

The Ordinary Middle Class in an Ordinary Community:

The Formation of the New Middle Class in China

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

June 2009

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Abstract

The economic reform in contemporary China has brought about transformations in its socio-economic and political environment. The implementation of a series of policies that changed the occupational structure, reinvented resources allocation mode, and increased the purchasing power of China's urban citizens has facilitated the emergence of a new social stratum. As this new middle stratum is still emerging and expanding, its composition is pluralistic. To describe the emerging affluent social classes, simply looking at economic indicators may not be adequate. Lifestyle factors have become important components in the shaping of China's new middle class.

Based on an ethnographic study of a middle class community in Beijing, this research attempts to investigate the formation of a specific segment of China's middle class, namely, the white-collar employees and the new generation of private entrepreneurs in urban China. It will demonstrate how this segment of China's middle class deliberately differentiate themselves from other social groups through symbolized everyday domestic practices, and capture the latest development of domestic lifestyles of China's middle class.

Using Bourdieu's theoretical schema, three inter-related analytical questions regarding to domestic life patterns of China's middle class will be addressed in this research: their aspirations of home, how this expected domestic life is protected through collective actions, and how a local system or a moral order of behavior is gradually formed through mundane and ordinary everyday interactions. A legally recognized and protected homeownership has become the bottom line, upon which the middle class

continue to develop higher requirements to live comfortably and safely at home. From these everyday practices in the field of domestic life, we shall see how the emerging middle class in China is establishing a lifestyle, forming a shared social identity, and constructing social space in the social structure.

摘要

經歷了市場改革的當代中國，它的經濟、社會以及政治環境都發生了很大轉變。一系列的政策改變了中國的職業結構和資源分配模式，提高了中國城市居民的購買力。在這個過程中，我們見到了新興中產階級的形成。由于這一階層還處于形成和擴張的過程中，它的成分必然相當多元化。為了更加準確的描述這一新興階層，僅僅關注經濟類指標（如收入等）并不足夠。生活方式已經成為塑造當代中國新興中產階級的重要因素。

通過對一個北京中產階級小區進行的民族學調查，本文試圖研究中國新興中產階層的重要組成部分——即白領階層和新一代的私人企業主——的形成過程。本文將展示他們如何通過具有象征意義的小區內日常活動將自己與其他階層區分開來，并試圖捕捉中國中產階層家庭生活方式的最新發展。

運用布爾迪厄的理論概要，本文將主要集中討論中產階層家庭生活方式中三個相互關聯的方面：對於“家”的期望，如何通過大型的集體行動來保護他們想要的家庭生活，以及如何通過日常活動來集合出一種中產階級小區的道德秩序。對於新興中產階層，得到法律上承認并保護的房屋產權并不足夠；在此基礎之上，中產階級不斷發展出新的要求，以保證他們能生活得更加舒適與安全。從這些家庭生活領域內的日常活動，我們將會看到這些正在形成中的中產階級是如何確立屬于他們的生活方式，形成共同的社會認同，以及如何在社會結構內構建屬于他們的社會空間。

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Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude goes to my Supervisor Professor Lui Tai Lok. Professor Lui's continuous encouragement and inspiration motivated me during my research and study over years. His expertise and experience broadened my perspective in this field. In fact, he set an example of a greatly admired top researcher and academic for me.

I would also like to thank my internal committee members Professor Ting Kwok Fai and Professor Chan Kin Man who monitored the progress of my work and were always available when I needed their advice.

My appreciation goes to my external examiner Professor Alvin Y. So. His willingness to support has been very helpful and Professor So took effort to provide valuable comments and guidance.

I would like to express sincere thanks to my interviewees at KC Estate in Beijing. My research would not be possible without their tireless and candid interviews which formed the basis of this study.

Lastly, I am very grateful to the generous support and trust from my family. I would not have gone through years of research without their patience and love.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Market reform in China in the past three decades has brought about drastic changes to its economic and social structure. The number of private enterprises and foreign-invested companies increased significantly, creating a favorable environment for the growth of new occupational groups. On the one hand, private entrepreneurs, who have been quick to exploit new opportunities facilitated by institutional changes that first flourished in southern China and they gradually spread to the whole country, formed the major agent of socio-economic changes. On the other hand, as the state has implemented numerous policies to initiate market reform and to broaden the private sector, such attempts have intentionally or unintentionally served to breed a middle class (Tomba 2004), an increasingly visible group of white-collar employees who are able to utilize their professional knowledge and experiences to attain a decent income and standard of living. In short, the social stratification order in China has experienced significant changes¹.

As a new middle class is emerging and expanding in China, such a social change has attracted a lot of academic attention. Initially, this group of people was identified on the basis of economic factors such as household income and purchasing power. It was

¹ In fact, the change of the social stratification order in China has two aspects (Zhang 2000). On the one hand, new status groups are emerging, and the resources they possess increase correspondingly (Li 1995; Zhang et al. 2005). On the other hand, the pre-existing social status of groups such like the peasants, workers, cadres and intellectuals within the original stratification order has been altered as well (Sun 1994; Lin 1990; Nee 1989; Huang 1993; Wang 1994). The income gaps between different social groups have widened (Li 1995). The economic status of China's working class has been weakened since the reform (Zhao 1994). Part of the working class has suffered from the dwindled production capability caused by the market reform, and the protection of their interests has been neglected by the state (Feng 1993; Li 1993; Yang 1995).

labeled as the “new rich” in contemporary China. However, as a result of the deepening of economic reform and its impact on the social structure, it was recognized that a new class structure is in the process of its formation (Zhang 2002, 2003; Li 1993, 2002). For example, a new generation of private entrepreneurs is emerging in China, most of whom have high educational attainment and professional working experiences. Based on their professional knowledge and capital, these new entrepreneurs usually establish their careers in the growing service economy. Their outlook is closer to that of the white-collar employees, professionals and managers in the growing sectors. It is suggested that simply looking at economic indicators (e.g. income) may not be adequate to describe the emerging affluent social classes.

Indeed, in addition to economic factors, lifestyle factors have become important components in the shaping of China’s new middle class. The emerging middle class is continuously developing their lifestyles to express particular habitus that reflects their objective positions in the social structure. Besides, their social status are constructed and strengthened through their choices of lifestyles that help them differentiate from other social classes. In this regard, this research aims to go beyond the established practice of looking at social class from the structural perspective. I emphasize the need of contextualizing class analysis in a living context, highlighting how social class expresses itself in our living environment.

The living context is multi-layered, containing different aspects of our social life, or in other words, different fields wherein different groups of social actors can compete to establish their social space. In response to the emergence of the middle class, there are various attempts to look at the patterns of life of China’s middle class, especially their

consumption styles. However, few attempts have been made to study their domestic lifestyles. Similar to other aspects of everyday life, the field of domestic life also contains practices, through which different social actors develop their sense of distinction, sense of classifications, as well as codes and procedures which determine the pattern of social interactions and exchanges. In addition, domestic life involves one of the most important properties possessed by China's middle class, namely, their property. The transformation of identity as a homeowner plays a crucial role in creating China's middle class. This is a topic that deserves our attention.

In this research, the domestic lifestyles of China's emerging middle class will be examined in the context of a residential community. I will investigate the formation of a middle class community. By exploring their experiences in the process of constructing an ideal domestic life in a residential community, the present research is expected to identify the domestic lifestyles pursued by the middle class in China, and to discuss how the middle class in China utilize available resources to distinguish their lives from other social classes.

In particular, three inter-related analytical questions regarding to domestic life patterns of China's middle class will be addressed in this research. Our discussion will start from investigating the latest development of middle class residents' aspirations of home. The concept of "home" is decomposed into three aspects: locating a house, personalizing the house and transform it into home, and domestic activities that create a feeling of home. Each of these three procedures to construct a homely home involves numerous choices that reflect residents' social preferences and values. It is precisely through these social choices that these people express unique habitus that resembles their

social status. This research will also pay attention to impacts of the transformed identity as homeowners on people's expectations of home.

Based on the aspirations of home held by the middle class residents, this research will continue to examine how these middle class homeowners further enforce and maintain their expected domestic lifestyles. In this process, some critical issues may provoke the middle class residents to act collectively to ensure themselves that they can live at standard of living coming close to their expectations. I will analyze a series of collective actions of property right protection among the middle class homeowners.

In addition to the large-scale collective actions of property rights protection, this research will extend its focus to more mundane and ordinary everyday interactions among the middle class residents, as this is the most important part of a middle class community in China. Previous community studies usually assume that urban residents become increasingly isolated or "private" in the process of urbanization. However, since China has just launched its urbanization project, it is still too early to make that assumption. Interactions among residents in the same neighborhood are not uncommon. By thoroughly examining the practices of middle class homeowners drawing boundaries and making a balance between their own domestic lives and that of their neighbors', this research attempts to demonstrate how a local system or a moral order of behaviour is gradually formed in a middle class community. These daily practices to handle neighbor conflicts and relationships are class practices in real life situations. Through such daily practices, two processes can be observed: different lifestyles are competing against each other, and at the same time, residents are constantly conforming to their neighbors. These are "ways of coping with heterogeneity and of retaining individuality while being part of

the group" (Gans 1968:174). Class specific characteristics can also be revealed in such behaviours.

These three inter-related processes, namely, making an ideal home, protecting their property rights, and developing a community moral order, constitute the formation process of a middle class community. By investigating the above questions, this research will try to capture the recent developments of the structuring of the new middle class in urban China and their essential distinctive characteristics.

This research will start by a thorough review of existing literatures of middle class analysis in Chapter 2, including both general controversies of middle class between various approaches as well as discussions of the emerging middle class in China. It provides the theoretical foundation of the present research. Also, as this research is particularly interested in discovering how China's middle class is shaped and reshaped by their styles of domestic life, a brief introduction of the procedures of China's housing reform through which urban citizens in China gradually transform their homes and the impacts of such transformations on the restructuring of the social stratification order in China will be provided in Chapter 3. The three major analytical questions of this research will be covered in Chapter 4, 5 and 6. Particularly, Chapter 4 will introduce the process of China's middle class to build their dream homes, trying to reveal the transformation of their expectations of home and domestic lives. In Chapter 5, by discussing the three main collective actions of property right protection, I am hoping to further disclose the more profound requirements of domestic life among these middle class homeowners that are able to provoke them to participate in large-scale collective actions. Chapter 6 will return to some more ordinary and yet more fundamental daily issues that are also very important

to affect the quality of the middle class' domestic lives. The findings of these three chapters will be further related to the current debate of China's middle class and the general class analysis in the concluding chapter 7.

In short, this is an urban ethnography of a middle class community in contemporary Beijing. By unraveling the concerns of the residents in a middle class community, I shall show how a middle class lifestyle or way of life is emerging in rapidly changing China, how a common social identity of the new middle class is gradually formed, and how this particular social group constructs its social space in this process.

Chapter 2

Understanding the Formation of China's New Middle Class

The Growing Significance of the Middle Class

During the last century, with the growth of industrial capitalism and rapid urbanization, the social structure of modern societies has experienced significant changes: particularly, technological changes increased labour productivity and hence reshaped the demand for productive workers; at the same time, the rise of large-scale enterprises has resulted in the growth of the number of employees engaging in selling, communication, co-ordination and administration. There has been an increase in the so-called white-collar occupations in developed economies, and gradually such occupational structural changes are also found in the emerging market economies. In response to the ascendance of non-manual work and the rise of the managerial and professional employees, many sociologists and social historians have shifted their focus of attention from the working class to those in the middle of the class structure of modern capitalist societies. The question of the middle class becomes one of the central concerns of sociological studies. Sociological interpretations of changes in the class structure transformations are many but the key theories fall into two main camps, namely the neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian.

Contending Theories

Based upon Marx's analysis of the capitalist economy, the Marxist tradition focuses upon relations of production and defines social class on the basis of the ownership of the means of production. Accordingly, this view gives a two-class model of the class structure: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The intermediate groups that do

not immediately fit into either one of these two classes are viewed as primarily transitional. Some of the neo-Marxists argue for the proletarianisation of the middle class, and others suggest that the middle class is not a component of the proletariat. The former group of scholars sees the middle class as a fundamentally unstable grouping possessing neither the will nor the power to transform society. They insist that if the working class is well organized and the middle class is effectively proletarianised, then most of the latter will come over to the side of the former (Corey 1935; Klingender 1935). For the non-proletarianising theses, the new petty bourgeoisie is seen as a class that does not belong to the capitalist class because it neither owns nor possesses the means of production, and it does not belong to the working class because much of the new petty bourgeoisie labours unproductively (Carchedi 1975a, 1975b; Poulantzas 1975, 1979; Abercrombie and Urry 1983; Archer and Blau 1993). Current debates within the Marxist circle are still divided by these contradictory views of the middle class.

Being criticized for neglecting the importance of the new middle class, many Marxists try to develop more complex model to accommodate the intermediate strata. The key representative of the neo-Marxist tradition, Erik Olin Wright, developed his influential contradictory class locations thesis on the basis of three components: ownership of the means of production, control over labour power, and control over investment and resource allocations (Wright 1977, 1978, 1980, 1994; Abercrombie and Urry 1983). He pointed out that the new middle class in advanced capitalist societies, though remaining propertyless, have interests opposed to the workers because of their effective control of organizational and skill assets.

Unlike neo-Marxist theories which focus on relations of production, the Weberian perspective developed alternative analyses of the position of middle class on the basis of the notion of life chances. The distinction between manual and non-manual occupations was assigned considerable importance. An example of the Weberian perspective is the works of Goldthorpe (1980, 1987, 1995). In his analysis, Goldthorpe used the term "service class" to represent the middle class, and developed a class schema to capture the common the major positional differentiation in labour markets and employment establishments that are important to explain the life chances of various social classes. Research sensitive to the effects of market situation includes the analysis of Mills of the American white-collar workers (1951). He believed that the new middle class expanded because of changes in the occupational structure. Giddens (1981) also argued that the market capacity of middle class occupations that are conferred by educational and technical qualifications produces class differences between manual and white-collar workers.

Both traditions have provided their distinctive analysis of the middle class; however, their class analyses are by no means unproblematic. On the one hand, Marxism is criticized for identifying constructed class with real class (Bourdieu 1985). Not only have the Marxists reduced the class structure of capitalism to two polarized blocs and thus under-estimate the importance of the middle class, the aggregate class structures are thought to be only shallowly institutionalized in the labour market, which left the fundamentally hybrid character of modern class systems unexplored (Grusky and Galescu 2005). Also important is the criticism that a lot of attention of Marxist class analysis has been given to the issue of class boundaries, which are seen as typically fuzzy

(Abercrombie and Urry 1983). On the other hand, Weber's conception of the class structure is sometimes criticized for being descriptive, not being able to analyze the meaning of class relations and the mechanism of class inequalities. Besides, the Weberian tradition is also criticized for shifting the focus of analysis to the market situation. For instance, Goldthorpe's class schema was operationalized by assigning occupations to classes on the basis of knowledge about their typical employment relations (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992). Weberian sociologists using Goldthorpe's class schema justify this operationalization by claiming that a number of features that define the type of employment relationship vary with occupational change (Evans and Mills 1998; Evan 1992). However, there have been doubts on the sustainability of the practice of relying wholly on occupational titles as the basis of the empirical classification, as there may be a gap between "theoretical" conceptions of class and the indices of class such as occupational categories used in actual empirical research (Breen 2005).

In addition, both of these two traditions place their focus of attention on the economic foundations of class and emphasize occupations, economic returns to work, and the top and bottom of the class structure rather than the middle. They therefore provide only a partial basis for understanding the origins and formation of the middle class (Archer and Blau 1993). Although Weber saw class as only one aspect that forms the determinants of individual life chances, and pointed out that "status" was to designate the differentiation of groups in the "social" sphere, most the neo-Weberians treat middle class' status or style of life only as an outcome of class position and not an important factor that determines the social position of middle class (Lockwood 1958; Bain 1970; Abercrombie and Urry 1983). Reducing the multi-dimensional social space to the

economic conditions may be misguided, as such objectivism may lead one overlook the impacts of social actors to actively shape the structure of social space through their daily social practices. As some scholars believed, class is something that must be made in a definite historical time and space (Thompson 1966; Fantasia 1989). Based solely on economic conditions to classify social actors and to locate individuals in the detailed “maps” may fail to grasp the processes of formation of the middle class in multi-dimensional social space (Weininger 2005).

The point I want to make here is that both the Marxists and the Weberians have taken an objectivist approach to the study of social class. They seem to assume that the conceptual classification of class, which is a theoretical construct, would produce ‘real’ social class that are found in our social life. They therefore make a lot of efforts to address the definitional question and believe that the social classes according to their definition would be social classes acting in the real world. Such an assumption leads to an under-emphasis of the need of probing the process of class formation, a question that I shall further explore in a later section.

Social Stratification in Contemporary China

Although neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian theories are challenged from various fronts, their accounts for the emergence and consolidation of the middle class in contemporary capitalism still provide important inspirations for scholars studying the transformation of the stratification order in contemporary China. As a result of changes in the mode of resources allocation, personal attributes and inter-unit differences began to affect occupational achievement more directly. In response, millions who had been disadvantaged by the previous institutional management quit villages or enterprises with

depressed wages and moved to jobs with higher rewards. Growth in the scale and number of private enterprises as well as a surge of foreign investment also had an immediate impact. New socio-economic groups are emerging, at the same time the formerly privileged such as workers in state-owned enterprises are losing their advantage (Nee 1989). The social structure in China's society is undergoing thorough changes (Nee 1989, 1991, 1992; Walder 1990, 1995, 1996; Walder et al 2000).

Discussions of China's changing social structure mainly focused on three issues. The first issue that scholars deal with is whether a middle class really exists in China. On the one hand, some Marxists, who believe the ownership of production means is the only basis to distinguish different social classes, argue that the middle class is intrinsically different from the capitalist and the working class (Zhao 2003). According to them, the "middle class" is not the major component of modern capitalist societies; rather, the propertyless working class consisted of professional workers who possess knowledge and skills is expanding and constitutes the main part of societies in Western world as well as in China. On the other hand, the majority who are influenced by the neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian programme recognize the importance of organizational and skill assets in distinguishing social classes (Zhou 2005; Wang 2004; Zhang 2003, 2004, 2005). They believe that historically, there was a small group of people who can be recognized as the middle class in China, mainly landed gentries. However, the number of this group of people was limited and this stratum never became a sizeable part of traditional Chinese society. After the establishment of People's Republic of China in 1949, the middle stratum in China's society consisted of cadres, intellectuals and workers in state-owned enterprises. However, in the market reform era, the number of white-collar worker

increases dramatically, especially in big cities. These white-collar workers have higher education, income and consumption standard on average. Therefore, part of the old middle class has lost their advantage, such as workers in state-owned enterprises, and a new middle stratum or “middle class” is emerging and expanding in China (Li 2001; Zhang 2002; Zhang et al. 2005).

The second topic that attracts scholars’ attention is the boundary of China’s emerging new middle class. The neo-Weberian theories of the new middle class have provided many insights for the definition of the middle class in China. While some use income and wealth as indicators, others believe that occupation, professional power, education and credentials, consumption and life style, and consciousness and responsibility as a citizen can provide more effective distinctions (Wang 2004, 2005; Zhang 2002; Zhang et al. 2005; Zhao 2003; Zhou 2005). Due to the ambiguous definitions, the new middle stratum in China tends to be more fragmented. According to some common attributes in existing research, scholars identify four sources of middle class in China (Zhang et al. 2005). The first one is the “old middle class” consisting of individual enterprise owners (*getihu*). Then, there are cadres and intellectuals, who maintain their advantage through social network connections and possess knowledge resources. They form part of the new middle class. The other two sources are private entrepreneurs who have developed their own business by taking up opportunities in the process of market transition, and managers and technicians working in foreign invested joint ventures.

The third issue that mostly discussed among scholars interested in China’s middle class is an extension of the previous one: the status of a specific component of China’s

middle class, the Party cadres, in the stratification order in China. Two approaches, new institutionalist market transition theory and the state-centered approach, have provided different explanations and predictions.

From the market transition perspective, with the expansion of the private sector and an institutional environment favorable to private enterprises, private entrepreneurs have flourished in southeastern China. They exploit new opportunities for profit and gain from such institutional changes. These entrepreneurs are able to secure higher incomes than those obtained by the cadres. The rise of private entrepreneurship in China has opened up mobility channels both for entrepreneurs and for their employees (Nee 1991, 1992). Meanwhile, scholars also notice that state employees increasingly seek job opportunities in emergent labor markets. As a result, a new middle stratum composed of independent proprietors has arisen, and its size likely to expand in the future (Nee 1991, 1992).

Walder (1995, 1996) and other scholars who hold the state-centered perspective argue that market reform in China was not accompanied with a political reform. Therefore, cadres will continue to maintain their control over lucrative assets and the preferential access to capital despite the arrival of a marketization process. The administrative elite can readily convert political capital into economic gain, even more so in an increasingly marketized socialist economy. Walder et al (2000) found out that even in the coastal regions of China, cadres still maintain their income advantages over others. Cadres' monopolized control over key resources obscures the emergence of middle class. Consequently, cadres are reproducing themselves and the stratification order is not likely to be fundamentally changed.

These three issues are the most frequently discussed topics on China's changing order of social stratification. Recently, many scholars began to emphasize the basic characteristics and various functions of middle class in China's society. They have noticed that there is significant difference between middle class in cities and rural areas (Zhang 2002; Li 2003). Middle class in various cities may also behave quite differently due to the unbalanced development of cities in China (Zhang 2002). However, just like the Weberian and Marxist theories of middle class which are by no means unproblematic, the study of China's middle class that is greatly affected by these two traditions of class analysis is also facing many challenges and difficulties.

