%
Anhui	10,7%	23,1%	14,6%
Hubei	7,1%	7,7%	7,3%
Other	25,0%	7,7%	19,5%
*Other (Fujian, Hainan, Liaoning, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Sichuan, Zhejiang). Because of rounding the sum may be 99.9.			

Table 2. Percentages across *hukou*, educational level and job position categories for white-collar employees (WC, N=28), blue-collar employees (BC, N=13), and the total number of interviewees (TNI=41)

	% within WC	% within BC	% within TNI
<i>hukou</i>			
rural	28,6%	15,4%	24,4%
urban	71,4%	84,6%	75,6%
educational level			
university	89,3%	n/a	61,0%
master's	25,0%	n/a	17,1%
bachelor's	64,3%	n/a	43,9%
vocational college	10,7%	92,3%	36,6%
senior high or lower	n/a	7,7%	2,4%
job position			
manager	28,6%	n/a	19,5%
other leadership role	21,4%	7,7%	17,1%
office staff member	50,0%	n/a	34,1%
worker	n/a	92,3%	29,3%

Table 3. Percentages across total number of jobs held, average tenure per job (months), tenure at ElectriCo (months) categories for managers (M=8), other white-collar employees (OWC, N=20), blue-collar employees (BC, N=13), and the total number of interviewees (TNI=41)

	% within M	% within OWC	% within BC	% within TNI
total number of jobs held				
1	12,5%	20,0%	15,4%	17,1%
2-3	62,5%	75,0%	84,6%	75,6%
>3	25,0%	5,0%	n/a	7,3%
average tenure per job (months)*				
≤24	12,5%	25,0%	46,2%	29,3%
25-60	62,5%	60,0%	46,2%	56,1%
>60	25,0%	15,0%	7,7%	14,6%
tenure at ElectriCo (months)				
≤24	12,5%	30,0%	69,2%	55,5%
25-60	50,0%	55,0%	15,4%	22,0%
>60	37,5%	15,0%	15,4%	19,5%
*Because of rounding the sum may be 100.1.				

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