The first difficulty of the existing research of China's middle class is the boundary problem. Affected by the debate between neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian theories, scholars are concerned about whether ownership of means of production is the most appropriate attribute to differentiate one class from another. As a result, whether the emerging new group of people should be regarded as middle class or working class has become one of the central issues. Those who believe that ownership of means of production is the most crucial attribute often argue that the emerging new stratum in China is not really a middle class, but actually the working class as they are essentially propertyless. On the other hand, those who oppose may claim that these people should be recognized as a new middle class. However, such arguments are merely about how one should label this group of people, and have limited contribution to our understanding of the outlook and character of these people.

Even within the group of scholars who agree that a middle class is emerging and expanding in contemporary China, the boundary problem continues to shape their

analysis. Influenced by the Weberian programme within which the notion of market situation has been put forward for dealing with the issue of class boundary, they have developed different schemes of classification. Some believe that to define the middle class in China, it would be more suitable to adopt a single factor such as occupation, while others may think a multi-factorial classification system is more appropriate. In addition, whether researchers should include only objective attributes or should they also consider subjective perception is also debatable. As a result, the definition of the middle class in China continues to be a topic of academic debates². The transformation of China further enhances the heterogeneity of the middle class. Whether one should focus on the diversity and heterogeneity within the middle class or rather its commonalities has become an issue of concern. An all-encompassing definition derived from existing research seems to fail to characterize the heterogeneous composition of China's emerging middle class, and has limited contributions to our understanding of the uniqueness of this special group of people. This leads some researchers to argue that the middle class in China should be divided into different strata, each being carefully investigated.

In an effort to take up the challenge and to draw a relatively clear boundary of China's middle class, many scholars have concentrated on identifying different groups based on various indicators suggested by the Marxist or Weberian traditions and have tried to find what could be most appropriate for describing the current class structure of modern China. The middle class in China is therefore differentiated from the rest of the society by traditional indicators such as wealth (income, business ownership, and property ownership), as well as indicators of other forms of asset including educational

² The different definitions of China's new middle class are summarized in Li Chunling's article 'Zhongchan Jiceng: Zhongguo Shehui Zhide Guanzhu De Renqun' (Li 2004).

attainment, employment and occupation, and urban or rural residence. Several groups of people, namely, small business owners and entrepreneurs, managers of state-owned enterprises, and a wide spectrum of professionals and intellectuals have been classified as the new middle class in China (Lu 2002; Chen and Yi 2004; Zhou 2005; Li and Li 2007; Wang 2008). In this kind of classification, priority has been more or less placed on people's occupation, as it reflects not only one's economic and social status, but also one's position in the overall power structure (Li 2002; Wang 2008). Although it provides an initial sketch of the emerging middle class, such a structuralist approach has nonetheless been criticized for its inadequacy in terms of reducing social class to the analysis of economic relations (Archer and Blau 1993; Wilkes 1990). In reality, the relations of economic production and distribution constitute only one aspect of the multi-dimensional social space, other aspects such as patterns of life and dispositions are also important for people to construct representations of the social collectivities that bound them together and differentiate from others. This is particularly true in China. As China's social stratification order has experienced significant transformation, people with diversified life experiences often find themselves sharing similar economic conditions, and therefore being classified into the same aggregate group as the middle stratum. For those who are not happy with the fact of being classified as such 'middling sort', they start to distinguish themselves by adopting different patterns of life (Chen and Yi 2004). In other words, they are actively shaping their social identity through competing in every aspects of daily life. As Thompson states, "class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition" (Thompson 1966, p11). What is more, individuals who share a common style of life and have certain level of prestige are more

likely to develop their own class-consciousness (Weininger 2005). The existing studies of China's middle class that focus on drawing class maps based on economic indicators may overlook this process through which China's middle class is produced and reproduced through people's choices of lifestyles in this particular historical period of time.

Indeed, in addition to the objective conditions such as occupational division of labour, class is also constructed through a process of symbolic struggle (Bourdieu 1984, 1989). The making of the middle class inevitably involves a convergence in socioeconomic status, living patterns, the culture of work, and social perceptions and self-identity of non-manual workers (Blumin 1989). Although many scholars realized the importance of a phenomenological account of the acts of reciprocal classification that pervades social interaction, they have met huge difficulties in connecting localized affairs through which people produce and reproduce their class identities (Weininger 2005). One of the most prominent sociologists that integrate the insights from accounts which prioritize the structuralist and the constructivist dimensions in a coherent program of empirical research is Pierre Bourdieu.

In Bourdieu's understanding, the occupational division of labour is a structure of objective positions, that is, locations which are "occupied" by individuals independently of them (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Each location in this social space corresponds to a particular set of life conditions, which he terms the "class condition" (Sorensen 2005). To integrate these positions in social space with practices of social actors, he further establishes the concept of *habitus*. According to Bourdieu, the *habitus* designates a socially constituted system of dispositions. This dispositional understanding implies that actions, or using Bourdieu's term, practices of social actors, are generated neither by

explicit consideration of norms nor by rational calculation. Rather, action can proceed on a pre-reflexive basis, without recourse to conscious reflection on rules or estimations of results. Usually, actions that are generated by habitus are highly spontaneous and inventive (Weininger 2005).

The habitus is differentially formed according to each actor's position in social space, and therefore it is empirically class specific (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Different combination of volume and composition of capital corresponds to a particular set of life conditions, which then generates a specific system of dispositions that is consistent with such life conditions. In other words, a particular set of dispositions expressed by the social actor is actually imprinted by the experience of the particular class condition that characterizes a given location in social space (Weininger 2005). These dispositions enable social actors to apprehend their specific class conditions as meaningful, and to pursue a course of action which is "appropriate" to it. In this sense, social actor's various practices in everyday life, including food tastes, clothing, body dispositions, housing styles and forms of social choice are constantly expressing their class specific habitus. Therefore, it is not unusual to observe that different preferences and practices cluster in different sectors of social space (Bourdieu 1998).

Furthermore, in order to foreclose an overly structuralist interpretation of social space, Bourdieu introduces the term *field*. This term is meant to remind scholars adopting his approach that social actors who confront one another will enter into conflict or competition with one another, each from a more or less advantageous position (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, pp 16-18). In this sense, social actors are not reduced to individuals who only "occupy" the various positions and "bearers" of the structural relations that are

encapsulated in them. Correspondingly, Bourdieu believes that practices of social actors are best understood in social struggles. He insists that the practices and objects that constitute a lifestyle do not merely “express” the habitus. The appreciated and rejected practices or objects reflect social actors’ aesthetic sensibility that orients their everyday choices and therefore symbolize their social similarity with and their social difference from one another. By distinguishing themselves through various distinctions they make, social actors are expressing their position in objective classifications (Bourdieu 1984). It is only through constant, reciprocal social practices in various fields that social collectivities are born (Weininger 2005).

Compared with the two conventional traditions of class analysis, Bourdieu’s approach appears to be more appropriate for analyzing China’s middle class. Up until recently, the mainstream of discussion of China’s changing social stratification concentrates on mapping the class structure. Based on different criteria, scholars provide various versions of class structure in China society. However, there is not much revealed in regard to how particular group of people are formed in the arena of various aspects of social life, not to mention how they manage to struggle for their social spaces. As the fundamental question of Bourdieu’s sociology is “that of the existence...and mode of existence of collectives” (Bourdieu 1991), research adopting his approach to investigate how social groups are gradually formed and strengthen their position through social struggles in daily lives may be able to contribute to this unexplored area.

Indeed, as the social stratification order in China is experiencing tremendous transformation, social actors locating in various positions of social space are struggling for their places, not only in economic field, but also in various aspects of daily life. Some

primary norms or codes of behaviours in everyday life are emerging in their reciprocal interactions. This has particular importance for the emerging China's middle class. The middle class in China are learning and discovering their unique way of life, establishing some new codifications, and at the same time using these codifications to identify themselves as well as distinguish from others. This symbolic transformation is crucial to the transformation of the underlying class structure, as it is precisely through this process that social space is shaping and reshaping itself. In other words, it has a power of "social construction" (Weininger 2005). However, the practices of social actors, or social struggles, through which these social collectivities are mutually classified are guided by principles of taste that are lodged in the habitus, and thus situated below the threshold of reflexive consciousness. Conventional structuralist approach that classifies social actors according to objective indicators such as occupation cannot capture this process of social struggle. It is only through research which attends closely to the seemingly trivial "games" of culture and the routine choices of daily life that such mutual classification among different social groups can be revealed. Neglecting the struggle process of middle class social actors in their everyday lives, we will not be able to identify the formation process of China's middle class, and how they compete for their social space, not to mention to precisely understand their concerns and expectations in various aspects of life. This is something that China's middle class studies cannot afford to neglect.

Due to the influence of ideology in contemporary China, scholars seldom used people's life styles to illustrate differences between classes in the past. However, as a result of the deepening of market reform, the differences in terms of ways of life between different classes have become increasingly obvious. Scholars have tried to illustrate the

formation of China's new middle class by investigating their lifestyles, and found out that people in various social strata have different choices in daily-life consumption (Li 2002). People's consumption behavior is merely one aspect, and one can expect that class differences also exist in other aspects of their lives. Since there are few researches regarding people's ways of life in aspects other than consumption in China, it is worth further investigation.

Following Bourdieu's approach, the present research will start from identifying a group of objective positions in the social space. In order to avoid the problems caused by the all-encompassing definition of China's middle class, the present research will focus specifically on the middle class in a globalizing city in China. Furthermore, it will concentrate on the two main components of China's middle class, namely, *Bai Ling* (white collar employees) and private entrepreneurs. With the expansion of markets and institutional environment favorable to private enterprises, private entrepreneurs have flourished in southeastern China since mid-1980s. They exploit new opportunities for profits and gains opened up by institutional changes. However, the competition is intensive, and those who cannot adapt to the fast-changing environment are replaced mercilessly. The surviving ones who manage to accumulate profits in order to stabilize and expand their businesses become a component of the new middle class of China.

As the market reform in China continues, the composition of private entrepreneurs in China has experienced some changes. Most of the first batch of private entrepreneurs were previously farmers, and did not receive much proper education. However, based on a strong concept of competition and market feelings, they have quickly accumulated a significant amount of economic capital. This group of people is

comparable to the old middle class. In addition to this first batch of the urban entrepreneurs, a new generation of private entrepreneurs is emerging in China, most of whom have high educational attainment and used to work in state-owned enterprises or public administrative sectors. Based on their professional knowledge capital, these new entrepreneurs usually establish their career in the service sector, such as law firms, design studios, and IT consulting companies, etc. Although they may share similar economic status with the traditional private entrepreneurs, their positions of social space come close to those of professionals rather than traditional private entrepreneurs, and their patterns of life in various aspects also confirm this similarity. Therefore, this new generation of entrepreneurs is deliberately separated from the traditional one in the present research.

On the other hand, 'white collar' emerged under the circumstances that more and more foreign companies began to invest in China after the market reform. Generally speaking, the term 'white collar' refers to professional workers, managers and administrative executives in private-owned enterprises, especially in foreign invested companies (Lui 2004). However, this is not an academic usage and it has been used by local Chinese scholars to describe the broadly defined emerging middle class in the context that social class, and especially the middle class, was perceived as a politically sensitive topic in the early and mid-1990s. They suggested that 'white collar' in China mainly consists of people who: 1. are non-manual workers; 2. have higher education and professional training; 3. are salaried employees; 4. influential in the working environment (e.g. decision-making); 5. possess expensive consumption items (e.g. properties or vehicles); and 6. enjoy a high level of autonomy in their work (Zhang 2002, 2004; Li 2003). Among all these indicators, this research pays special attention to the ownership of

residential properties. This is because the housing reform in urban China greatly affected the social stratification in urban China, especially the emergence of China's new middle class. A detailed review of the impact of China's housing reform on the emergence of the new middle class will be provided in the following chapter.

Bringing in the Community Context

Simply identifying the objective positions of the emerging middle class in China is not enough. To correctly understand the formation of China's middle class, it is important to look into their unique lifestyles which express a particular set of habitus that shaped by their objective positions. The most obvious advantage of focusing on the lifestyle of middle class in China is that this approach perceives social class as product of a dynamic process, rather than a static object which will not change once it is formed (Wang 2004). Middle class can construct, strengthen and reproduce their social status through their choice of life styles.

As briefly mentioned above, class analysis of China's emerging middle class has already started to pay attention to their lifestyles. But most of these studies are still focusing on their patterns of consumption, leaving other aspects of their social life under-explored (or even unexplored). The present research will investigate the above-mentioned groups of people in the field of domestic lifestyles. However, focusing on middle class' domestic lifestyles also has two main constraints. One is the influence of subjectivity on people's life styles, and the other is that the notion of people's life styles is rather loose and covers quite a wide range of issues. To overcome these two difficulties, I suggest that we should examine life styles of China's middle class in the context of their everyday life.

In the present research, the everyday life context refers to be the immediate living milieu of the middle class. I carry out my research in a specific residential community in which the majority of the residents belong to the emerging new middle class. Previous community studies have demonstrated that community is closely related to social class. Many studies of social class in Britain, especially that of the working class, are based upon observations of ordinary lives in a specific community (Platt 1971; Young and Willmott 1957; Bell and Newby 1971). These communities are constituted by their residents, and therefore representing the latter's distinctive attitude, ambitions, and world-outlook (Day 2006). Many studies showed how distinctive types of communities grew up around work during the early period of industrialization (Brown and Brannen 1970; Tunstall 1962). In addition, community has unique impacts on social class as well. Lockwood (1966) argued that while work factors were conducive to the formation of working class diversity, their impact was reinforced by the nature of community surrounding the workplace. Also, the structural foundation of community has influences on class consciousness. Lockwood said that "for the most part men visualise the class structure of their society from the vantage points of their own particular milieux" (1966:16).

These working class community studies have been criticized as the historical settings for their observations have already diminished. The working class has been transformed into a spatially separated, fragmented class. Moreover, relationships among people have been influenced by urbanization. According to Wirth (1938), due to size, density, and social diversity in the population, urban people were thrown into relationships that were superficial, anonymous and transitory. As a result, there is no

room for anything like the traditional working class community, and the accounts the conventional community studies provided are merely of historical interests. However, this does not mean a loss of community. Quite the contrary, many researches show the existence of communities where they were least expected (Young and Willmott 1957; Gans 1962; Whyte 1957). A reconceptualization of community is anticipated, which considers the relationships developed among different groups of people within a relatively limited space. In other words, it is concerned about how different groups with different interests and frameworks of social meaning orient themselves towards one another “communally” (Day 2006).

This shifted consideration has singled out community as one of the most appropriate contexts for investigation of China’s middle class’ formation. No longer insisting upon an integrated community whose residents work and live together, it permits room for an examination of different fragments of middle class and the relationships among them. More importantly, “place” can serve as a social expression, which provides indication of specific social characteristics that come to be clustered into space. Therefore, the context of community will help identify the distinctive social characteristics of middle class. Indeed, despite the heterogeneity, different groups of middle class are bound together in the community context, as they are motivated by the same set of underlying values. Investigation of their behaviors and beliefs in community context will enable us to recognize the existing or potential commonality of various fragments of middle class.

Besides, focusing on the community can greatly minimize the subjectivity of individuals’ choices of life styles, as the target of analysis is life style of various groups

of people in the community, rather than that of individual residents. On the other hand, this approach is easier to handle since the context of community provides a physical boundary for the examination of relationships among different groups of middle class.

Previous studies of middle class communities in the U.S. have provided many insights for investigation of people's behaviors in a community context as well as the emerging new middle class at that period, which is mainly consisted of white-collar workers in bureaucratized organizations (Whyte 1957; Gans 1967). However, the findings of these researches may not be applicable to contemporary China. The structure of middle class careers has changed a lot. In addition, the marketization reforms also dramatically transformed urban spaces in China. Urban structures and functions have been changing, which affect residents' daily lives. As the workplace and home have been separated, and the newly constructed commoditized residential communities have proliferated, urban middle class residents regained the control over their domestic lives. By this I mean nowadays Chinese middle class in major cities are free to choose where to live according to their affordability and preference. They are no longer dependent on their work-units to determine housing allocation. As a result, instead of work colleagues, their new neighbors are basically strangers, with various background and life experiences. Bounded within a relatively limited space, these new middle class inhabitants start to develop different relationships with their neighbors: some of them share similar lifestyles and life attitudes, and are even emotionally bonded to each other (Tomba 2004, 2005; Ma 2006; Xu 2000); others soon recognize their differences, and adjust their ways of living accordingly. Examining the similarities and differences among community residents offers an opportunity to investigate the social characteristics of China's

emerging new middle class that clustered into these places, and how these different groups of people with different interests and frameworks of social meaning continuously struggle to form a set of community-wide norms through which a particular social collectivity may be constructed.

Also, social and economic differences of various residential communities have become increasingly apparent: some offer their residents prestige, security, excellent schools, access to recreational and cultural facilities, and community resources, while others offer much less and may in fact significantly impair their residents' well being and future life chances (Logan and Bian 1993). These stratified communities have been progressively widespread, and many scholars believed that it would become the dominant form of urban residential communities in the future (Xu 2000). How residents in these stratified communities differentiate themselves from those living in other communities through various aspects of daily practices may provide some insights for us to understand the formation of China's middle class.

In order to analyze the process through which a specific fraction of China's middle class, namely, the white-collar employees and the new generation of private entrepreneurs, struggle to establish and affirm their social positions within the changing social space, the present study aims to investigate three inter-related aspects in the field of domestic lives of middle class residents in China: first of all, the home-making processes through which diversified middle class urban residents transform their houses into their dreamed home and the symbolic meanings of their choices; secondly, the collective practices of these middle class homeowners to collectively protect their property rights; and thirdly, the construction of codes/norms among middle class

residents in the community to deal with public/private interface. All of these three aspects are actually components of the formation process of a middle class residential community. Community is a field where a particular pattern of social living exists. It is “a static, bounded, cultural space of being where personal meanings are produced, cohesive cultural values are articulated, and traditional ways of life are enunciated and lived” (Smith 2002: 109). Although the presumed equivalences among community, tradition, cohesion and fixed boundary are questionable, it is undeniable that the residential community contains social characteristics and some level of overall coherence and integration. Therefore, it becomes an excellent field for analysis of the pattern of life of the emerging middle class at the local level.

This research will start with investigating the diversified origins of the targeted fraction of China’s middle class and their life experiences of middle class residents before they move into one community. Although these homeowners appear to share similar social status through their own efforts, as the first generation of China’s middle class, they have diverse life experiences: they also vary in terms of family background, and their ways of becoming middle class are also different. Such different pre-existing experiences actually reflect the diversified composition of China’s emerging middle class. Investigating these pre-existing life experiences will not only provide us with insights into the rationale behind the needs of the middle class homeowners when they search, locate, and make their ideal home; more importantly, it can demonstrate how these different expectations of home are continuously developing and converging, and how the idea of dream home of the middle class citizens are gradually shaped and reshaped. There are quite a lot of research describing the changing requirements of various aspects of life

of the emerging middle class in China, but little has been done to explain how these expectations are formed at the first place and transformed subsequently. Therefore, a thorough investigation of the prior life experiences of China's middle class residents is necessary, as it may shed some light on the formation process of those choices and expectations, and how the middle class homeowners use these symbolized choices to distinguish themselves from other social groups.

Indeed, the converging life experiences of China's middle class homeowners may have great impacts on their behaviors associated with their own housing property. To many of them, it may not be the first housing property that they have purchased with their hard-earned money, but it does not mean that their expectations of ideal home have been lowered. On the contrary, as their life experiences expand with the improving of economic status and the increasing variety of choices available, the middle class homeowners' expectations of ideal home also experienced a significant development. Therefore, I suspect that they may have higher expectations and lower tolerance to imperfections. First, they may expect high building quality and functionality which provide a secure and protected feeling of home. They may prefer decoration materials with no detrimental impact on health, despite of their higher costs. In addition, their privacy and freedom at home are supposed to be undisturbed. They may expect that all their neighbors are well-educated and well-behaved who can respect others' private lives. They may also expect the community developer and service contractors to deliver reliable and fast service, and to properly maintain common facilities. In other words, the middle class homeowners' expectations of home are continuously escalating. The importance of homeownership and the physical conditions of housing in making an ideal home is

progressively caught up and exceeded by something “bigger” than the house itself. This new development of the demand of China’s middle class is definitely worth further investigation.

On the one hand, in the process through which the houses are transformed into ideal homes, the middle class homeowners express their expectations and ideas of the domestic lives that distinguish themselves from other social classes and other fractions in the middle class. On the other hand, as their domestic lives started after moving into the community, their activities inside the residential community make up a field full of struggles. To make sure that their expectations of domestic life can be realized after paying their hard-earned money for the house, the middle class residents need to continuously negotiate and interact with other social actors who are also somehow involved in this community in various aspects of everyday life, so that their symbolic power can be further enforced, and social positions within the social space established and affirmed. The counterparty of their struggle can be generally divided into two groups: firstly, as middle class homeowners in the community, the most important competitor over control of the expected peaceful community lives is the property developer and its management company; and secondly, even among property owners, the struggle to maintain their expected private lives is also quite frequent and normal.

The most explicit reason of middle class homeowners’ struggle with the property developer and its management company is that the middle class homeowners usually find their requirements of domestic life cannot be fulfilled by the property developer, and they need to find some approaches to protect their property rights. Therefore, a thorough examination of such requirements, which, when not fulfilled, can provoke and mobilize

these people to act collectively may help us understand the real concerns of these middle class homeowners as well as the transformation of their expectations of domestic life. Moreover, it is quite apparent to observe the politics of classification in this process as well. The identity of homeowners makes it possible for these individual social actors get together to discuss possible strategies to deal with the developer who has significant advantages in terms of economic resources and social networks. A collectivity then accedes to the level of discourse. In the process of discussion and preparation, their opinions of ideal domestic life are frequently exchanged and shared with each other. This verbal designation of the collective enables an explicit recognition of the membership status of oneself and others, and thereby confers an explicitly collective dimension on individuals' sense of personal identity. With a discursive identity that is known and recognized, these homeowners become capable of acting in concert for a specified purpose, that is, mobilizing.

In the process of struggling with property developer to protect their property right, the preparation of strategic plans also helps the middle class homeowners gradually understand their advantages, and therefore, their distinctive ways of struggling emerge. Through the classification process, the underlying powers, resources, and privileges possessed by these people—whether these take the form of economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital—may become more recognizable. Equipped with such powers and resources, the middle class residents may find themselves more compatible to the strong counterparty, namely, the property developer and its management company, in struggling for the control of their social spaces, and hence, they may be more confident to identify suitable and effective approaches to protect their rights and speak about the

social world. The unique struggling strategies also possess symbolic meanings and may reflect some particular characteristics, through which the middle class homeowners differentiate themselves from other social classes and other fractions within the middle strata. In addition, in the process of struggling with other social actors, it is possible for us to observe and evaluate the attitudes and concerns of the middle class homeowners towards politics issues such as democracy and freedom, therefore examine the existing studies of the political implications of the development of China's middle class.

Equally important is the reciprocal interactions among middle class homeowners themselves. The ordinary daily social practice among neighbors under normal circumstances is the most important part of cultural environment in a residential community and an increasingly crucial factor to consider when middle class locate their homes. Yet, this issue has often been overlooked by existing research. Indeed, community has significant impact on its residents in areas including individual behaviours, family life, neighboring patterns, organizational participation, consumption styles and so forth. Moving into a new residential community, it is inevitable for residents to experience a process of adaptation to the new environment that consists of unfamiliar neighbors. Such adaptation involves social choices and constraints; therefore, it reveals the social characteristics of the actor. Through examination of daily interactions among neighbors, especially their ways to deal with neighbor conflicts, this research aims to show how the middle class residents actively draw boundaries and shape a friendly environment in the community where they can pursue "a better life".

Ordinary daily interactions among community residents can be quite trivial and mundane. Therefore, this research will specifically concentrate on the middle class

residents' interactions of balancing the private domain and the public space. Such practices to deal with public/private interface represent the formation of a protocol of behaviour so that individual needs can be maintained while respecting other residents' preferences. They resemble some sort of "local social system" bringing the component parts together. In this system, not everyone will adopt a uniform position on any local issue, but there will be some element of collaboration, whether voluntary or compelled (Day 2006). This "system" or "moral order" is far from some codified social order, and yet its symbolic significance in shaping China's emerging middle class should not be neglected. This is the class practice in normal lives, or in other words, the politics with a small "p", which grants us an opportunity to examine the process through which the middle class manner is institutionalized in daily lives.

Chapter 3

Research Background and Design

As pointed out in the existing literature on China's social stratification, the formation of the middle class in contemporary China shares some similar determinants with that of the developed capitalist societies, such as changes in the social and occupational structure. Nonetheless, beside all these important determinants, there are some special factors that are also crucial to the formation of the middle class in China. The role of the contemporary reformist state is one of these factors that we must take into account in our understanding of the rise of the middle class.

Indeed, the development of an urban society with growing consumption power, in China has been thought of as a consequence of the opening up of the economy and society in the past three decades. Some scholars have argued that it is also the outcome of a social engineering project of the government (Tomba 2004). According to Tomba, the government mainly contributes to the formation of China's middle class by working intensively on two fronts: on the one hand, various levels of the government initiate policies targeted at increasing the purchasing power of urban residents, especially the public-sector employees, in order to stimulate consumption and economic growth; on the other hand, the state and its agents also enlarge the middle class through various housing policies, including marketization of the housing market and intervention to subsidize homeownership (Tomba 2004). These politically driven and highly coordinated policy efforts from the above help increase the salaries of employees working in the public sector and improve the welfare and benefits received by the skilled, public-sector employees in the cities. Such efforts are significant to the shaping of a socio-economic

environment that would allow for the formation of a middle class in China. From this perspective, the middle class is “created” (or in Tomba’s words, “engineered”) by the reformist state rather than simply the outcome of free market forces.

The Housing Reform and the Formation of China’s Middle Class

As stated above, housing reform is an important part of the process of the formation of the middle class in contemporary China. Without such reforms, which have brought about homeownership and have facilitated the emergence of a new attitude towards domestic lifestyles, it is difficult to see how a distinctive middle class identity and way of living would be crystallized. So, before coming to the core analysis of China’s middle class in the following chapters, it is necessary to briefly review the housing reform in the past decades.

As part of a broad and comprehensive economic reform, the urban housing reform program aims to introduce market mechanism into the centrally managed urban housing system. This ongoing housing reform has brought along dramatic changes in housing provision and consumption.

Urban China’s pre-reform housing system has three main characteristics, namely, a) housing was a welfare provision instead of a commodity; b) the state monopolized housing investment and construction; and c) work-units took up the administrative work of housing allocation (Gu 2002: 181). In the 1950s, these three characteristics essentially reflected the main goal of socialist ideology, which was to eliminate all defects of modern capitalist society, such as class exploitation, conflicts and social inequality. The way to achieve this goal was to eradicate the root of all these evils—private ownership—by nationalization or socialist transformation (Zhao and Bourassa 2002: 722). Most of

China's urban private housing was transformed into public ownership in the 1950s. The central government provided over 90% of housing investment in urban areas, and local governments and work units followed the central government's plans to construct housing, which then was allocated to employees at extremely low rents (Wang 23 Oct 2007). As a result, this kind of public housing became the predominant form of housing provision in urban China (Wu 1996; Zhao and Bourassa 2002).

The low rents and public ownership in the pre-reform era greatly discouraged private investment in housing (Zhao and Bourassa 2002). At the same time, the central government emphasized the development of productivity, housing construction and maintenance were largely neglected and under-invested (Wang 23 Oct 2007). Inevitably, China's cities experienced an increasingly severe housing shortage since the 1970s (Zhao and Bourassa 2002; Gu 2002). To secure more units with higher quality and better location, work units had to continuously negotiate with the municipal governments for building new housing blocks. These negotiations were not easy to go through. Social inequality existed between work-units in the state sector and those in the non-state sector in terms of housing conditions for their employees, as work units' accessibility to housing investment was different (Walder 1992; Logan and Bian 1993; Logan et al. 1999). Welfare housing and its related administrative allocation system led to housing corruption (Zhao and Bourassa 2002). All these problems became very serious since late 1970s and this forced the central government to carry out the reform of urban housing system (Bian et al. 1997; Zhou and Logan 1996; Wang 23 Oct 2007; Gu 2002; Zhao and Bourassa 2002).

The goal of this reform is to marketize urban housing. Housing commoditization and decentralization of housing provision are two thrusts in parallel to this significant change (Zhu 2000). Consequently, publicly owned dwellings are sold to the tenants; housing needs are regarded as something to be met by commodified market provisions and no longer solely a matter of a welfare benefit provided by the state; and housing construction, allocation and maintenance shift from the control of work units to professional companies (Huang and Clark 2002; Tolley 1991; Gu 2002). These tasks are not as simple and straightforward as they sounded. At the beginning of the reform, the most imminent challenge was the hesitation of occupants of public housing to buy properties. Occupants of the pre-reform public housing had de facto inheritance rights, with their children continuing to live in units occupied by their parents after the parents had passed away. With the de facto situation already conferring many of the privileges of ownership and with restrictions placed on re-sale, people were hesitant to buy these properties even at a low price (Tolley 1991). The distorted inter-relationships among rents, house prices and costs were only the tip of the iceberg of housing economics (Ibid). Under the pre-reform system, as work units provided all kinds of compensations including housing, health care, education, and other benefits, workers' salary level was extraordinarily low. Enhancing spending power and housing expenditure from their limited disposable income had to be in tandem with market reforms in other aspects of China's society.

Just like market reforms in many other areas, the reform of China's urban housing system is gradual and experimental. Housing tenure in urban China has experienced a zig-zag path which reflects the changes in prevailing political ideology (Gu 2002; Huang

and Clark 2002). According to the depth and breadth of reform measures, three major stages of housing reform can be identified. The first stage lasted from 1978 to 1991, which included the selling of public housing at low prices and the gradual increase of public housing rent to levels at least sufficient to cover maintenance costs (Li and Yi 2007). At this stage, property financing was decentralized and work units that maintained the control over allocation of funds and resources constructed a lot of housing for their employees during this period. The serious housing shortage of pre-reform period was mitigated (Li and Yi 2007). Although the dependence on work units for housing provision was strengthened, housing ownership was gradually encouraged and housing was increasingly recognized as a commodity (Wu 1999).

The second stage of the reform broadly covered the period of 1992 to 1997. Two distinct systems of housing provision were established in this period. One was the provision of “economically affordable housing” (*jingji shiyongfang*) for low- and middle-income households. The price of such housing was fixed by local government, which would take into account local income levels and construction costs. The second was commodity housing which targeted mainly at upper-income groups. This period was recognized as the initial development of commodity housing markets and China’s real estate industry. However, as work units continued to dominate the housing provision scene by acquiring commodity housing from developers and subsequently allocating to their workers, this period was also recognized as “double-track stage”(Li and Yi 2007). The state-owned enterprises and other work units sold public housing flats to their employees at highly subsidized prices. Purchasers of this kind of properties only obtained “partial property rights” and they could not sell the units in the market at will (Ibid). As a

result, to enable home purchase and ownership, the 1994 reform also called for the establishment of a mandatory housing provident fund (*zhufang gongjijin*) (Xie 1999).

Since 1998, the reform accelerated to terminate the welfare allocation of urban housing, and moved to the third stage: the full-marketization stage. The government assignment of housing was replaced by market mechanisms. With improvements in employees' incomes, it involved establishing housing accumulation funds and encouraging workers in state-owned work units to buy commercial housing from the increasingly liberalized property market (Li and Niu 2003). The last two years of the twentieth century witnessed massive disposal of work-unit housing to sitting tenants and a drastic surge in the rate of homeownership (Li and Yi 2007).

Throughout the housing reform, the old institutions, namely, work units including state-owned enterprises and public administrative units (*shiye danwei*), maintain a critical role in the new housing system in urban China. Enterprises such as energy, postal and telecommunication companies, which can take advantage of their monopoly positions to raise huge profits, often use their power to construct or purchase luxurious apartments in order to favor their employees (Zhao and Bourassa 2003). The real price of housing paid by employees in these work units can be significantly lower than the market price. When these employees purchase apartments from their work units, they enjoy the property rights protected by law. The huge amount of money paid by the work units to buy housing is regarded as part of the employees' income package and those apartments become the employees' personal assets. Employees of these work units change from tenants to homeowners overnight (Li and Niu 2003). As these people also enjoy various fringe benefits provided by the state other than cheap housing, such as virtually free

health care and a pension plan, their economic positions and the standard of living have been improved in a significant way (Tomba 2004). These people join the middle class through the development of the state-controlled system, and therefore some scholars call them as middle class within the system (*tizhinei zhongchanjieji*) (Zhang 2002; Li and Niu 2003)

The transformation from “double-track stage” to full marketization requires not only loosening up of control from state-owned work units, but also increasing the purchasing power of urban residents by making commodity housing more affordable. Economic restructuring in China has brought about occupational changes, which provide opportunities for the development of “new white-collar workers” in urban China. Since the 1980s, China has attracted massive amount of foreign investments, and many private enterprises that focus on advanced technology or professional services that have never been developed in China in the pre-reform era are established dramatically. With attractive salary, such enterprises are able to attract people who possessed higher educational level or skills. Additionally, with the expansion of markets and the general institutional environment becoming favorable to private enterprises, private entrepreneurs have flourished in southeastern China since mid 1980s. They exploit new opportunities for profits and gains opened up by institutional changes. Meanwhile, professional employees experience a sharp increase in salaries, and they soon become new members of China’s new middle class (Zhang 2002). As they work in the private sector and do not have the fringe benefits provided by the state, some scholars called them as the middle class outside the system (*tizhiwai zhongchanjieji*) (Li and Niu 2003; Goodman 1998).

Without financial support from the state, the middle class outside the system is directly pushed to the market. Compared to the middle class within the system, those outside the system have to pay the full market price when acquiring housing (Li and Niu 2003). Nonetheless, the entrepreneurial ability and professional skills, as well as the accessibility to bureaucratic power and social connections, altogether help the middle class outside the system achieve higher level of economic rewards. The economic advantage then makes it possible for them to acquire homeownership through purchasing commodity housing (Bian and Liu 2005).

With or without subsidy from the state-controlled system, the dwellers in urban China try to find different ways to become homeowners. According to China's Fifth Population Census, 72 percent of households in Chinese cities own their homes (Bian and Liu 2005). More recent social data showed that between 84-89 percent of homes are privately owned in urban areas (United Nations 2004). After almost three decades of reform, housing today primarily takes on the commodity form. People begin to recognize the security and prestige provided by homeownership. They also believe that owning a property is a major step in finding a home, and not just a unit of accommodation, for themselves.

The homeownership-oriented housing reform in urban China goes hand in hand with changes in social stratification in urban China. They shape the emergence of China's new middle class. Indeed, homeownership has become one of the most important and distinctive features of the emerging new middle class in China, despite their diversity in origins, power sources and other aspects of life. As a commodity, housing reflects its owner's social status: household income, occupation, and other factors that greatly affect

people's house ownership, living space and quality of life (Logan and Molotch 1987). Buying a house that is large in size, conveniently located, and with good quality can demonstrate the strong purchasing power of the house owner, which is closely related to the income level determined by the owner's occupation (Bian and Liu 2005). Compared to people who can only rent, either from private landlords or the state, house owners are believed to have more advantages in creating a secure and comfortable place that resembles home, and are regarded as the "winner" in the market reform. As a result, homeownership is increasingly used as an important indicator of social stratification in modern China society (Bian and Liu 2005; Tomba 2004; Li and Niu 2003; Zhang et al. 2005).

The housing policies as well as policies aiming at further increasing the size of a consuming middle class together create growing differences among various social strata in terms of their quality of life (Bian and Liu 2005; Liu and Li 2005; Chen and Yi 2004; Huang and Clark 2002; Tomba 2004). Since the focuses of such policies are continuously adjusting, which create improved objective conditions for different groups of people at various stages, the development of China's middle class appears to have undergone the following experiences: the first generation is mainly consisted of independent entrepreneurs and the "cadre capitalists" as the "new rich". Particularly, it includes the entrepreneurs in rural township and village enterprises and in speculative activities such as construction and the stock market. However, as the market conditions in China have transformed and the knowledge economy has been developed, a new group of entrepreneurs with higher educational level and more professional knowledge starts to take advantage from this transformation. At the same time, as the state has launched more

policies favouring the salaried professionals, especially those in the public sectors, those who are highly educated and put substantial resources into education, and are employed in positions that imply some levels of administrative responsibility, have been well positioned to obtain the most out of recent initiatives put forward by the central state to create a consumer society (Tomba 2004). As these new entrepreneurial elites as well as the salaried professionals accumulate significant economic capital, and share the relatively new experience of home ownership as well as other benefits of privileged access to various markets with the first generation of the middle class, these two groups of middle class homeowners consciously differentiate themselves from the first generation of middle class in various aspects.

Scholars also have noticed the increasing consciousness about private property rights among the new middle class in urban China. They study the process through which the new homeowners protect their property ownerships (Davis 2005; Davis and Lu 2003; Tomba 2005; Zhang 2005). Not only have they developed distinctive logics to claim for the properties (Davis and Lu 2003), certain strategies have also been created by the homeowners based on the accumulated economic, cultural and social capitals so that more people can be mobilized to join their collective actions and protect their property rights more effectively (Zhang 2005; Read 2008). In addition, the political implications of these collective actions of property right protection have also become one of the focuses of attention. Expanding property ownership can reduce individuals' dependence on the state, breed legitimate resistance against state encroachments, inculcate new mentalities such as self-sufficiency and independent-mindedness, and create both literal and figurative spaces for open deliberation among asset owners. With the increasing

autonomy and power and emerging common interests, new solidarities with other property owners may be created (Read 2008). This new development has been argued to be the initial stage of an emerging civil society in urban China (Zhang 2005).

Nonetheless, the focus of the “growing pains” of the new homeowners in these researches essentially implies that they are still in the process of adapting to the new identity as homeowners. Indeed, purchasing a house means a significant life change, but with the ending of welfare allocation of housing, the growth of private property developers, the sharp increase in residents’ purchasing power due to the occupational restructuring, the development of housing finance particularly the mortgage market, and the expansion of the secondary markets for housing transactions, China’s new middle class found the transformation from tenants to homeowners not as difficult as they expected. Affluence and commoditization have increased the opportunities for autonomous decisions for some urban dwellers (Tomba 2005). The booming real estate market in China further encourages quite a number of new house owners to purchase a second property within a short period of time. Instead of simply becoming property owners, they are searching for places where they can live more comfortably, both materially and spiritually. The changed requirements and expectations of home reflect an emerging domestic lifestyle among the new middle class in urban China. Such emerging lifestyle is not merely displaying people’s status; on the contrary, it is through these forms of living that the new middle class in China actively consolidates and affirms their social positions within the changing social space (Crompton 1993; Zhang 2008).

The above brief description of housing reform in contemporary China is intended to serve as a backdrop of our analysis in the following chapters. This is an important

social context wherein the middle class emerges and develops their style of living. Such institutional changes also shape the strategies adopted by the middle class to present themselves in front of the others. The urban context, the built environment, and the notions of homeownership and home are crucial contextual factors in our understanding of China's rising middle class.

Research Design

This research was conducted in Beijing. As the capital of the P.R.China, Beijing has many exceptional advantages: it is a political, cultural, technological, and information center, the brain that makes economic strategies and conducts international interactions. Therefore, it possesses extraordinary integrated competitiveness. According to "The Report of The Competitiveness of Cities in China #3" conducted by the Institute of Finance and Trade Economics, Chinese Academy of Social Science, Beijing is ranked highly in most of the indices (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences 2005). In fact, Beijing is ranked No. 1 in more categories than any other city in China. First of all, Beijing has the most number of reputable universities and other academic institutions, with a comprehensive elementary, intermediate, and adult-education system and a long history of culture, making it extremely competitive in terms of attracting talent. From professionals to technicians, from attracting talent to efficient human resource allocation, Beijing has its advantages. In addition, Beijing's competitiveness and creativeness in technology is outstanding, leading other cities in areas such as available resources, investment in technology, and ability to produce results by means of new patents and publication of scientific journals. Furthermore, Beijing has strong economic foundation and is among the highest in terms of GDP, government revenues, number of financial

institutions, and capital resources. Beijing also has good infrastructure assets. Its transportation and communication are both the best in the country. The Olympic Games further enhance Beijing's infrastructure development. Lastly, Beijing people enjoy the highest level of medical care, education, cultural development, and sports in China. With the ability to offer good working conditions and high income, Beijing is a very attractive city to many.

In addition to these positive factors, Beijing municipal government has strategically emphasized the development of the modern service industry. The favorable policy environment in Beijing attracts numerous foreign-invested companies and private-owned enterprises, which in turn facilitates the occupational restructuring in Beijing. A great number of white-collar employees and highly educated private entrepreneurs soon flourished, making Beijing a very suitable location to observe the social practice of the emerging middle class in urban China. Indeed, if one is to locate China's rising middle class, Beijing is surely an appropriate locale for sociological observation.

This research is designed to be conducted in a community context. To select the most suitable middle class residential community, it is necessary to review the housing property market in Beijing.

Generally speaking, the residential housing market in Beijing can be divided into three major categories: luxurious residential housing, ordinary residential housing, and economically affordable housing. The economically affordable housing is policy-driven accommodation, targeting at residents of median to lower income families, which take up about 30% of total households in Beijing. Beijing introduced the guidelines on economically affordable housing in 2005: 54 to 117 sqm housing units of less than RMB

320,000 each. It is estimated that the investment in economically affordable housing reached a peak of 16.6% in 1999 in China, before it reduced to 6.9% in 2005 (REICO Studio 2005). Correspondingly, total area under economically affordable housing has also experienced a downward trend nationwide as well as in Beijing. Based on China Real Estate Report #3, the supply of economically affordable housing in Beijing has been dropping during the same period (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences 2005).

By contrast, the boundary between luxurious residential housing and ordinary residential housing is less clear. According to the official standard, villa, resort, and other residential properties with a per-square-meter price that doubles the average commercial housing in the previous year will be classified as luxurious properties (No.1926 [2002] of Beijing Municipal Finance Bureau and Beijing Municipal Administration of Local Taxation). In Beijing, the standard of luxurious housing in 2004 was RMB 8,500 per sqm, with feasible design, reasonable environment, and high quality construction. However due to the rapid development of Beijing's real estate market, the proportion of commercial housing with less than RMB 5,000 per sqm in Beijing decreased significantly during 2000-2004, whereas the market share of high end properties of at least RMB 8,000 per sqm has increased steadily. As a result, the standard of classifying luxurious housing soon became invalid. From June 1, 2005, Beijing started to implement a new standard including three conditions: (a) plot ratio of 1.0 or above; (b) gross floor area of 140 sqm or below; and (c) price is below 120% of average transaction prices in the neighborhood.

Such classification is necessarily arbitrary. The most obvious problem is that the trend of suburbanization in Beijing has been ignored. According to an analysis of Beijing's real estate market, the supply of housing in suburbs has increased rapidly, with

estates of relatively affordable prices springing up in areas not too far away from the city center (World Union Real Estate Consultancy 2006). Therefore, it is possible to use the same price to purchase properties with vastly different plot ratio and gross floor area in Beijing.

As a result of lack of standardized classification, the present research takes many factors into consideration while choosing a fieldwork site, including location, price, floor area, and community planning. First, China Real Estate Report #3 published in 2005 indicated that the ordinary properties had an average selling price of RMB 6,721 per sqm, whereas villas and luxurious apartments had RMB 11,467 per sqm. As the subject of this research are those who enjoy more economic, cultural and social capital, such advantages are reflected in their choice of residential community. The research site should therefore fall within this range, and specifically, between RMB 7,000 to RMB 10,000 per sqm. Furthermore, according to different locations, price, floor area, and community planning may fluctuate. In this sense, a community located near the city center with a selling price close to the upper boundary and floor area and community planning in line with official standards of ordinary properties is comparable to a suburban community with a selling price closer to lower boundary but larger floor area and better community planning than the official standards.

The Setting

Based on the above criteria, a residential community in Beijing called KC was selected to be the field site of this research. KC is located on the east edge of the city, about 10 kilometers from the business district and 15 kilometers from downtown. Being the second phase of the whole Cannes project, KC provides stacked townhouses which

have two units vertically, each with its private entrance from the street. The upper unit includes a large balcony, while the lower unit contains a private garden. Houses in KC range from 180 to 250 sqm with an average price of RMB 7,000 per sqm. Compared with housing properties in the city center, KC offers more living spaces than the average in Beijing, which is merely 32.68 sqm (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2005) with a relatively affordable price³.

KC also tries to distinguish itself by emphasizing the quality of its community environment. The plot ratio in the community is only 1.0⁴. The average distance between buildings is 20 meters. It contains 2.7 hectares of public green area, and a 7 sqkm artificial lake. Besides, KC provides community-wide facilities, including a community club house, playground, a swimming pool, a gym, golf range, tennis courts, barbeque facilities, etc. Each unit has a private parking lot, and public parking area is also available in the common space in KC.

The property developer aimed to attract middle class urban residents, and this purpose was clearly reflected in its slogan: "The Private Garden of CBD". Many residents living in the community are senior employees working in joint ventures, private enterprises, universities, and community and social services like TV stations, hospitals and local government. Detailed information of residents' composition can be found in the following diagrams:

³ According to China Real Estate Report #3, the average selling price of commercial housing in Beijing is RMB 7,076 per sqm in 2005.)

⁴ According to an online survey conducted by www.focus.cn and IHome magazine, the plot ratio of over 51% of all residential communities in Beijing is over 2.0 since 2006.

Diagram 3.1 Occupation of KC Residents

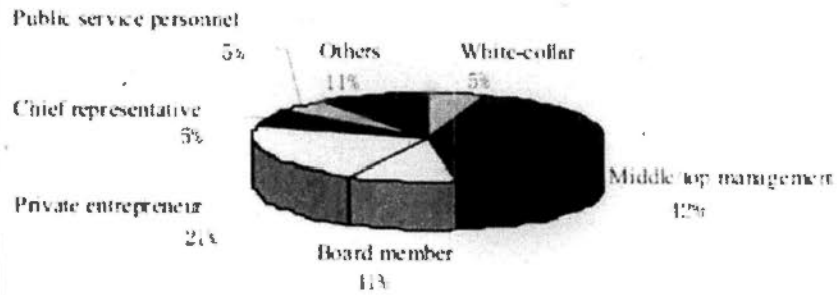


Diagram 3.2 Family Structure of KC Residents

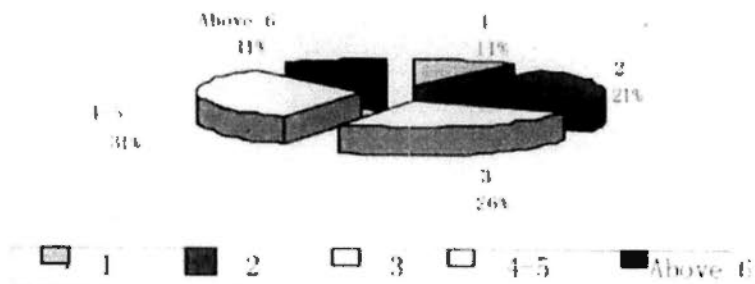
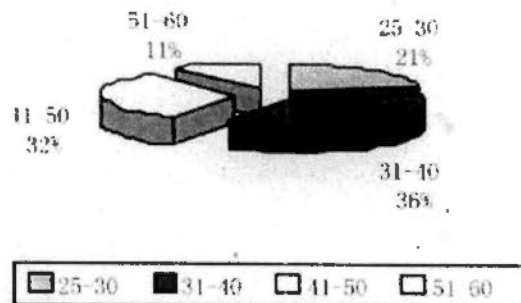


Diagram 3.3 Age of KC Residents



Source: The Fourth Season Statistical Analysis of KC's homeowners conducted by the property developer (2005)

Methodology

The ethnographic fieldwork consisted of both participant observations and in-depth interviews. It was conducted in KC from June to August 2007. The participant observations included two parts. Some of the observations were carried out on the community's online forum. Unlike other residential communities whose community online forums were usually attached to major property websites, KC's online forum was established and completely controlled by KC's homeowners. Aiming at providing a carefree environment for discussions between neighbors, this forum required every user to register by submitting their personal information such as real name, cell phone number, and most importantly, their address in KC, and their contacts were posted on the forum for better communication. In this sense, KC's online forum was not an entirely virtual world. Residents' behaviors and interactions in this semi-virtual world largely reflected their real expectations and ideas of everyday life in the community.

More than 1,200 users registered on this forum, which provided the sampling frame for the research. The most active residents in KC were singled out, so that case selection bias for the in-depth interviews could be greatly reduced by balancing the active and passive residents.

In addition to the online observation, residents' activities and interactions in real life situation were also closely examined. Through participation in informal neighbor gatherings and residents' home parties, and casual chats with homeowners while working out together in the community clubhouse, walking dogs and buying dinner materials, a clear picture of homeowners' everyday life in KC was sketched out.

Following an initial period of participant observation, 23 in-depth interviews, totaled 45 hours, were conducted with 22 households in the later period of the fieldwork. The composition of the interviewees' age, education, occupation was consistent with the above general description of KC's residents (See Table 3.1 in Appendix 1: The summary of demographic information of the interviewees). Besides, the manager of the property management company was also interviewed for an understanding of KC from another perspective.

In short, this is an ethnographical study of a middle class community in contemporary Beijing. As I have noted in the introductory chapter, my analysis emphasizes the importance of contextualizing the study of the middle class in a living environment. This would help me grapple with the meanings of their actions and understand their implications for our understanding of how a middle class comes into being in a changing social environment like contemporary China.

Chapter 4

Making A Homely Home

Home is a multi-layered concept, which most directly means a place or a site, a set of cultural meanings and feelings, and the relations between the two (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). It is more than a house or a household. Imagination about ideal home of residents living in KC, either clear or ambiguous, correspondingly involved the following three parts: physical conditions of dwelling place (i.e. size, number of rooms, location, community environment, etc); personalization of house (i.e. structural alteration and decoration according to the residents' personal taste and preference); and daily domestic activities at home. Through the realization of the fantasized home, including searching for the ideal housing property that satisfies most of their expectations, discussing with family members and friends about how to utilize and personalize the decoration of the unit, using every weekend shopping for all necessary domestic goods (from paints to hardwood floor, and from toilets to ceramic tiles), KC's residents gradually developed feelings of their own home in the new dwelling place, and therefore accomplished the transformation from buying a house to building a home.

These everyday practices at the local level could be easily perceived as a natural result of the improved economic status of the emerging middle class in China. However, such an oversimplified interpretation might overlook the symbolic meaning embedded in these everyday practices. In fact, these were class practices in daily circumstances, through which KC's middle class residents continuously and deliberately expressed their preferences and tastes, established symbolic boundaries, distinguished themselves from

other social groups, known and recognized their identity, and struggled for their social spaces collectively.

I Want a Decent House

Just like other new middle class in urban China, the composition of KC's residents were diversified and complicated, and their personal experiences were also different from each other. However, when asked to describe the initial thoughts of their expectations of home, the following words were repeatedly mentioned by almost every interviewee, despite their varied background: large in size, multi-level, many rooms, a private garden, low density, good community environment, etc⁵.

The desire of owning one's own dwelling space by Chinese urban citizens had been increasing significantly. Generally speaking, the criteria of KC residents' search of dwelling corresponded to existing studies of the living standard of China's new middle class:

First of all, the house must be a big one. "Big" is a relative concept, as one's definition of a big house can be quite different from another. For KC's inhabitants, big house should be at least 200-250 m². In other words, for household size of three people, average dwelling size should be more than 60 m², much higher than the national average. This was the most fundamental criterion of a decent home.

Secondly, the house layout should be practical, efficient, stylish and appealing. Practicality/functionality was the most essential factor. KC's citizens would not consider an apartment with open layout, such as that of the "loft-style", when they looked for a house. Instead, they preferred regular townhouse/stacked townhouse which contained

⁵ The following discussion is based on data collected in my interviews.

many rooms and multiple levels, and they believed such floor plan could fulfill needs of every family member and therefore was practical.

Community environment was another key consideration. For KC's residents, their home should be located in a low-density community, which was not over-built. It must keep certain areas as community green land. Open space was very important. Above all, cleanness was the simplest but nonetheless the most fundamental criterion: even the most gorgeous community would become intolerable if it was not properly maintained. In addition to the physical environment, cultural environment was also taken into account. The "quality" (*suzhi*)⁶ of residents as a criterion for choosing a residential area had become increasingly significant.

Location was also important. Suburb has become increasingly popular among the urban middle class in China, as it provides quietness and adequate open spaces in a location not too far away from the city center. They expected that their home should be conveniently located within minutes to major transportation infrastructures that connect to their working place as well as the city center. 45-60 minutes was the maximum acceptable driving time. The combination of these two criteria highly restricted choices that KC residents have, as peak-hour traffic jam in Beijing could easily turn most major roads into mega car parks and make the journey to work intolerably long. Besides, as experienced investors (i.e. most of them are not first-time property buyers), KC's residents completely understood the influence of location on the value of estates. Clearly, people might have opinions on the definition of "good location", but most of them were optimistic about the housing price in eastern Beijing. Many of them mainly focused on

⁶ "*Suzhi*" refers to a person's "disposition, ability, and way of acting", characteristics which are conditioned by a person's upbringing and are therefore hard to change. (Fleischer 2002; Zhang 2001)

northern and eastern Beijing in their search exercise, as “these are the most prosperous places in Beijing which is developing most quickly”.

An ideal residence community should provide various modern amenities, such as luxurious clubhouse with swimming pool and fitness center, light basketball court and golf driving range, community library containing various books as well as electronic visual materials, car care centers and laundry shops, detached and direct access garages/car park, convenience store and restaurants, baby nurseries/kindergartens/primary schools, and so forth. However, commercial facilities (such as a shopping center) should be kept outside of the residence community.

The last and most important factor was cost. Housing prices in Beijing had been rising drastically and continuously reaching new records in the past few years. Despite of numerous reasons behind this housing boom, one thing was certain: Beijing citizens found that it was getting more and more difficult to find affordable housing that could meet their expectations. Housing cost was the most decisive factor that KC residents considered when they searched for dwelling places. Generally speaking, most of them were willing to pay 1.5-2 million RMB for a decent house.

Interestingly, none of my interviewees mentioned ownership when they listed their criteria of a “homely” home. In other words, ownership itself was not mentioned in my interviews as a prerequisite for making a decent accommodation unit a home with homely feelings. Obviously, this was not because homeownership was not important for KC’s inhabitants; quite on the contrary, the disappearance of ownership from the criteria list precisely demonstrated that it had become something they had taken for granted. Ownership was most basic in the shaping of such homely feelings. KC’s residents were

well aware of the difference, particularly in terms of the meanings they attached to the housing unit, between rental and ownership. They were surprised when they were asked if ownership was one of their concerns. They thought that was obvious and mentioning ownership as a criterion of a “homely” home was simply unnecessary. According to a crude survey about KC’s residents conducted by the property developer, most house owners in KC were not first-time homebuyers (The Fourth Quarter Statistic Report of KC Customers 2005). Many of them were employees of state-owned work units or public administrative units, and they became homeowners either through purchasing housing from their work units at a subsidized price, or with help of the monetary allocation of housing in their work units. Others were private entrepreneurs or white-collar office workers, who purchased their first housing through commodity housing market. Unlike their parents whose salaries were so low that buying any property was going to consume their whole lives’ savings and therefore became unimaginable, KC’s residents accomplished this task in an astonishingly short period of time. Having grasped opportunities in the economic restructuring, they enjoyed drastic income increase, and within 10 to 15 years, they were able to accumulate a substantial amount of fortune to purchase housing units that entirely belong to themselves. But they were not easily satisfied. The rapidly developing real estate market, the increasing salaries and the confidence in their careers altogether drove them to consider upgrading the physical structure of home. Merely purchasing a dwelling place that belongs to them was no longer enough to create their expected home.

As their careers improving and household wealth increasing, urban middle class residents began to consider strategies to manage their wealth. Since China’s stock market

was still in its infancy and investment tools were limited, most of them chose to diversify their assets by investing in real estate. Indeed, having witnessed the skyrocketing housing price in Beijing in the past few years, urban citizens believed the value of Beijing real estate market still had great potential. For most of the KC's residents, purchasing an estate that could improve their living standard was good; purchasing an appreciating estate that improved living standard was even better.

Indeed, as market mechanisms had been introduced into the Chinese economy for three decades, and people started to enjoy freedom in managing their own consumption, they were getting more and more familiar with various market strategies. This was especially true for professionals, successful entrepreneurs and other white-collar employees who needed to deal with market transactions every day. Constantly learning and practicing through market experiences in their daily lives, they were used to cope with the evolving investing environment consisted of both new market mechanisms and various administrative regulations. Their experiences in investment in different markets were accumulating, and their consciousness about risk was increasing. Given their relatively high and stable salaries, they were ready and were willing to take risk in order to secure better returns. The new middle class, being experienced in the buying and selling of real estate properties, took advantages of the booming housing market in urban China, hoping for an appreciation of their real estate assets. Such phenomena were common, not only among those working in the competitive market environment, but also in state-owned enterprises and public administrative sectors. For these second-time homeowners, their experiences of both buying and selling properties were reflections of the realization of "housing as a commodity" from merely a state policy to commonplace

practice by the affluent sector of the population. Furthermore, with the accumulation of knowledge of investment and experiences of handling transactions in the housing market, they developed a new sense of confidence in realizing their dream of finding one's home for the future.

Needless to say, KC's residents had already considered the pros and cons of KC based on criteria mentioned above, and finally made up their decisions. One would easily conclude that KC's residents chose such a type of housing to be their home was due to the improved income level of middle class households. This certainly was part of the answer. However, it was not just about money or affordability. Due to the decentralization of housing provision and the development of commodity housing market, China's urban residents started to gain the autonomy and freedom that they had lost since the communist government monopolized land use and accommodations were allocated through the work-units. Now they had a choice in deciding which type of housing they want to live in. In short, now they could choose.

To find a comfortable physical structure that matches their expectation of an ideal home, KC's residents would work quite intensively to choose among housing units of various sizes, floor plans, locations, environments, costs and other conditions. The decisions they made were based on their purchasing power, the stage of their family life cycle, as well as their past living experiences. Generally speaking, one's imagination of home was initially formed by his upbringing experiences, especially the home that the person was brought up in. But then, of course, they would change and adjust their expectations along with the transitions in their life course such as changes in their career development, increase in household savings, transitions in familial development, and

accumulation of experiences in purchasing property. The improvements in career and household income helped upgrade urban inhabitants' socio-economic status and therefore increased their ability to obtain desired homes. In addition, with successful career, increased household income, and expanded family size, new middle class inhabitants' expectations of home were progressively raised. Their rising expectations of home and domestic living drove them to search for better housing units to materialize their dream of ideal home.

The process of materializing the dream of building one's home, consisting of searching, purchasing, and finally settling down with the choice of housing unit, in turn influenced the respondents' expectations of home in future. Simply attributing the urban middle class's home purchasing behaviour to an increase in income provided only a partial, and quite often rather superficial, explanation as it underestimated the importance of pre-existing living and working experiences of the middle class with regard to their choice of home purchase in connection to the process of class formation. Indeed, it is my argument that we need a thorough exploration of the impacts of pre-existing life experiences on their housing aspirations. Furthermore, by understanding how they materialize their dream of building their "homely" home, we can gain insights of the formation process of the new middle class in urban China.

More Living Space

Emerged and expanded in a context of rapid societal transformation, in which pre-existing inequalities sustained and new bases of inequalities developed, China's new middle class is characterized as heterogeneous and complex in various aspects. Some of them grew up in old middle class families with parents working as cadres in various

levels of governments/state-owned enterprises/armies. Having experienced relatively good living conditions in their early years, unsurprisingly, they had developed higher expectations for their own home. As one of my interviewees, Mr. Chen, told me:

“...I grew up in an army residential community, particularly for retired career military officers. The living conditions were very good. If you have never seen it before, you won't even dream about it. But I've experienced this kind of high quality life after all. It gives me a concrete objective to fight for...”

– Mr. Chen

Not all middle class residents were as fortunate as Mr. Chen who had the chance to experience such a good life. Most of the respondents moved and lived in big cities because of their studies at top universities and their career development after graduation. They were not well endowed with financial support and social capital. They worked their way up the social ladder. These people shared similar experience in finding their own paths of social mobility at the early stages of their careers. Unlike Mr. Chen who had a model to follow in pursuing his dream home from the very beginning, most of the respondents developed and accomplished their dream of building one's home gradually in the course of their career development. One typical example is Frank, who came from rural area in Hubei Province. He said:

“...When I was young, my home was in Hubei rural area and the conditions were very poor. [...] I came to Beijing in 1996 after graduation from university. I was then admitted to a state-owned enterprise. I was living in a dormitory that my unit provided for two years. In 1998 I got another job offer and so I moved out from the dormitory. I rented a small, poor-conditioned bungalow with my wife. There was only one room including all sleeping and cooking area, with high humidity. We didn't even have a toilet within our unit. We couldn't afford a better dwelling. You know why? When my wife and I first came to Beijing, our salary was

just enough for food -- and only canteen food in my work unit. We dared not to buy extra things, not even a pair of shoes. ...I can still remember that in 1997, when I was still working in the sales department of that state-owned enterprise, one day I stood on the Chaoyangmen Bridge looking at the building of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and grieving: Beijing is so big and modern, living here must be so good. But I don't own even one square meter of land here; nothing belongs to me. And I couldn't see the future. Everything was so vague and uncertain. It was a cold, cloudy day, and everything was dusky. [...] My father died when I was still in university, not to mention the debts of several thousand RMB that I borrowed from relatives for my education. All I can depend on is myself, my own hands. So at that time, I never had a chance to think about what my home should look like..."

-- Frank

The cases reported above are intended to be illustrative of the diversity within the new middle class in contemporary China. Clearly, the aspirations of home that Mr. Chen and Frank began with were completely different. These contradictory expectations of home among the new middle class were not uncommon in present urban China. On the one hand, with the intensification of the process of marketization, people armed with different kinds of assets composed of wealth, knowledge and social relations had become high achievers, regardless of their family origins. On the other hand, their previous familial experiences shaped their basic conception of home. After becoming members of the new middle class, people like Mr. Chen who were brought up in the old middle class families were more likely to have higher expectations of "homely" home than those who grew up in lower class families in urban or rural areas in China, although they might share more or less the same amount of household income.

Despite differences in their original conception of home, with the development of their career and the improvement of household purchasing power, their aspirations and expectations regarding their homes converged. The physical structures that they chose to

call homes were similar in terms of ownership, size, quality, and other aspects. In addition, the shared family structures—usually nuclear family including the concern couple and their child—also drove their requirements of home towards the same direction. A particular form of the new middle class's dream of home is in the process of formation.

For people like Mr. Chen, the development of home aspirations was rather steady than dramatic. In the late 1990s, Mr. Chen bought a fully decorated apartment in a commodity residential community. According to him, it was the first step to realize his ideal home. Judging from various aspects, the apartment fulfilled his requirements, as it was large enough for the nuclear family, with sufficient green areas and open spaces in the community. However, his hope of a higher level of privacy at home was brought to his attention his aunt purchased a decent villa:

“...My aunt bought a very decent villa in Beijing's suburb area years ago. It's too expensive and there is no way we can afford it right now. But it doesn't hurt to imagine, right? We want to have that quality of life, and to achieve that we must leave our original apartment and find an affordable decent dwelling place, which is not necessarily a villa, but must be a type of housing closer to our dream...”

-- Mr. Chen

His wife, Mrs. Chen, further elaborated their expectations for their future home:

“...Right now my son is living with my parents during weekdays. But as my kid grows up, we want him to live with us. I will need help from my parents and parents-in-law; at least one of them needs to live with me. I need full-time live-in babysitter. But working in top management means we must face intensive stress everyday. We always feel exhausted after a whole day's work. Our jobs also require us to be decision-makers, not followers. But parents, you know, like to intervene and they like to treat you as a child. It is quite hard for us to get along with our own parents, not to mention the in-laws. To deal with this dilemma, we must have relatively independent space at home. That's why we choose townhouse rather than apartment. We need a whole storey where the two of us can feel easy, uninterrupted and relaxed...”

-- Mrs. Chen

Meanwhile, for people like Frank, their imaginations of home changed significantly. After one year's arduous work, Frank accomplished significant achievement in his career in 1999. At that time, he accumulated his first fortune: 20,000 RMB. It is not a great deal of money, even judged by the average income level 9 years ago. Nonetheless, it was sufficient for the family to make a small down payment for a small apartment with separate kitchen and bathroom in suburb Beijing, a community being part of the Economically Affordable Housing Programme for middle and lower income urban residents. Frank recalled:

“...I was quite satisfied at that time, although the apartment was only 60 square meters in size and I had to wait two more years for its completion. We didn't have baby, only my wife and I, 60 sq. meters are pretty enough for us. I even thought that it wouldn't bad if I could settle down in that little apartment for the rest of my life...”

-- Frank

But it did not take long for Frank to find that this 60-sq. meter apartment could no longer meet his needs. There were new members joining their family within a couple of years: a baby girl and her brother were born successively. Frank's mother-in-law also came to live with them from Yunnan Province to take care of the children. As both Frank and his wife were full-time employees and his mother-in-law could not look after both babies, they decided to hire a full-time live-in babysitter. Their apartment soon became too small to accommodate all these people. As a result, Frank decided to let his own apartment and to rent a bigger one to settle down his home. The rented apartment was big enough for all 6 people. Nevertheless, Frank was still unsatisfied. He stated that:

“...I wish I could have a reading room, a desk, a bookshelf, and more importantly, a private space that exclusively belongs to me. That will make me feel relax and help me collect myself. Many people, especially men, are obsessed with cars. He sometimes may feel that, his car completely belongs to himself, and nothing can influence, control and interfere in this moment of self-therapy. When he gets into the car, he is alone. He can do whatever he wants. Such things are not possible in another place: you want to watch a TV show, but you can't, as your children want to watch cartoons; you want to watch football game, sorry impossible, because your wife is waiting for the TV series. But when you are alone in your car, things are different. You can listen to whatever music you like. I suppose a reading room can give me similar feelings like my car does...But I don't have a reading room in my current apartment. (Frank's unit in KC was still under renovation during the fieldwork period, so he was living in the rented apartment at that time.) My computer stuff is exposed to everyone in the living room. Sometimes I may want to stay alone for a while, think about business stuff, or just to get away from the tremendous pressure at work. But I can't find such a place in my apartment. I feel being interfered...So my imagination about home is: besides a living room, a kitchen and bathrooms, my wife and I will share the master room; two children will have their own room while the babysitter will share a room with my younger one; one room for my mother-in-law; and finally, a reading room for myself...”

-- Frank

Frank was a typical example of people who left their lower class family origins and became the new middle class by their own efforts. Their imagination of their “homely” homes had evolved dramatically through the experiences of choosing different formats of ideal homes: having purchased commodity housing, their identities had been transformed from being tenants to becoming homeowners; in the process of such status changes, their requirements and expectations of a comfortable home also changed. They gradually changed their perspectives: what they asked for was more than simply buying some places to satisfy their accommodation requirements. Nowadays, Frank and his family would no longer feel embarrassed to talk about their dreaming of an ideal home. Indeed, for those who were upwardly mobile, their home aspirations were becoming

similar to those who came from families of higher socio-economic status. The effects of one's background on aspirations of home seem to be shrinking and the differences in terms of their criteria in choosing domestic property between people of different socio-economic backgrounds had also been narrowed.

A change of status from being a first-time to a second-time homeowner had its impacts on the new middle class' ideas of homely homes. Mr. Chen's and Frank's expectations of home clearly showed that both parties had significantly upgraded their standard of home after becoming homeowners. Instead of simply pursuing the gratification of owning a piece of property, they expected to acquire properties in which each family member could have enough space for domestic activities and enjoy some privacy at the same time. Common apartments (*putong zhuzhai*), either constructed by state-owned work units or provided by the economically affordable housing scheme, were losing their attractiveness as they used to have in the early reform period. The middle class residents looked for comfortable accommodation that could only be provided by the commodity housing market.

Community environment

Most of KC's residents were non-first-time-homeowner and their emphasis was likely to be found in the area of community environment. Unlike Mr. Chen and Frank whose families included different generations of people, many residents in KC opted for a DINK (i.e., Double Income No Kid) lifestyle. For them, size of the unit and space for family members (e.g. their desire of a study room) – as usually these households were composed of husband and wife – were not that crucial. Instead, community environment and the layout of the house appeared to be more important.

One of my interviewees, Jessie, used to live in a small apartment with her husband, Didi, in Zhong Guan Cun (i.e. a technology hub in Beijing). It was a mature community with various facilities around, very convenient for living. However, its high density was becoming increasingly intolerable to Jessie:

“...Zhong Guan Cun is a high density residential district. Didi’s parents bought an apartment there years ago and we lived in it after our marriage. After living there for a while, we felt it was too noisy. Too many people living there and there were too many cars. Every possible place was transformed to car parks, but it was still not enough. It’s really disturbing...”

-- Jessie

Because of such unpleasant experiences, Jessie and Didi decided to look for residential community with lower density. There were many such communities available at that time, but they were attracted by KC for its beautiful courtyard and the stylish outlook of house.

“... We visited another townhouse community before coming to KC. It’s called Wide-House. Its outlook was so outdated: its exterior walls were coated by texture, which seemed to be inferior. [...] KC is different. When we came into this community for the first time, I was attracted by its gorgeous garden. We never had such a huge green area in our previous community. And the outlook of house, dark brown exterior walls coated with tile, looks so stylish. I fell in love with this community at first sight...”

-- Jessie

Nancy had experiences similar to those of Jessie. In 1999, she and her husband bought a 120-sq. meter apartment in Wangjing residential community, which was the first estate project in Beijing directly developed by foreign-invested company. The property

was purchased without careful considerations, as they scheduled to get married and needed a place to live immediately. The apartment was big enough for a couple, and the floor plan was rather practical. However, Nancy's husband was unhappy with the apartment. Nancy recalled:

"...My husband likes to live close to natural environment. He doesn't like apartments or condominiums in downtown, as living in such dwellings makes him feel like being tied up. [...] Our previous community was big with many people were living there and many cars as well. It was such a mess. The community environment was so poor; basically you couldn't see any green area there. The whole community contains different neighborhoods, but it belongs to one property developer. Therefore the developer wouldn't bother to consider the community environment, as there was no competition at all. Every possible land was occupied by residential building, and distance between buildings was getting increasingly narrower. At the beginning, you could still see some lawns. Later on when people gradually moved in as there were not enough car parking lots. The developer started removing lawns to create more car parks. Nonetheless, parking spaces were still not enough for all residents. My husband told me more than once that the most frustrating thing was to find a parking lot. Very annoying. [...] But now he is happy in KC, because he doesn't need to worry about parking space – as we have a detached garage, and there are more public parking spaces available for renting. Moreover, he can enjoy the beautiful view from both his private garden and the common courtyard, even though he doesn't really have time to take a walk outside."

-- Nancy

KC's residents emphasized the significance of community environment when they made up their mind in purchasing their homes. They also cared a lot about the intangible side of their living community, namely the quality of their neighbors. Many residents attributed the reason that their interest in visiting KC to its slogan: KC – the exclusive garden of Central Business District (CBD). This slogan gave them an impression that residents in this community should share similar household income, social status, working and living experiences, etc. To confirm that, some of them actually

requested general information on their potential neighbors more than once, before they made any decision about the final purchase. Some even decided to buy a dwelling here rather than other similar communities because they heard that many of their neighbors in the future were working in foreign-invested companies in CBD, or China Central Television (CCTV). In a low-density residential community like KC, it was not uncommon that residents did not see their neighbors frequently. So, why were they so concerned about the social composition of their neighbors, even more than physical conditions of house and community?

The answer lied in their previous living experiences. Many of them, especially those emerged outside the system (*tizhiwai zhongchanjieji*), had unpleasant experiences with some of their previous neighbors. They usually attributed this to the fact that different social strata were mixed in the same community. Mr. and Mrs. Chen described their frustrating experiences in a commercial residential community named Pearl River View:

“...It was our first owned apartment, with decent decoration. The community itself was also pretty good, including gorgeous courtyard and lawns. It’s very beautiful. We were very pleased at the beginning. But after a while, we found our neighbors were quite annoying and difficult. The community was close to a garment wholesale market, and many of my neighbors were entrepreneurs in the garment industry. It is out of question that they are very rich. You can always see male residents wearing fur coats and jade rings, as well as thick golden necklaces. They are rich. However, they pee and smoke whenever they want in public lifts, use cigarette lighters to burn lift buttons, strip to the waist in public area, and talk loudly everywhere. We tried for two years to accept their life style, but it turned out as if we were from a different country. We speak different languages. They can’t understand our messages and we can’t understand them either. What they think normal are usually the most intolerable things in our minds. ...For example, pee in public lifts. We encountered them several times in public lifts when their kid wanted to pee. These parents wouldn’t say “baby, wait a minute, we will soon get

home and you can pee then". They simply said "Okay, pee here." The kid would pee in front of us. I realized that they were from rural area where pee whenever they want is normal and common. Although they are so rich, they are still rural people. We used to remind them not to smoke in lifts, but it only made those people think we are aliens from other planets. We were the minority. They have their kids and I have mine. When our kids played together, their kids talked with dirty words. I don't want my kid to live in a cultural environment like that. I don't want to live with such people. But we can't change them..."

-- Mr. Chen

The experiences of the Chens were not uncommon. In the early period of the reform after the de-linking of work and residence, people had just started to enjoy the independence to manage their spending. They did not have references for choosing the right kind of accommodation when they purchased their first residential property. The most obvious and influential factor that affected their decisions was the combination of their affordability and needs. As a result, many people who got rich first were concentrated in the first batch of commercial residential communities developed in urban China after the reform. Unfortunately, these people who got rich first came from diverse backgrounds. Some of them, just like Mr. Chen, were professionals with high educational levels; others were successful entrepreneurs, with many of them coming from lower classes in rural areas. When these people with diverse backgrounds live together, different lifestyles easily led to unpleasant encounters or even conflicts between neighbors. Such unpleasant experiences were critical to the shaping of people's eagerness in looking for alternatives. The Chens were one of these families. They realized that dwelling places with unpleasant neighbors would spoil their dream of an ideal home, despite that the physical structure of their home was attractive. The quality of the

neighborhood had become an important factor in their search of their ideal home. Mrs.

Chen said:

“...We decided that we must leave the place. The quality of a house has nothing to do with the quality of your neighbors. The old Chinese saying from the Three-Character Classic ‘Mencius’ mother moved three times to avoid bad influence from neighbors for her son’ is so correct. We didn’t think about neighbor problem when we bought the apartment. That’s the lesson...”

-- Mrs. Chen

Indeed, the Chens’ experiences were shared by many KC’s residents, including those who were white collar employees, entrepreneurs of companies providing professional services, and those working in public administrative or state-owned work units. They realized the importance of cultural environment in the community after suffering from the unpleasant experiences with former neighbors. As a result, they put this factor high on their list when considering their plan of buying a new home. Such considerations were clearly shown in their search of accommodation. Condominiums and apartments having a lot of communal space were eliminated from their list of potential dwellings as conflicts among neighbors were not uncommon. They gathered information of the neighborhood in their search of new accommodation. It was rather questionable whether such techniques really worked at all as information on neighborhood was not easily accessible. But the point to make here is that KC’s residents were very conscious of the importance of the cultural environment of a community.

Once they could find a housing project with a promising cultural environment, the new middle class residents were eager to move into those areas. An enclosed residential communities like KC with low density had its appeal to such potential buyers. After they

had moved into KC, these residents were also conscious of maintaining a good cultural environment in the community. In this connection, it is interesting to observe that urban communities are increasingly stratified, not only in terms of their social composition and the values of the property, but also the cultural milieu and ways of living. The new middle class residents are forming their own communities and are eager to find communities they feel comfortable to live in.

Sufficient private living spaces, beautiful physical environment and a friendly neighborhood were the most important concerns of KC's residents when they looked for their ideal home. Their decisions were made carefully only after complete and rational evaluations of the pros and cons of various property estates regarding these mundane and ordinary subjects that affecting their everyday lives. The converging expectations of a homely home as well as similar purchasing power of the new middle class urban citizens prompted them to choose suburban housing properties instead of those located in central city area. It was important to note that it was still too early to argue that suburban living had already landed in China and has become an ideal way of living. Indeed, the new middle class urban residents in China were not deliberately selecting suburban areas in order to pursue a Western suburban middle-class lifestyle. Rather, they chose the suburb because the result of balancing their requirements and affordability of home at the current stage happened to be located in suburban area. If they could find some places in central city area that could meet their needs, most of them would not hesitate to move back to the city center.

One typical case was Ms. Ma. She bought an upper unit with her ex-husband.

After the divorce, she has been living with her parents and three pets: two cats and one dog.

“...I am working in a property development company and so I’ve seen many gorgeous properties. I think this place is too quiet for me. I still maintain a young attitude, and my current status makes me feel that living downtown may be more appropriate. I’m not ready to be too far away from the colorful city life. I think my parents may like it here more...”

-- Ms. Ma

Indeed, it was not uncommon to hear KC’s residents planning about purchasing an additional apartment in the central city area in future. Part of the reason to explain their shifting preferences was that the emerging new middle class in China remained unclear about the way of life that they would like to live, and were still searching and trying out different possibilities. For many of them, suburban life was simply a possible option available in front of them. It would not do any harm to give it a try. In addition, the suburbanization in China was still at initial stage. Even in KC, one of the earliest suburban residential communities, public facilities and services such as primary and middle schools, clinics and hospitals, were not well developed compared with those located in the city center. When their children reached the school age, or their parents needed long-term medical care, such residential communities could not fully meet their needs, and moving back to the city center would be an option. Without an increasingly stable number of residents living in such residential communities, a suburban life culture could not be developed in a short period of time. Therefore, although the new middle class in urban China kept moving out from the city center to suburbs, and more residential housing compounds were launched in suburban area to attract middle class

residents, it was still too early to conclude that a suburban middle class lifestyle, similar to that found in the US, was fully established.

The Personal Touch

Unlike housing projects in Hong Kong, U.S., or some other countries where brand new dwellings available in the markets furnished with the basic domestic appliances, most new residential properties in Beijing are still in the form of a “white-box”, i.e, they are minimally prepared for the buyers to move in. Therefore, the first thing that Beijing house-owners have to do after settling payment is to decorate the interior of their dwellings. Those who purchase finished apartments or condominiums may also need to adorn their residence. Indeed, how to add one’s personal touch on their house is an important procedure in the whole process of home making.

Fashionable and Practical

Interior decoration is influenced by residents’ age, gender, social classes, etc. Moreover, as second-time homeowners, KC’s residents had more experiences in decorating their houses. For some of them, previous decoration experiences made them realize the importance of identifying a suitable decoration style. Gigi said:

“...Both my fiancé and I had a very clear idea about how to decorate our new home. As both of us had previous experiences of house adorning, so we knew from the beginning that we don’t want the style of our house to be simplistic, that’s more suitable for young people, but not for us. We hope our house to be a cozy one, snugly warm and comfortable. So we chose an English country style. I guess many people may choose European style, but we feel it is overdone. But simplistic style, like Ikea, we have tried that before: it only works well in small apartments or condominiums, not in such big houses. Moreover, the industrial mark embedded in this kind of style is not our favorite. We are a bit old for that. Young people may like it more... To find a suitable style, you need to do research by yourself. Books, magazines, Internet, and model rooms of

similar housing type are all sources that you can utilize. More importantly is your sixth sense accumulated through previous life...”

-- Gigi

For most of the KC’s residents, collecting useful information and suggestions of decoration styles from various sources was relatively easy. They were well-educated and were quite familiar with modern media, especially the Internet. However, not everyone was certain about the most favorite decoration style like Gigi. What they had in mind was usually vague ideas about possible decoration they want for the house and functions of different parts of the house. For instance, Pak Choi described her thoughts when planning the penthouse:

“...The original plan was to create a North American decoration style by putting some rocks in the penthouse to echo the brown brick fireplace in living room. But it seems a bit unrealistic. Since the plan has been altered, the design of living room also needs to change [...] Now I planned to make my penthouse look like a bar, so our friends can come and drink here. Will build a bar counter. Right now we’ve finished the ceiling with wood beams and interior walls with cream color paint. Look a bit like bar now. I guess the inspiration comes from our preferences. Both of us like dark color, it makes things look aged and rich. We like worn out things, not necessarily the true ones, artificial ones will do as well. What we are struggling right now is how to blend these two different styles naturally...”

-- Pak Choi

In such situations, house owners usually turned to seek help from qualified house designers, even though they needed to pay high commission for the professional advises. For many of them, a good designer could help them a lot, not only to clarify the appropriate decoration style, but also to lower the total cost of adorning. An example was

Pak Choi. Having experience of dealing with professional house designer, she decided to use the same designer to help her decorate her house:

“... When I decorated my previous apartment, I saw an introduction of a home designer in a magazine, with photos of the designer’s home. The photos attracted my attention so I hired the designer and completely trusted her. She had special tastes in selecting materials and the result turned out to be so great! You can’t find any apartment similar to mine. Even home design and fashion magazine journalists were attracted to my home. You can find pictures of my house on the Internet as well. The commission was 200 RMB yuan per sq. meter, so it took me around 24,000 for hiring the designer. But guess how much did I pay for the materials? 48,000 RMB yuan! Though I paid more for the designer, my total costs were far less than what I expected. So when I bought the house in KC, I immediately determined to ask for her help. She knows what I want. With her help, I can clarify my thoughts about the decoration style...”

-- Pak Choi

Yet, not all middle class residents in KC were keen about making a stylish home. Many residents only wanted to relax at home. Too complicated an interior design would backfire and make them feel uncomfortable. Mrs. Chen said:

“...Actually we don’t know whether our design qualifies a ‘style’. I like Ms. Gao’s (her neighbor in KC) home, full of ‘style’, full of her own thoughts. It’s good looking. But I’ve never thought of introducing that way of decoration into my home. I think my home should look ordinary, simple, so that I can relax...”

-- Mrs. Chen

The decoration style of Mrs. Chen’s house could be classified as the “practical” style. There were many residents like Mrs. Chen who planned their house in a functional way. For them, the tone and colors of house were not the most crucial factors. Instead, to

maximize the functional use of each part of house so that their needs would be met was more important. Frank was such an example:

“...Due to the romantic factor in my bones, I plan to install a background music system. You can listen to music when you use the bathroom. Honestly speaking, I don't have time to read books. Most of the time I have to work with computer, make decisions and check emails, if not then I must be socializing with business customers or partners. That's what I do for a living. I only have time to read books when I'm on a flight, or using the toilet. So when I finish installing the background music system in every bathroom, I can read book as well as listen to music or radio programmes when I'm in it. I even save a place for TV set, as I'm thinking of the possibility to watch TV programme while bathing... And on the staircase wall, I plan to mount a series of electronic photo albums. I'm more interested in functional uses. Some people focus on remodeling the house, creating many rooms or making artificial molds. We don't do that. I try to keep as many spaces as possible so that my kids can ride bicycle at home...”

-- Frank

It certainly did not mean that people like Gigi or Pak Choi who emphasized on tone and color balancing did not care about functionality. It was equally incorrect to assume that residents like Frank and the Chens who paid attention to practical uses did not value a personal and stylized interior. The two kinds of consideration were not mutually exclusive. Our concern here is not about their personal preference. Rather, it is about how individual household add their personal touch on their homes. The inputs of introducing this extra personal element in their homes were important ingredients of making a homely home.

No matter what type of decoration style they had chosen, either British country, North American, or modernist, suggestions from professional designers were greatly appreciated by many KC's residents. Even people like Gigi, who were certain about decoration style, also sought advices from professional designers. Indeed, most of KC's

residents never decorated a house with more than one storey and thus their former experience in home adorning might be applicable to their new home. In such cases, professional advises were found most helpful. The tendency of relying on professional advices was certainly a reflection of the economic resourcefulness of KC's residents. Simply put, they could not afford the expensive services. However, the crucial problem for KC's residents was that it was not always easy to find a good designer. Many of them found designers through friends' introduction, as they did not trust a so-called "professional designer" easily without knowing their performance. Given KC residents' rather broad social network, they sought referral through their social contacts.

Moreover, the new middle class residents' decisions of decoration styles were actually determined by the aesthetic sense cultivated by their life and work experiences. The similarities in the pre-existing experiences also shaped the shared characteristics of their favorite decoration styles: low profile, graceful, and practical⁷. Their choice and practices in home making process confirmed and supported their social identities in a material sense, and helped them differentiate from other social groups.

Best Price/Quality

When the design concept and layout were ready, KC's residents began to consider materials used to decorate the interior of house. Although the services provided by most of the decoration services teams included purchasing interior decoration materials such as paint and tile, most of KC's residents liked to take up the task of buying raw materials by

⁷ Appendix 2 provided a basic example of houses in KC. KC provided different types of units, but the floor plans were more or less similar. Figure 1 and 2 are floor plans of the units in KC (pictures were available at Ushfang.com). Figure 3 and Figure 4 are two samples of interior design provided by the developer (pictures were obtained from Lookhouse.cn and Sina.com.cn). Although the interior decoration showed in these two pictures was quite luxurious, practically, the interior decoration of KC's residents was not like that. As I observed in home visits, their decoration style was far more simple and practical than these two illustrations.

themselves, though usually accompanied by their designer. Other than dealing with the practical issues of adjusting to alteration and the availability of preferred materials, KC residents were also very conscious of other aspects, such as health-related concerns, of interior decoration. For example, some of them were aware that decoration materials contained many chemistry compounds that might be harmful to human health. To be responsible for their families' health and to minimize risks to live in the new dwelling, they did pay a lot of attention to the building and decoration materials by attending the process of material purchase. Equally significant was that they were cost conscious too. For the same type of material such as paint and tile, profit margin could vary a lot across different brands. To make the best use of every dollar and have a better control of the total costs, homeowners decided to get involved in the purchasing process. Indeed, the quality of decoration materials was regarded as important for the residents in KC. Though they were affluent and could afford the spending, they would still try their best to carefully balance price and quality when they chose decoration materials. Indeed, "best price/quality" was the most frequent word when they described how they made decisions about decoration materials. Mrs. Chen said:

"...Our decoration materials must be the most environmental ones together with best quality and price. Some KC's residents gathered to ask for a block sale through which they can get more price discount, so we joined them. Brand is not a criterion; rather, we are more concerned about quality. No matter what, the most decisive factor is still the strength of price/quality correlation..."

-- Mrs. Chen

However, for different people, the definition of "best price/quality" varies a lot. Similar to their choices on housing type and decoration styles, middle class residents

make judgments based on their living and working experiences. As Frank described his criteria when choosing his bed:

“...My criteria for bed are very strict. This is because most of our time at home is spending on our bed. Moreover, you energize through resting on bed. If you can't rest well, how can you perform well at work? My bed must be very comfortable, with soft headboard that adds comfort and support. The mattress must be neither too soft nor too hard. I spent 2,000 RMB yuan for a single mattress, the most expensive one in the shop...”

-- Frank

Moreover, most of KC's residents had prior experience in decorating their units, though not quite of the same type of design and layout as of KC. They were experienced in choosing decoration materials such as paint or tile that could be used for decoration for a wide range of housing units. Also, the strategy of group shopping, as mentioned by Mrs. Chen in the quotation above, was frequently used to get a quality buy at a reasonable price. For instance, due to its location, the water supply system in KC was not connected to the city water supply network. The source of tap water in this community was actually underground water filtered by its own system. The residents thought that this kind of water had a high mineral content and did not readily form lather with soap. Therefore, a water softener was necessary. However, most KC's residents had never bought a water softener before. To deal with this kind of difficulties, KC's residents established a community online forum where they could discuss such issues. One of the residents, Mr. Li, conducted detailed market research on water softener and organized a block sale with more than ten residents. Not surprisingly, they got a rather good deal. Mutual help and information sharing among KC's residents in home decoration became a feature of the social life in this neighborhood.

The remodeling and decorating process not only helped the new middle class create a comfortable and safe dwelling place, more importantly, it is through this process that KC residents generated a feeling of home in the new house, and hence accomplished the transformation of house to home. As shown in the above discussion, compared with their previous experiences, KC's residents had higher requirements when they decorated and personalized their new houses. They looked for a better life and such expectations were embodied in their home decorations. These improved criteria were partly an outcome of their past experiences as homeowners, especially that they wanted to overcome problems (from shortage of personal space to the possibility of highlighting their personal style) they encountered previously. Their affluence and possession of information on home decoration surely affected the way they handled the decoration process. Yet, we should not be carried away by the selling of ideal home and home decoration that one found in local middle class magazine. In all the houses that I had visited in the course of my fieldwork, I found most of the decorations were down-to-earth. Many of the families were still unclear about what kind of specific decoration style could best reflect their middle class position. Indeed, in all the online as well as offline discussions on home decoration among KC's residents, the topic that they would go into had nothing to do with whether this or that style was most appropriate for a middle class home. Quite often, I found a blending of different styles of furniture in the same house. In this regard, it seems that it is still early to assume that a clearly defined middle class style of home decoration has emerged in contemporary China. Spending a large amount of money on a designer chair was uncommon. Nor had I seen highly stylized decoration, for instance all furnishing conforming to a particular theme, in those homes I had visited.

Being middle class in KC is more about pursuing a comfortable life in a decent community than that of leading a highly individualized life of good taste. In fact, the word taste had not been a keyword in their discussions.

That said, most of the KC residents did share certain common ideas in making their homes. If there was a theme that most of their homes converged to, it was a perspective emphasizing: fashionable, practical and economical. Indeed, the emerging new middle class in China was given limited time to develop their own senses of fashion and style, therefore it might seem that they lacked a clear definition of fashion. However, the observations in KC demonstrated that the new middle class residents have started to intentionally refine their houses to make them become more fashionable. They would either spend time doing research to figure out the most popular trend in home decoration, or turn to seek for professional opinions, even if it would push up the decoration costs. But this did not imply that they would go all way for becoming fashionable. They would not spend on fashionable items without a limit. The combination of these two considerations actually constituted two key concerns in decorating a middle-class home. Middle class home decoration had little to do with conspicuous consumption simply for an expression of personal taste and style. But it was about how to build a home that KC's residents would feel in it.

A Homely Home

As mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter, home is a multi-layered concept, including physical structure of housing as well as people's feelings and personal relations in their residence. In other words, while the housing unit provides bones for a home, personal feelings and relationships give flesh and soul to it. Therefore, to investigate

middle class urban residents' ideas about their dream home, we cannot afford to overlook the process through which feelings and personal relations at home are generated.

For many KC's residents, a housing property was recognized homely when it could provide a sheltered place for their beloved ones. In this sense, personal relations at home were far more important than the physical conditions of the housing unit in developing a homely feeling. They constituted the most important factor in creating a homely home. But an important feature of home was the personal feeling. For some, this was based upon family or conjugal relations. An example was Gigi's case:

"...In my definition, home is not something that belongs exclusively to me. When a man appears in your life, he wants to live with you, not your parents or anyone else. Therefore, my home belongs to two of us, both me and my fiancé. It contains records of interesting tiny little things and precious memories important in our lives. That's a home that I want most..."

-- Gigi

For others, it was the personal touch. Home could be one's backstage. Frank said:

"...My home should make me feel comfortable. That's the first priority [...] Psychologically, home is like a harbour while we are like ships. We work very hard in the outside world, when we come back home, what we want is to relax completely. One can do whatever he wants, be entirely true to family members, no need to wear a mask as he does in the outside world..."

-- Frank

Indeed, comfortable, safe, relaxed, private, independent, belongingness, and intimacy, etc., all these words were repeated by the informants time after time in my fieldwork. To a certain degree, the responses of KC's residents confirmed the sociological observations of the "normative values" of home: safety, individuation, privacy and preservation (Young 1997). These four normative values are shared by most

ordinary people; therefore, it should not be surprising to find such similar perspectives among KC's citizens, as they are ordinary people as well.

Unlike personal relations at home which existed long before they moved into KC, feelings at home in KC's houses emerged after all procedures of house buying (such as making payments and signing contracts) were completed. For many residents, initial feelings of home were usually derived from visits of the new house as well as discussions with family members about life after moving in. Mr. Chen remembered:

“...My sense of belonging to the new house started as soon as I made the payment. Although I didn't get the key at that time, since KC was still under construction, from time to time when my wife and I were free, we would drive to KC, walk in the courtyard and around the pool, and discuss about life here in the future. We even tried to come into the construction site, to feel about our new home. That's an initial sense of feeling at home, I suppose...”

-- Mr. Chen

Indeed, a sense of belonging, or feeling at home, was articulated through the process in which one was getting familiar with the physical structure of a property. When home decoration started, innumerable details of the house needed to be considered, and endless difficulties turning the design concept into actual furnishing called for solutions. Either being forced to or doing it voluntarily, house owners consumed their time and energy in decorating their homes. In return, they had become not only familiar with their properties but also psychologically attached to their homes. A sense of belonging was gradually strengthened. Pak Choi said:

“...When I bought this house at first, I felt quite unfamiliar and strange. I didn't have a feeling about it as I did with my previous home. However, when I started decorating my house, I came here more and more

frequently and stayed longer and longer. I found my feeling of home was increasing..."

-- Pak Choi

Transforming a "white-box" into an elegantly decorated house required a process usually lasting for 3-6 months. However, feeling at home did not cease growing after this initial period of furnishing and decorating. Indeed, house adorning, in the full meaning of the term, was an extended project. Little by little, KC's residents adjusted details inside their houses. After moving in, they might find out that certain arrangement made them uncomfortable. They would make minor adjustments by adding more flowers and house plants, displaying interesting and charming ornaments, and/or installing more electronic devices, etc. Their feelings at home continued to refresh and to grow while they were making adjustments and doing some fine tuning. Gigi and Ms. Gao both enjoyed decorating their homes with souvenirs bought from their travels. Gigi said:

"...When I go shopping, I'm not so interested in clothes. Rather, I'd like to search for interesting things that can be put in my house. Last week, I bought four cushions with flower pattern, which I think would match perfectly with my tablecloth in dining room. They did as I expected. That's perfect! I'll be happier to have meals at home with those lovely cushions. ...Every time I go for a trip, intentionally I'll buy something that can adorn my room. First of all, it is a souvenir of a journey; and second, such things help keep your memories longer. I've been to so many countries, and my home looks more and more like a small museum, collecting and preserving my memories through those little things..."

-- Gigi

Other than decorating and furnishing, people also developed a sense of belonging through daily domestic activities after moving into their new house. What they did at home included cooking, cleaning, and taking rests, etc., and anything not related to their

work, helped them relax. These activities were so common as one could find them inside almost every ordinary home. Nonetheless, the most ordinary usually turned out to be the most important. Nancy suggested:

“... We only came to KC during weekends at first. Things got messy on Fridays, as I had to go to supermarkets to get foods and drinks needed during the weekend, and my husband needed to wait for me. Then we two had to go back to our previous apartment to get all the clean clothes needed for the coming Saturday and Sunday, and other things that may be used in KC. Every time we needed to bring a lot of things. And on Sundays, we needed to pack all the things that we brought to KC and took them back to the city. Must be very cautious about the trash. In this period of time, we almost lived totally on convenience foods, as food ingredients and kitchenware in KC were not adequate. Usually we ate snacks such as duck neck, some green salads, with porridge. Then we decided to spend a golden week vocation here, and we can't live on convenience foods for seven days. Therefore, a set of kitchenware was brought to KC, and we started to cook for lunch and dinner. Since then, we felt KC is becoming more like a home...”

-- Nancy

Cleaning was another common domestic activity that provided physical as well as psychological comfort to KC's residents. As Mrs. Tu described the different behaviors of her husband after moving in to KC:

“...He never did any cleaning in our previous apartment. If I left for a couple of days, there would be no place for standing. So I was unwilling to buy a house in KC at first, as it's too big for me to clean by my own. But out of my expectation, my husband volunteered to clean the house, even though he is also tired after work. He said the cleaning work actually helped him to get away from stresses caused by annoying business issues. I think it is because he really likes the house, and finds everything related to the house interesting. Anyway, my burden is released. Now while he cleans the house, I can have more time to cook the dinner and watch TV afterwards. He enjoys living here, and so do I...”

●
-- Mrs. Tu

For middle class residents like people living in KC, a home was homely in the sense that it was non-work related. Most of their jobs were very demanding, which easily caused psychological stress. To deal with that pressure, they needed a place where they could do things that were completely unrelated to their jobs. Mrs. Chen's explanation of her choice of TV series further illustrates this point:

"...My only interest is to watch TV series, especially those with exciting story lines that can attract my attention, such as 'Lost', 'Prison Break'. You know, when your pressure from work is huge, you will be eager for another world where you don't need to deal with those annoying things. Sometimes I'm so tired, too tired to think about anything about my work, I'll dive into whatever things that can help me forget my work. I need to live in others' lives for a while so that I can forget my own. That's how I make myself relaxed..."

-- Mrs. Chen

The domestic activities that KC's residents adopted to comfort themselves from work-related pressure were quite diversified. While most of them found themselves more relaxed after "traditional" or ordinary activities such as jogging, watching TV, playing mahjong, cooking meals for family members, and drinking Kung Fu Tea, which were also common in lower class families, others started to enjoy westernized activities such as playing golf and tennis, tasting wines, listening to classic music by using high-end audio equipment, and hosting home parties. I found quite a mix in such activities among the informants. This might suggest that KC residents had not yet developed a unique domestic lifestyle that would differentiate them from the others. After all, the new middle class in China is still at its infancy. Many KC residents had brought with them their hobbies and interests cultivated at an earlier stage of their career development. In this regard, the cultural boundary of the new middle class in China had not yet been set up rigidly. Yet, that said, it is interesting to observe that KC's residents saw such domestic

activities as an important component of their newly found comfortable life in a homely environment. It was not what they did at home that showed their difference from the other social classes. It was their ability of constructing a comfortable environment to enjoy their personal hobbies and interests in the pace and manner they liked that really marked KC as a new middle class urban community.

Neighboring was another activity that helped enhance the residents' feelings of home. Brought up in traditional neighborhoods where residents were closely bounded to each other, most KC's residents had experienced the belongingness brought by intimate relationships among neighbors and were willing to get familiar and maintain good relationships with their new neighbors. However, having lived in newly constructed housing compounds which were inconvenient for neighbor-wide communication, they gradually got used to keeping domestic life within boundary of their own house. Mr. Zhao recalled:

“...Unfortunately, private property developers begin to construct condos and small apartments with high density which soon dominate the housing market. Urban residents living in such residential communities one day find out that their neighbors are total strangers. These residential communities are usually very large in size and you seldom have a chance to communicate and understand other people living in the same community. People gradually get used to locking themselves in their own apartments. This is the fundamental reason.”

-- Mr. Zhao

According to Mr. Zhao as well as many other interviewees, the architectural design of KC provided a very favorable environment for communication among the neighbors. Unlike common residential housing compounds which have high density and little open spaces, KC contained a large public open area, where people frequently met

each other while they were jogging or walking dogs. In addition, the floor plan of KC's houses also made it much easier to get familiar with neighbors. Zhao elaborated:

"...Each block has only four units. I have two ways to get to know most of them. First of all, our parking lots are located in the same place, so it is quite often to get our cars together with my neighbors when we leave for work in the morning or come back home at night. In the meantime, it is inevitable to have conversations. Secondly, for my neighbor who lives opposite, his private garden is next to mine. When we are both in our gardens, there is no way that we don't communicate, right? Therefore, it is quite easy to make 75% of my closest neighbors become acquaintance. If you live in a high-density condo compound, it is highly unlikely that you will meet the same group of neighbors everyday, not to mention getting familiar with them."

--Mr. Zhao

In addition to the physical environment, the establishment of KC's online forum provided another space for residents to express their expectations to maintain good relations with neighbors. Mr. Wu said:

"...Many residents were used to sharing decorating experiences on the community forum. Most of the time, we discussed about problems that we met in the process of decoration, and we also chatted with our neighbors a lot. Most residents were quite friendly and helpful. After a while, manager of the forum, GKP, organized our first neighbor gathering at a very popular pub. We got a chance to match those familiar online nicknames with real people. Since we got to know each other, it was quite natural to say 'Hi' and asked about the progress of decoration when we met neighbors in the community. Neighbor visits became quite often, which helped develop the intimacy among KC's residents...To me, the friendships with KC's neighbors are very invaluable..."

-- Mr. Wu

This kind of friendly environment appeared on the community online forum matched their expectations of harmony cultural environment in KC. As a result, they were encouraged to share their own opinions and offer help to other residents. Indeed, many interviewees mentioned how they were surprised by the warmly atmosphere

reflected in residents' online conversations. Pak Choi talked about the impact of her friendships with KC's residents on her feelings of home:

"...I searched for KC's community websites for a simple reason: to have more ideas about decorating my own house in KC. I've already forgot why this community forum attracted my attention. I just googled, and the address came out. After several online conversations with its residents, I felt really comfortable. Frankly, before registered on this forum, I never chatted with people online, as I don't have extra time. But now, I found it's quite hard to stop browsing and posting on this forum. Although I had lived in neighborhood where residents were work colleagues and they knew each other pretty well, I never thought that the intimate relationships with neighbors could bring about such a strong feeling of belongingness. Those intimate relationships emerged in traditional neighborhoods are different from what we have in KC. In traditional neighborhoods, people are work colleagues first, then neighbors. In the former community that I lived in before moving to KC, there was also a community online forum, and it was possible to contact my neighbors if I wanted. But somehow I didn't want to get familiar with them. In KC, people are total strangers and yet we share a lot of things. It feels like we all belong to the same big family. It's a new experience to me, and I like it very much..."

-- Pak Choi

Through interactions with neighbors in both virtual and actual world, KC's residents soon recognized that they had a lot in common: they shared their views on many issues and shared similar concerns and expectations of their everyday life in the community. With commonalities in ways of living and social perspectives, KC's residents were willing to communicate with their neighbors and soon started to act collectively to solve common problems (see discussion in the following chapter). These collective gatherings and actions in turn expanded the mutual understandings among neighbors and further developed neighborhood relations. In fact, neighbor gatherings became a part of resident's daily life. Mr. Zhao stated:

“...I really enjoy spending time with our neighbors; although I’m very busy. Honestly speaking, what I need most is to sleep more, and spend more time with my baby girl. However, I’m still willing to make some time to have tea with Ms. Gao several times a month. She knows a lot about Chinese tea, and makes excellent coffee, and we share similar ideas about different cultures. There are a plenty of things they we can discuss together. I can learn a lot from Ms. Gao and her husband, and I believe they will learn something from me as well. [...] This kind of interactions with neighbors actually becomes part of my domestic life, and it makes me feel comfortable at home.”

-- Mr. Zhao

Just like Mr. Zhao and Pak Choi, residents found their relations with neighbors in KC similar to those in traditional residential communities to some degree, where residents knew each other very well. The difference is that in KC, they could maintain this kind of relationship while keeping the private life undisturbed. In the old days when they were allocated to apartments assigned by their work-units, they did not have a choice. They could not choose to live near or away from certain neighbors. The close ties in those communities could be a source of psychological pressure, especially when they had to live with unfriendly neighbors. Compared with those living in traditional neighborhoods and common residential housing compounds, KC’s residents enjoyed more autonomy in balancing necessary interactions with neighbors and their own private lives. On the surface, the neighboring in KC presented a certain degree of continuity of their upbringing experiences. But in substance, this was a new mode of neighboring. This was neighboring based upon autonomy and choice. They could withdraw from the wider community and stay in their private home if they wanted to. In KC, many of them enjoyed their neighborhood. They chose to be a part of the community.

At the first glimpse, the criteria of a homely home possessed by KC’s residents seemed to be quite ordinary. The personal relations and the expected feelings that KC’s

residents hoped to experience at their homes appeared to be quite similar to those living in other residential communities, and their domestic activities through which a feeling of belongingness was generated were indifferent to life patterns that were also common in other neighborhoods. There was nothing that was class specific. However, if examined thoroughly, one would find out that KC's residents in fact began to enjoy more freedom in choosing their required domestic life than people living in traditional neighborhoods or common residential housing compounds. These extra choices available for KC's residents were closely related to their socio-economic status and pre-existing experience. Although these were only minor changes, they indicated the emerging of a middle-class pattern of life in urban China.

Conclusion

Beginning with consumption practices and preferences of China's middle class to locate and transform a "house" into an ideal "home", this chapter tries to identify some particular "middle class" preferences and practices in the arena of domestic life that cluster in this special sector of social space, and attempts to investigate whether there is any particular "scheme" or "principle" that underlies these practices and preferences, which gives rise to a unique middle class domestic lifestyle. It demonstrates that a unique system of dispositions of the "ideal" domestic lifestyles is gradually emerging among China's new middle class. The new middle class in urban China are diversified in terms of family origins and upbringing experiences, and therefore their initial imaginations of home are different at the beginning. However, as they move up the social ladder and gradually learn to lead a new way of life, KC's residents, despite their difference in origins, have come to form some shared perspectives of a homely home.

Consistent with Bourdieu's theory, the converging preferences and practices of making a homely home among KC's residents are not generated through explicit consideration of norms nor by rational calculation. Rather, such habitus is formed according to the position of KC's residents in the social space, to be more specifically, the combination of their economic and cultural capital. No longer satisfied with simply owning some places to live, the majority of the new rich in urban China had developed higher criteria for their expected home. On the surface, they were eager to look for a sizable dwelling, a convenient location, and a good community environment, all of which were hardly surprising, considering their improved purchasing power. However, such requirements in fact reflected some fundamental changes in their needs of a homely home. They needed more living spaces at home so that they could feel more relaxed after a day of hard work, and better physical and cultural community environment for sharing a way of living and yet at the same time allowing them to be undisturbed when they wanted privacy. They did think about a property's potentials of appreciation. But quite often this factor only served a hedging function (or differently put, resisting drastic depreciation) and was not the most critical consideration in determining the purchase of property. Generally speaking, China's middle class homeowners were not chasing after homeownership for the sake of owning a property. These new middle class homeowners had developed their expectations of what constituted a comfortable domestic life. And such expectations were no longer confined to the internal setting of their properties. They cared a lot about the wider community wherein their properties were located. They looked for the building of a homely home. They could afford to pay for a spacious

property in a good location. But more importantly, they were prepared to spend time and efforts on furnishing and decorating in order to materialize their dream home.

KC's residents shared some basic requirements of a homely home. They expected their homes to be fashionable and yet practical. This common perspective had not yet helped them develop a standard style of furnishing of the new middle class. The new middle class in urban China was still in its infancy and home furnishing had not yet been overly stylized and turned into a component of cultural distinction and social distance that would keep them apart from other social classes. In terms of styles of furnishing, KC's residents were mixed. But they did converge towards the expectations of building a homely home for themselves. They asked for a certain kind of community environment to match their expectations. They wanted a comfortable home with their own personal touch. In short, they were consciously building their own homes.

As we shall see in the discussion in the following chapter, the home feeling was a source of KC residents' sense of belonging. This newly developed sense of home and belonging was not only embedded in their domestic lives. It was also shaped by their community participation. In this regard, this sense of home drove KC's residents to protect their interests in the face of unreasonable measures from the developer and management company. Their participation in such action in turn reinforced their commitment and sense of belonging. To look into this process, we shall discuss community action in KC in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Homeowners' Collective Action of Property Right Protection

Through careful selection, laborious renovation and deliberate decoration, and the final moving-in, the new middle class residents in KC have gradually created a sense of home in their newly purchased properties. While it is quite true to say that building one's home is a continuous process, the residents of KC simply cannot wait to experience the highly expected domestic life at their new homes. However, the notion of 'living happily ever after' is perhaps something that only happens in fairytales. In reality, KC's residents soon found out that the peaceful life promised by the property developer would not come by easily. Worried that their money was spent for something that was not worth the price, they began to articulate their interests and to confront the property developer and the management company in order to protect what they had bought – both their properties and the expected domestic and community life in a new environment. As the most concerned issues of KC's homeowners were no longer confined to matters directly related to their properties, but in fact quite often connected to broader concerns of the community as a whole, their struggles had gone beyond the limits narrowly defined homeownership issues. Instead, there was a growing concern of the control of the wider community environment. While the assurance and maintenance of the quality of individual houses was always issues that arouse KC residents' attention, various aspects of community-wide concerns, such as the maintenance of the community facilities, the quality of security guards and their services, the preservation of the surrounding

environment, were matters that had been quickly articulated by the local residents during my fieldwork.

When the residents of KC found that their individual efforts produced only limited effects, they turned to neighbours for help. They tried to carry out collective actions to protect their property rights. All these struggles and collective actions can be seen as parts of a home making process. This is because they are actions organized by the residents to construct and to maintain their expectedly domestic lifestyles in KC. These actions are not only protecting the rights of homeownership of the middle class homeowners, but are also actions for protecting their particular domestic lifestyles wherein they find important symbolic meanings that help differentiate their community from others. My Investigation of these collective actions of property right protection can show the kinds of issue that the new middle class residents are most concerned about. They also shed light on the shared collective interests of the new middle class in urban China.

Understanding the collective interests of China's emerging new middle class is very important, particularly when their collective actions of property right protection in residential compounds are expected to bring new sources of autonomy and new forms of individual and collective empowerment. These collective actions have been seen by many as indicators of the political potentials of the new middle class. Indeed, consumer activism against fraud and other abuses have drawn attention from both public media and academics, as such popular actions aimed at upholding rights may affect China's democratic development and they are believed to be prototypes of other rightful resistance. Nonetheless, the argument that these actions will challenge the existing

authoritarian political settings may overlook the real concerns of China's new middle class, and therefore will eventually overestimate the political implications of these collective actions.

In this chapter, three major collective conflicts over the protection of private property in KC will be carefully examined. These three collective actions are not isolated; rather, the latter two actions are greatly influenced by the organizing process and the result of the former one. In other words, these three collective actions can be treated as parts of a larger process of community organization, which gives us a chance to study homeowners' reactions to the need of defending their property rights in a dynamic process. The strategies employed by KC's residents clearly reflect the distinctiveness of the new middle class residents in urban China that has emerged in the process wherein they have experienced a significant change in their social positions. In addition, the critical issues that lead to these collective actions indicate precisely the common interests of China's new middle class, which in turn will provide us with an opportunity of understanding the political implications of middle class collective actions.

Three Collective Actions of Property Right Protection

Quarrels and struggles with the property developer and the property management company to defend and to uphold rights as homeowners started to appear almost immediately after the houses were handed over to the homeowners. Some of KC's residents pursued individual strategies by privately negotiating with property developers or filing lawsuits. Nonetheless, many of them felt vulnerable when confronting a well-equipped organization as the property developer, and therefore chose to join other owners to protect their rights together. Three large-scale collective actions were launched in KC

since the residents had moved into their houses (and until the end of my fieldwork in 2007). Although the third one was still ongoing at the time of my data collection, it was closely related to the previous two actions and could be seen as an integral part of earlier actions.

Action Related to Housing Defects

The first collective action in KC broke out in July 2006. After contracts had been signed and transactions were closed, KC's residents began to renovate their new houses. They assumed that they would only need to wait for another 4-6 months before their new lives could be started. However, things did not go in the way that they had expected. Soon after moving into the newly renovated houses, KC's residents found that many construction defects began to manifest in different forms. This surely contradicted their expectations of quality housing. The immediate response of KC's residents was to contact property developer's maintenance department and the property management company, who were responsible for such quality issues. But it had not taken a long time before they realized that the effect of negotiating individually with these parties was quite limited. As one interviewee, Amy, whose houses had serious leak problem recalled:

"...Soon after we moved into this house, a hidden tube in one of the restrooms started to leak seriously and damaged the wall downstairs. We contacted the property management company at first, but their response was completely unacceptable: not only did they totally deny the leaking tube was a defect of the house and refused to repair it, they even tried to blame our renovation team for changing the drainage system. Therefore, to simply figure out who should be responsible for this problem, we needed to arrange a time to gather all three parties, namely, the property developer's maintenance department, the property management company, and our renovation team, to meet in person. In the meantime, the tube was still leaking. It's not hard to imagine that our life was greatly disturbed: the restroom was not usable, and what's more, our house that was expected to be cozy and comfortable was changed to a construction site

again. I was also worried about our relationship with the neighbour living downstairs, as the water dripped from our restroom all the way to their basement, and their wooden floor was completely damaged. I can imagine their feelings, so I wanted this problem being solved as soon as possible. However, the property developer and the management company didn't give a damn at all. What they cared about most was to avoid taking up the responsibility by demonstrating that the leaking pipe was caused by the misconducts of my renovation team, so that they could walk away easily. We contacted everyone we could, from department managers to general managers, and even threatened that we would contact public media, but nothing had changed..."

-- Amy

Amy's experience is not uncommon in KC. Water leaked, wall cracked, and electrical wires malfunctioned. All these housing defects began to appear after renovation, and none of the negotiations with the property developer and the management company was easy and smooth. At the beginning, homeowners who suffered from housing defects did not believe that the seemingly beautiful houses would have such quality problems, and tried to convince themselves that such house defects were unusual. Yet, they did ask their neighbours whether they had similar experiences. When similar annoying issues were frequently posted on the community online forum, they soon became the main topic of discussions in neighbour gatherings. KC's residents shockingly found out that KC housing project was not quite up to their expectation. Not only were they unsatisfied with the houses' quality, the irresponsible attitude shown by the property developer and management company was found irritating. The dissatisfaction and frustration among KC's residents accumulated, and reached its peak when they heard that Mr. Wu's house was flooded with sewage after a full day's heavy rain. The property developer refused to compensate to Mr. Wu. The result was straightforward: now, in the eyes of most KC's

residents, individual negotiation was ineffective and therefore should be abandoned; instead, they should struggle together as a group for ensuring themselves of enjoying the expected lives in KC. Through these informal gatherings and online discussions among neighbours within the same community, the first collective action to protect their lives in KC was soon organized.

Around 40 KC's residents took part in this action. The participants of the first collective action of property right protection can be classified into two categories: those who directly suffered from housing defects and those whose houses did not have apparent quality problems at that time. The struggle can be divided into three stages. In the first stage, the irritated residents united together to directly approach the top management of KC's property developer and management company. Mr. Wu drafted a letter pointing out their dissatisfactions and frustrations, and active neighbours contacted other KC's residents to collect their signatures in support of Mr. Wu's petition. More than 40 households co-signed the letter, which was then delivered to the chairman of the board of the developer through the management company. The response of property developer was quick: Mr. Wu and his coworkers did not wait a long time to hear the good news that the developer was willing to negotiate with them. Numerous pre-negotiation preparatory meetings were organized, in which rationales and main objectives were identified, and possible alternatives were analyzed. Tasks were carefully assigned to each participant: Mr. Li who was recognized as the most persuasive person among the participants was assigned to be the main negotiator. Meanwhile; each of the other participants were asked to prepare for one topic, such as electrical wires, tube system, and services provided by the management company, in order to articulate the problems encountered by most KC's

residents. Despite the thorough preparation by the active residents, KC's developer was very tough to them and did not want to make any compromise. The negligent and irresponsible attitude of KC's developer did not change at all, and the first round of negotiation did not make any progress.

The second stage can be described as the public media intervention stage. Unhappy with the developer's feedback, Mr. Wu found it impossible to tolerate living in the house with a basement dirtied by sewage. As a result, he approached a journalist of a newspaper called the "Jinghua Times" through his friend, and complained about his annoying experiences. Soon after the interview was published, the developer fought back by publishing a report favoring their position on the "Beijing Evening Post", which is one of the most popular newspapers in Beijing. Such response immediately led to an uproar in KC. KC's residents reacted by organizing the second round of collective action. Extensive discussions were carried out, and several crucial principles were concluded: First of all, it was decided by the participants of collective action in KC that for the safety of every participant, no violent and illegal strategies should be adopted. Second, support from various parties including public media and other residents living in KC is absolutely important and necessary. According to these principles, tactics such as giving out fliers and protest were immediately vetoed, because such tactics were radical and could be easily turned into illegal actions, and media were not allowed to report actions involving these actions⁸. Also, violent actions would create strong aversion to property right

⁸ According to Article 291 of the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, in cases where a crowd is assembled to disturb order at stations, wharves, civil aviation stations, market places, public parks, theaters, exhibitions, sports grounds or other public places, or a crowd is assembled to block traffic or undermine traffic order, or resist or obstruct state security administration personnel who are carrying out their functions according to law, when the circumstances are serious, ringleaders are to be sentenced to not more than five years of fixed-term imprisonment, criminal detention, or control. See The Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China (2006)

protection among residents whose houses did not have any defect, and consequently isolated the participants from the rest of the community. Another common tactic was putting up banners, but some residents were afraid that security guards might tear down the banners, which would lead to unnecessary physical confrontations. A compromising technique was used: banners were posted on the windows from the inner side of every house so that they would not be easily taken down by the patrolling guards. Moreover, instead of posting aggressive words such as "Protection of Homeowners' Rights" and "Shame on the property developer", KC's residents carefully selected their language such as "Low Cost Housing for Sale" to stimulate the maximum curiosity and sympathy from media and the public audiences. To seek support from every possible KC resident, a public letter explaining the purposes of the action was posted at the online forum, and participants were asked to promote the action to their neighbours who did not know the online forum. The strategy worked better than expected. Many residents, who were quiet previously, were willing to participate in the action, and the banners appeared in almost every building in KC. When things were ready, Mr. Wu and other activists motivated every possible interpersonal relationship with people working in the most influential media channels, including the Central Television Station. Journalists came to interview representatives of the irritated homeowners and the programmes were broadcasted soon. The news spread out immediately, and the effect was significant. KC's developer, who was promoting a new housing project at that time, contacted Mr. Wu and other participants right away and did this with a change in his attitude. Most quality problems were solved in a short period of time, and the developer agreed to compensate any damage caused by the repair work. Besides, a thorough examination of the plumbing and

electrical system in every unit, including the unsold ones, was carried out to prevent similar problems. At the second stage, KC's residents successfully demonstrated their power as a group and started to show their strength vis-à-vis the developer.

The third stage of the action mainly focused on extension of the houses' guarantee period and extra monetary compensation. Compared to the earlier stages of organized actions, only a few number of residents participated in this round of action. However, having realized their collective power through the previous two rounds of action, KC's residents were much more determined and radical at this stage. Meanwhile, learning from their previous experiences of encountering the residents, KC's developer and management company were aware of KC's residents capability of mobilization for action. Besides, this round of action took place at a critical moment. Residents initiated their negotiation with KC's developer one day before the latter's launching of a new housing project. They threatened the developer that fliers would be distributed out to potential buyers at the launching occasion if their request were not met satisfactorily. Reporters from TV stations would also be invited if the residents found it necessary. In response, the developer decided that they could not put millions of dollars of potential sales revenue in jeopardy and was forced to compromise. The developer agreed to the terms put forward by the residents. In return, the residents' collective action of property right protection in KC came to an end.

Struggle against the Clubhouse Restructuring

Several follow-up discussions with KC's management company concerning various aspects of community life were organized after the first round of collective action of property right protection. Such efforts organized by the active residents had impacted

on the quality of their community life. For example, qualified security guards were hired to replace the previous inexperienced ones. More sophisticated visitor management system was implemented for the purpose of more effective differentiation among the residents, their guests and other outsiders. Also, upon the requests from the residents, additional facilities such as dog waste collection bins and garden stepping stones were installed in the community. All these efforts were well received by most of the residents.

Generally speaking, most of these interactions with the property management company were small in scale, involving only a few participants. And their participation was less intensive when compared to the earlier confrontations concerning housing defects. One possible reason is that the issues involved in these negotiations with the management company were very different from that of housing defects. The latter touched the nerves of the newly move-in homeowners and was able to pull the concerned residents together quickly. For ordinary residents, while they did care about the quality of community life, they were more ready to share their opinions and provide suggestions in casual discussions among their neighbours than to join organized action in order to deal with these issues. As a result, most of these complaints and problems were settled on an individual basis. However, the peaceful life in KC did not last long. The news of restructuring the community clubhouse provoked the second round of large-scale collective action in KC.

Discussions among neighbours about changes regarding the clubhouse were first started at the community online forum. Several homeowners posted messages about the renovation process of KC's clubhouse, while some residents with inside information revealed the news that KC developer had determined to transform the clubhouse into

serviced apartments and to launch the new property project in the middle of 2008.

Instantaneously, homeowners in KC started to take actions. Most initial proceedings were individual behaviors. Some directly consulted lawyers for advice on legal approaches suitable in KC's circumstances, while others contacted their acquaintances that were familiar with the real estate industry for professional advices to deal with such an issue. Residents with inside information kept updating the most recent development of the new project, and others contributed by searching for relevant cases and legal documents and by giving suggestions for possible strategies. All these findings were posted online frequently, generating many inspiring opinions and suggestions. As more residents moved into KC after the first collective action, more participants joined in the online discussion.

The online discussion soon turned cyber talks into real actions. Several core members of the first round of collective action called for a meeting among all homeowners to discuss the necessary actions they should take to protect regarding news about the clubhouse. Most residents responded immediately. In the meeting, two suggestions were put forward: first, professionals (e.g. lawyers) would be approached to investigate the legal basis of the developer's decision of changing the community clubhouse into service apartments without gaining permission from the majority of residents. Once such procedures were confirmed illegal or violating existing government regulations, follow-up actions would be carried out to protect homeowners' rights. Second, homeowner committee (*yeweihui*) should be established as soon as possible, especially when the implementation of Property Law in Mainland China offered more autonomy and legal support to homeowners so that they could supervise the management

of their own real estates. Some residents volunteered to research the enforcement rules of the Property Law that provided the guidance for establishment of homeowner committees. These decisions were posted online to collect more opinions from those who could not attend the meeting. Most residents believed that they were entitled to partial ownership of the clubhouse, and would like to give it a shot to stop the restructuring process by legal action. In the course of discussion among the residents, their bottom line gradually became clear. They insisted that the restructured clubhouse (or the new service apartments) must be completely separated from the existing community. Entrances to KC and the clubhouse must be separated. Also, the property management company must enhance the security level in KC in order to keep strangers out of the community.

When feedbacks from residents were collected and consolidated, a negotiation with KC's developer and management company was arranged. KC's homeowners strategically selected five representatives, most of whom were core members in the struggle against housing defects. These members had experience of confronting the counterparties. In the meeting, when KC's developer presented the evidence confirming the legal basis of changing parts of the clubhouse into serviced apartments, the representatives of the homeowners switched the focus of negotiation to protection of residents' quality of community life. KC's developer promised the representatives that existing amenities would be maintained and new services would be made available in the clubhouse after the alternations. It was agreed that an additional wall would be built, separating the clubhouse/service apartments and the existing community. At the same time, the developer expressed the view that they would welcome the establishment of a homeowner committee, and would provide assistance if necessary.

Soon after the negotiation, a detailed plan for functions and facilities of the new clubhouse was announced. A new entrance was also constructed, separating the clubhouse/serviced apartments from the community. These actions were considered as a response to the residents' requests. At the end, the developer was able to pursue its plan without making significant concession. Seeing no advantage to continue the negotiation, KC's homeowners chose to withdraw from further action and not to press the developer further. The reluctant withdrawal made KC's homeowners realize that without their own organization, they would not have the negotiation power against the developer. Subsequently, their focus shifted to the establishment of the homeowner committee and this led to the third round of collective action in KC.

Struggle to Establish the Homeowner Committee

The different outcomes of the two rounds of collective action showed the importance of establishing a legitimate and stable organization exclusively composed of homeowners through which they could mount collective claims and assert control over the administration of their neighbourhood. Subsequently, the idea of establishing a homeowner committee in KC as soon as possible became the mainstream opinion in neighbours' discussions within the community. While they did not request any further negotiations with the developer after the meeting concerning the clubhouse, hoping to make the latter believe that their remedial measures had calmed them down, the residents had started the first step to organize their own homeowner committee. Government policies and regulations, successful examples in similar residential communities, and comprehensive review of various experiences in establishing homeowner committee were conducted and the results were posted online. Although not many KC's residents had

experience of organizing homeowner committee previously, after the extensive promotion and discussion, most of them got a clear idea about normal procedures of establishing a homeowner committee.

Spontaneously, several activists approached the local residential committee⁹ (*jumin weiyuanhui*) and neighbourhood office (*xiaoqu bangongshi*) which were in charge of community level affairs and they confirmed that there were two important documents they needed to process in applying for the establishment of the homeowner committee: first, letters of authorization from as many homeowners as possible; and second, plans showing the complete layout of the community. The letter of authorization was quickly drafted and revised by a lawyer who was also a homeowner in KC. The amended letter of authorization was soon posted online, requesting homeowners' signatures. In the meantime, the activists prepared hardcopies of the letter and visited every family in KC so those who were not aware of community online forum could also contribute to this organized effort. Most homeowners appreciated their efforts. Many of them volunteered to help distribute hardcopies of the letter to acquaintances in the neighbourhood and to collect their signatures. Within several days, nearly half of KC's homeowners signed their names on the letter, which paved the way for the establishment of the homeowner committee.

Collecting authorization letters from homeowners was relatively easy and smooth. Meanwhile, the developer provided the required plans showing the complete layout of the whole community. Everything seemed to be going well. However, when representatives

⁹ According to government guidelines on "Rules of General Meetings of Owners" (Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of People's Republic of China 2003), the formation of homeowner's committee should be supervised by the local municipal government (i.e. local residential committee and neighbourhood office).

of homeowners went to apply for establishing KC's homeowner committee, they ran into unexpected difficulties. In order to establish an independent homeowner committee, they needed to demonstrate that the underground pipe system in KC was independent of the surrounding areas. KC is the second phase of the whole Cannes project, and it is inevitable that some underground pipes are shared by the rest part of the district. Theoretically, the problem would have been easily solved if the developer could provide a statement suggesting that the operation and maintenance fee of these facilities in KC had been completely taken care of by KC's homeowners. Unfortunately, the developer refused to provide such a statement. In consequence, the application had to be reluctantly withdrawn.

To most homeowners in KC, the rationale behind the developer's refusal was very clear. The property developer was the parent company of the property management company in KC. The unprofessional services provided by the latter had been complained by most homeowners for a long period, and the developer was afraid that once KC's homeowners successfully established their own homeowner committee and asserted control over administration of the community, their subsidiary would lose its business immediately. As its parent company, KC's developer definitely hoped to keep the stable revenue contributed by the property management company, and therefore the last thing they would like to see would be the establishment of homeowners' own organization.

Although the application process did not proceed smoothly, KC's residents did not give up. Instead, the core organizers began to seek assistance from professionals and experienced activists. A famous businessman and community activist, Shu Kexin, was contacted for professional advice. Separately, a preparation team was created in KC to

contact and organize residents, collect their opinions, and communicate with homeowner committees in other residential communities in order to learn from their experiences and ideas. In other words, action continued and most KC's residents were confident that their efforts would pay off and their own organization would be established eventually.

Characteristics of KC's Collective Actions

Generally speaking, the collective actions organized by the new middle class residents in KC were rather rational and moderate. The most representative example is that there was no violent conflict in all the three collective actions. Most claims and assertions were negotiated through meetings with the property developer and other counterparties, and professional opinions were highly regarded and appreciated by most residents. For journalists of public media, scholars interested in collective actions and their political implications, and many homeowners in other residential communities who also struggle for control over their own domestic lives, the self-restraint and rationality shown in KC's residents in the process of property right protection were quite unusual. Indeed, in many other housing communities where residents also joined together to defend their property rights, it was quite frequent to observe more radical actions, such as blocking community's main entrance or even public streets by automobiles, and quite a number of them developed into violent conflicts or even riots eventually¹⁰. Why did KC's residents choose such a special form of action?

¹⁰ A typical example of this kind of radical action is Huilongguan community in the northern part of Beijing. In 2003, Huilongguan's residents organized a series of collective actions to protect the common area in the community, an area designated to be a garden that was used for a new building by the developer. These residents' collective actions soon became out of control as fights broke out and police had to intervene. Several residents were injured in the conflicts. Detailed description of these actions is available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2005-06/22/content_3117457.htm.

A distinctive feature of the collective property right protection in KC is that mobilizing its residents to participate in collective actions was relatively easy. KC's residents were organized repeatedly within a short period of time since moving into the community. Participants of the initial collective action included those residents who suffered most from defects in their units. Their action was driven by concerns that were close to their interests as homeowners. For the two subsequent actions, not only new participants were developed, most core members of the first collection remained very active. This is rather unusual among homeowners in the sense that their actions were organized prior to the formation of a legitimate organization of their own. Without a formal organization, many homeowners would be quite cautious in following the organized action. Why were KC's residents so easily mobilized? What are the reasons behind the continuity of KC's collective actions?

The two characteristics of KC's collective actions are actually shaped by its residents' distinctiveness as the new middle class in urban China. The social processes and experiences through which KC's residents were transformed into the new middle class affect not only their ways to construct their ideal homes, but also the styles of action that they choose to protect what belongs to them.

Rational and Moderate Collective Actions

Consistent with many existing observations of middle class collective actions, the new middle class residents in KC are not radicals. As stated earlier, their actions are rather rational and moderate. It is easy to attribute this particular characteristic to some obvious factors, especially their accessibility to essential resources in protecting their property rights. Such resources include practical suggestions from professionals (e.g.

lawyers), sophisticated negotiation skills, extensive interpersonal networks (e.g. contacts with news media), etc. In the process of transforming to the new middle class in urban China, economic, cultural and social capital of KC's residents have been continuously accumulated, which and this has greatly improved their accessibility to the necessary resources for organized action. And this certainly, though mainly in an implicit manner, improves their ability to assert control over their own lives. Nonetheless, it is still not clear how exactly their increased accessibility to the necessary resources helps promote the rational and moderate strategies in defending their own property rights. To answer this question, a thorough examination of the three collective actions in KC is necessary.

Know your friends well, and know your enemies even better. Each of the three collective actions began with a thorough collection of relevant information from every possible source, so that residents could get the whole picture of their situation. This helped them precisely estimate possible responses of the property developer and determine their reactions correspondingly. Such information was first gathered within the community. It was not uncommon to find among the neighbours in KC professionals whose knowledge was relevant to an evaluation of the issues at stake. In this process, the aggregate cultural capital possessed by KC's residents, particularly their professional knowledge, was proved to be the most important factor.

For instance, in the struggle regarding housing defects, when residents started to complain about the leaks in the ceilings, cracks on the walls, and problematic electrical wires, their neighbours working in various positions related to the construction industry and/or the real estate sector volunteered to offer helps and advices immediately. With the help of such professional opinions, residents were able to work out demands that would

be favorable to their further actions. One example was Mr. Wu's experience in asking for a discussion with the top management of KC's developer:

"...Most of us had little knowledge about housing renovation. So when we saw numerous quality problems surfacing after renovation, we were really upset. One more annoying thing was that, although we had bought houses before, such housing defects were quite unusual and we didn't have a lot of experiences to handle such things. For example, after several unsuccessful negotiations with the manager of property maintenance department in KC, I realized that to protect our rights and start our expected peaceful lives in the community, we must push for a negotiation with the top management of KC's developer. However, how to contact the developer's chairman and let her know about our concerns? I didn't have a clue at all. Fortunately, a neighbour named Lily who worked in Beijing's real estate industry saw my situation on the community forum, and suggested that we could directly contact the chairman of KC's developer. Lily told me that as far as she knew, the chairman of KC's developer paid quite a lot of attention to the company's reputation, and were very concerned about its projects' quality. When I finished drafting the letter, she provided me with the contact of the chairman. The first collective negotiation with the top management of the developer was organized soon after the letter was sent out..."

-- Mr. Wu

When the negotiation meeting was scheduled, suggestions from residents working in the real estate industry were important. They helped their neighbours collect evidence and suggested the main objectives of the negotiation. Mr. Zhao, who worked in an architecture design company attached to the China Architecture and Design research Group, discussed his main contribution to the first round of collective action in an interview:

"...As the director of an architecture design company, I have more technical understanding of issues related to house renovation than ordinary residents. Therefore, when I saw neighbours complaining about house-related problems, I could provide advices as a house designer. Personal relationships were developed through such interactions. I guess it's

because they dared not trust the maintenance technicians provided by the developer, or the renovation teams hired by them. I'm a homeowner myself, and I'm a professional in this field at the same time. So they felt that I was on their side and they could trust me. Indeed, as a homeowner, when I heard from neighbours about the quality problems in their houses, I felt angry too, although my own houses didn't appear to have such problems at that time. When more homeowners discovered defects in their houses, and joined together to defend their own rights, I decided to join them. It turned out that my professional knowledge did help a lot in the negotiation. Things got tricky in negotiations, you know. The shrewd property developer would take any chance to shift their responsibilities to the homeowners. Therefore, to protect homeowners' rights, items for negotiation must be specific and clear. However, most homeowners did not have such experiences and thus they considered my opinions as professional instructions. The finalized list of items sounded very professional, and I thought the developer didn't expect that at all. At least the developer dared not deceive us when they knew we had professionals on our side..."

-- Mr. Zhao

Suggestions from professionals in real estate greatly helped to identify the most crucial issues and determine the focus of their negotiation with the developer. In fact, the developer changed to a more positive attitude after they realized the homeowners were equipped with professional knowledge. In addition to securing assistance from professionals working in Beijing's real estate, residents who were familiar with private property laws in China also offered their help. In the confrontation concerning changes to the clubhouse, a homeowner who happened to be a lawyer joined the action. He posted relevant items in the Property Law and other government regulations on the online forum. He discussed what he had in mind during our interviews:

"...Let's assume that the developer had already acquired the whole property right of the clubhouse as a commercial building for 40 years. Now the developer had a plan to transform this commercial building into a residential building, and intended to promote it to the market. What would be the legal consequences of its action? What could we do to stop this? ...According to the current Urban Planning Law and Property

Law...if the developer has obtained the whole property right of the clubhouse, they can sell it as a commodity. However, without government approval, both the developer and homeowners cannot sell it as a residential building...Therefore, I suggested that we should investigate the following issues: 1. Whether the developer had acquired property right for the whole building, or just partial of it? 2. Was it a commercial building, or a residential building? 3. Was the 'clubhouse/serviced apartments' promoted as a residential building? If so, did the developer get permission from relevant government administration units? 4. Could those who purchased the 'clubhouse/serviced apartments' used it for commercial purpose?... Another thing that needed our attention was, whether the office of the property management company was located within the clubhouse. If so, then it couldn't be sold by the developer, because all homeowners in KC shared its property right... In sum, I suggested we should hold still before all the above information was fully understood. Decisions of actions should be made correspondingly."

-- Mr. Li

Following Mr. Li's advice, KC's homeowners revised their negotiation plan.

When the developer actually presented the legal documents demonstrating the legal basis of its intention of transforming the clubhouse into serviced apartments, representatives of homeowners immediately shifted to an alternative plan so that they could still maximize their interests. Some of them admitted that without Mr. Li's suggestion, they might overestimate their advantage, and might have lost the negotiation completely.

Besides gathering professional knowledge directly from KC's homeowners, participants of collective actions also tried to utilize their social networks to look for other useful information. As most residents in KC were professionals in various industries, their acquaintances, such as business partners, work colleagues and classmates, were quite likely to be professionals as well. Suggestions and advices from these people also played a crucial role in strengthening their preparations before formal negotiations. After Mr. Li offered his professional suggestions from a legal perspective, a homeowner, nicknamed 'bath123', posted the record of his conversation with a property developer

friend in the forum. In the message, he reminded other participants about their interests in the parking lots in front of the clubhouse. He said:

“...According to the Property Law, parking areas in residential communities belong to every homeowner. Homeowners also share the rental revenue of these areas. So if the parking lots in front of our clubhouse are sold or leased, can we charge parking fee or management fee from the developer?”

-- Bath123

Bath123's suggestion made some impact on many participants' opinions. Many messages were posted afterwards, claiming that if the clubhouse was to be restructured into serviced apartments, the building should be excluded from KC with a separate entrance, and the management fee of the clubhouse should be refunded and waived in future. This actually became one of the proposals emerged in the negotiation and was agreed by the developer.

Sometimes both homeowners and their acquaintances could not provide enough support for their action and KC's residents needed seek help from the outside. This included the use of the official channels. For instance, when the action for establishment of homeowner committee was interrupted by the developer's uncooperative actions, several homeowners contacted the famous community activist, Shu Kexin, and invited him to be the consultant of KC's property right protection. These homeowners were willing to share the payment of the consulting fee. When the news was posted online, many more residents volunteered to share the fee. Indeed, for most of KC's residents, several thousands a year would not be a burden at all. Compared with working class

residents, these middle class homeowners were resourceful and could apply such resources to community organizing.

When collective actions began, KC's residents continued to make the best use of their resources and to use them to exert pressure on the developer. The most effective and common strategy was to seek for public attention. However, as collective actions of property right protection became increasingly common in different residential communities, attracting public eyeballs was getting more competitive. Under such circumstances, the relationship with a powerful external actor, public media, was crucial. Generally speaking, the property developer had close ties with local officials and had informal influence on local governments, which control and regulate most public media. It was also common practice for big property developers to advertise in public media in order to build their public reputation. Compared with ordinary residents, property developers usually were placed in an advantageous position in handling public media. It is not uncommon that many actions of property right protection in various communities were unreported or under-reported. Also, many published reports implicitly or explicitly favored property developers. Nonetheless, given KC residents' resourcefulness, they were able to secure exposure in public media. As Amy recalled her role in the action against housing defects:

"...My husband and I both work in the China Central Television Station (CCTV). Many programme producers in CCTV are our close friends. After the first round of negotiation, the developer agreed to repair the leaks. But no one really contacted us. Soon we received a letter, claiming that they were not responsible for the defects and we were asked to pay more money. It really irritated us. So in the meeting to discuss reactions, my husband and I suggested that we must attract public attention, otherwise the developer would not feel any pressure at all. While Mr. Wu and other neighbours approached several newspapers, I contacted my classmate who was the producer of a popular TV programme and he

immediately agreed to assign a reporter to handle this piece of news. ... Since there were many similar topics at that time, we needed to make sure that the news clips could be aired and shown to the public. Therefore, a good TV planner was absolutely necessary. We approached a famous TV planner in CCTV. My friend even planned for follow-up report. But since the developer showed their sincerity settling the matter after the news was broadcasted, the follow-up interview was canceled..."

-- Amy

Not only did their influence on public media facilitate the success in the first collective action, the close relationships with professional reporters also provided internal information on government regulations with regard to reports of property right protection. KC's residents adjusted their plan rapidly to ensure that their TV message would comply with government regulations. Mr. Wu said:

"...My friend in the Jinghua Times suggested that we should not adopt strategies that were too radical because the government didn't allow report of such radical actions to be published. Hence illegal actions were ruled out. On the other hand, Amy's friend in CCTV reminded us that our action needed to be special, otherwise the report wouldn't be attractive and its influence would be limited. He offered an idea: to paste banners on windows inside each house. Then what should we write on the banners to attract public attention? After days of discussion, a brilliant idea cropped up: On sale! Why people wanted to sell the beautiful houses at such low prices? What an excellent start of the report! Without insiders' recommendations, even if we could find journalists to report our experiences, it might not be shown to the public so quickly..."

-- Mr. Wu

In addition to what have been discussed above, homeowners' negotiation skill was another important factor that put them in an advantageous position in their conflicts with the developer. Amy recalled one of her speeches during the negotiations concerning housing defects:

“...I can still remember our last negotiation with the developer. I made a speech in that negotiation. It was the most successful speech I’ve ever made in my whole professional life. When I gave the speech, the negotiation was in a dead lock. I told the developer’s general manager: ‘I decided to buy a house in KC because I had a fantasy. I hoped to settle down in a community that has both excellent physical and cultural environment. I also know the story behind KC’s name. Your chairman named KC after her first son. I believe that she must have wished KC to be the most perfect housing community, just as we did, otherwise she wouldn’t name it after her own child. Your irresponsible attitude to deal with these housing defects completely destroyed her effort.’ All of the representatives of the developer were shocked, and they became more positive in responding to our requests.”

-- Amy

Amy was eloquent. She attributed it to her prior experiences in numerous negotiations. Indeed, with some of them working as senior managers/leaders, KC’s residents had extensive experiences in negotiation and bargaining. Moreover, as most of them were not first-time homeowners, negotiations with property developers and property management companies were also not fresh to them. As a result, when homeowners with inadequate techniques lost their advantages in negotiations, KC’s residents strategically improved their position by adopting proper negotiation tactics.

The new middle class in urban China is a resourceful group. They are able to make the best of their resources in organizing. Disruptive tactics were possible options of organizing but quite often they found themselves resourceful enough to beat the developer and the management company over the table of negotiation. Their ability of utilizing their own professional knowledge and of drawing upon resources through social networks ensured that they could exert pressure on their counterparts without resorting to radical actions. In short, their resourcefulness helped them adopt non-violent action and institutionalized channels for protecting their own interests. Furthermore, being one of

the beneficiaries from existing social institutions, the new middle class residents in urban China were very cautious in their choice of collective action. As noted above, they are well aware of potential response to their action from the establishment and are willing to comply with laws and most government regulations in planning their action. While they may adopt action that would embarrass their counterparts, their actions remain low profile, non-violent, and least disruptive. In this regard, the new middle class residents' collective actions of property right protection are essentially mild, rational and non-violent.

Community Mobilization

In the first two collective actions organized in KC, the response from the homeowners was quick. On the whole, they were willing to join the proposed organized actions. From the first round of collective action to that of the second round, the number of participants in collective actions had increased. More importantly, participants of earlier actions were willing to join the subsequent ones. My observations of their participation in the organized actions in KC offer us an opportunity of knowing the main characteristics of the new middle class residents' participation in the mobilizing processes. Such observations of the three rounds of collective actions in KC also show the common incentives shared by most participants and therefore shed some light on the main concerns of the new middle class residents in urban China.

When examining the collective actions in KC, one would easily notice that the online forum played an important role in action facilitation. It provided a virtual space wherein homeowners could exchange opinions without committing a lot of time and energy. With the popularization of Internet, especially among the well off households

which had no difficulties in finding space for home computers, many residential communities have established their own online forums. Compared with discussion boards in other communities, KC's community online forum possessed one special feature: unlike most online forums of residential communities which were attached to and managed by major real estate websites, KC's forum was established on an independent discussion forum website, managed completely by homeowners themselves¹¹. Most of the registered members were actual homeowners in KC; others included employees of the property management company. In addition, special techniques were adopted to make sure that messages posted on the forum would not be visible to non-homeowners. As a result, while most residential online forums could easily degenerate into message boards of advertisements, the discussions on KC's forum were vivid and relevant.

Many homeowners in KC admitted that their first impression of KC after purchasing the house was the friendly neighbour relationships shown in their online discussions. Most homeowners in KC were white-collar workers who were very familiar with computers and Internet. Online communication was a common practice and was well accepted among KC's residents. When renovating their houses, many of them sought advices from their neighbours by posting messages on the forum. Others were willing to give feedbacks or recommendations by replying messages. As more and more residents became aware of the forum and got used to browsing it every day, organizing collective actions through the Internet became possible.

¹¹ Unlike KC, many community online forums were established on the platform provided by major real estate websites, such as Soufun.com.cn and Focus.cn. Messages on such board were monitored by website managers. Sensitive issues such as complaints related to property quality or organizing actions of property right protection were usually deleted immediately.

As communication on the online forum became increasingly frequent, some kind of emotional attachments among homeowners gradually developed. When some of them encountered problems, others would respond and show their sympathies. Such communication and exchanges on the Internet forum facilitated the formation of a social basis for mobilization. One example was Mr. Wu's case. When his house was flooded with sewage, Mr. Wu posted a message on the online forum and asked for suggestions. This message found strong reactions from many residents, especially among those who had established good relationships with Wu. Some of them soon contacted Wu declaring that they would like to help him and mount an organized effort to defend his rights. As Mr. Chen recalled:

“...I became familiar with Wu through house renovation. Sometimes he provided information about good renovation materials and we bought things [related to house decoration] together. As time goes by, we became good friends. Many residents here thought he was a good person. So when we heard about his poor experiences, we got really angry. Some of us immediately suggested that we should organize an action in order to let the developer know our power. I wouldn't say my participation in the struggle against housing defects is completely due to Wu's experience, however, he was definitely an important factor...”

-- Mr. Chen

Indeed, interactions among neighbours in both the virtual world and in offline community greatly enhanced KC residents' capability of collective mobilization by creating mutual sentiments among themselves. These interactions became rather frequent in the first round of collective action. More importantly, they were maintained even after the settlement of negotiation. Mutual understandings were developed in these interactions, which provided the foundation for further collective actions. As Mrs. Chen remembered:

“...The first collective action was actually an excellent opportunity, through which all homeowners could know each other well. ...However, through the collective activity, you could get an idea of people’s real thinking through thorough discussions and close observations of their behaviors. You could tell who shares similar perspectives, or put in a broader way, life attitude, with you. Which neighbour is more conservative, which prefers more radical strategies, all would appear in front of you. But generally speaking, many of us were astonished to find that we share similar socio-economic backgrounds, similar preferences of ways to handle things, and even similar life attitudes. Through this action, many of us became really good friends. So next time when they met troubles in dealing with the developer, I would participate again...”

-- Mrs. Chen

The sentiments and tacit understandings developed through neighbour gatherings and online interactions made it possible to assemble quite a number of participants within a short period of time. Their similar education backgrounds and working experiences also helped them reach a consensus among themselves. The first round of collective action in KC clearly illustrated this point. Mrs. Chen pointed out that:

“...When we discussed the objectives of our actions, several participants who did not suffer from housing defects like me suggested that our focus should go beyond monetary compensation. People like me were not interested in helping individual residents bargain for more money. If that were the case, then next time when we want to organize some collective action, no one would come. To avoid such a situation, we should pursue for something bigger and broader. For me, the attitude held by the developer is the most important thing. So in our struggle, we reminded homeowners that whenever there was a chance, we should make the story that those who suffered from housing defects could be our lives in future. Participants were not helping others; rather, they were helping themselves. This was very important, as it led us to a moral high ground in dealing with the developer. Most homeowners in KC showed their understanding and supported our action. Without their understanding and support, the action would lose its mandate, which would definitely lead to its failure...”

-- Mrs. Chen

'To strive for a complete solution of housing defects and to ensure the developer to adopt a better attitude' became the main purpose of the first round of collective action. Just as Mrs. Chen said, this suggestion did not meet any difficulty in getting support from most KC's residents. Those whose house did not have quality problems immediately recognized the importance of their participation in this action, as there was no guarantee that they would not encounter the same quality problems and unacceptable attitude from the developer some day in future. At the same time, those who suffered from housing defects did not insist upon individual compensation. One apparent reason was that the amount of monetary compensation would not be substantial according to previous examples. For the new middle class homeowners who were able to pay more than 1 million yuan to purchase a house, a couple of thousands monetary compensation would not be very attractive. They would rather sacrifice it for something bigger that helped guarantee quality of life in KC.

KC's residents were well aware of the importance of sustaining themselves as a unified group. In this regard, focusing on individual household's compensation from the developer would undermine their solidarity because each of them would come up with a different list of requests for compensation. Many participants suggested that they should not focus on requesting for monetary compensation, and instead they must pursue a broader objective for the whole community. The core members reached such a consensus quickly. Other participants who did not immediately agree on this focus were soon persuaded through extensive discussions. The focus aiming at improving the quality of life for all homeowners in KC allowed participants to gain a wider appeal to all residents living in KC. And they also allowed themselves to spend more time on preparation and

arrangement for further actions in order to negotiate with the property developer. Mr.

Chen commented:

“...The preparation for negotiation was quite time consuming at first. Each meeting took at least three hours. Sometimes it lasted for more than five hours. Every participant tried to express his opinions, and the suggestions were quite diversified. Fortunately, residents were able to rationally consider and respect others’ perspectives. As a result, it was not very difficult to reach to a common ground. No matter what, the conflict was not between participants. We just wanted to find the best way to struggle together against the developer...”

-- Mr. Chen

Another example was the response of KC’s residents in their online discussions before they had decided to take action regarding changes in usage of the clubhouse. Soon after they discovered that the property developer was planning to change the clubhouse into serviced apartments, a homeowner known as Yoyo posted a message on the discussion board:

“... We should organize a meeting as soon as possible! Several things need to be figured out:

1. All favorable evidences: property description, transaction contract, promotion materials posted on famous websites, feedbacks from Beijing Municipal Bureau of Land and Resources concerning this transformation, and whether it has been approved by relevant governmental departments.
2. What is our bottom line to negotiate with the developer?
3. If we decide to solve this problem through the legal channel, whom should we sue?
4. Time is critical! All information should be gathered before Jan 5th and lawyer should be contacted before Jan 15th.”

-- Yoyo

Many homeowners replied and expressed their agreement to the post message as well as their suggestions for further action. After the first preparatory meeting was held

and the lawyer homeowner, Mr. Li, suggested to the homeowners to check the legal basis of the developer's proposed action, many residents in KC agreed that given the developer might possess the ownership of the community clubhouse, directly negotiating with the developer and requesting the latter to stop restructuring the clubhouse would be unrealistic. Furthermore, they might not have the legal backup for such requests. So, KC's residents instead changed the focus of their arguments from the ownership of the community clubhouse to the following two issues: first, changing the clubhouse without notifying existing homeowners violated the latter's right to information; and second, the building of serviced apartments would inevitably alter the community density and by doing this the developer actually brought damages to the existing residents in KC. One of the KC's homeowner, nicknamed Camel, said in his posted message:

“...Even though the property developer owns the clubhouse, the proposed change from being a community clubhouse to the building of new serviced apartments will actually change the guaranteed density of living within the community. This might greatly affect our quality of life. Such a change in population density implies that the property developer had misled the homeowners in KC. Therefore, the advertisements and promotions materials regarding the living density within the community can be used as evidence against the developer.”

-- Camel

Many KC's residents also recognized the importance of establishing their own legally constituted resident organization. One resident, Tank, suggested:

“...I think we should assign several KC residents to specifically prepare for the final establishment of our homeowner committee. These people would be responsible for contacting and coordinating the developer, the local residential committee, and all homeowners in KC. Other residents should also show their efforts. We can't disappoint our good neighbours who use their own time and money to help all KC residents. It's our own home. Every homeowner in KC should contribute, by either donating money or their own personal time.”

-- Tank

Tank's suggestion of establishing a homeowner organization was carefully considered and was well accepted by most KC's resident. Several residents replied to Tank's suggestion on the online forum:

"...The new Property Law provides us with better conditions for homeowners to protect our own rights. However, without our own legitimate organization, a homeowner committee, the developer won't really consider our opinion. Individual homeowner's power is very limited..."

-- Ms. Ho

"...Indeed, if we want to stop the proposed changes of the community clubhouse through legal approaches, we must have our own organization. The current regulations don't allow courts to accept cases that have too many joint plaintiffs. But if each homeowner sues the developer individually, the effects will be very limited. Only when we have our own legal organization, we can have similar power with the property developer in the lawsuit."

-- Mr. Wu

From the above replies, it is very clear that most KC residents' concerns were not restricted to their immediate interests such as monetary compensation. Rather, they shared a broader perspective and were careful in thinking about what might serve their interests well in the long run. That they were affluent (and thus were not eager to haggle over the terms of monetary compensation) and resourceful (and therefore able to address broader issues and concerns) are important factors in affecting the articulation of interests and opinions in their organization of collective action.

I emphasize in my earlier discussion that the three rounds of collective action in KC were all parts of a broader social process. Undeniably, the first collective action in KC had enormous impacts on the subsequent two actions. Through frequent ◀

communication, KC's residents were able to see among themselves their common interests and shared concerns. A feeling of shared concerns no doubt facilitated the organization of subsequent collective actions. Moreover, as informal neighbour gatherings were maintained after the first collective actions, residents were able to communicate and interact with each other. This served to strengthened their ties among themselves. As put by Mr. Zhao:

“...Although there are differences among our neighbours, when you observe closely, you will see that they share similar understandings basically. Otherwise, they won't keep in touch so frequently. For example, in public holidays, neighbours will organize informal gatherings. Many will bring along delicious snacks and they will chat beside the artificial lake. In such communication, they will share their opinions on quite a number of things, especially those related to public interests, such as estimation of stock market development, China or the world history, and etc. Some may share similar opinions or preferences, and some may not. But that's not the point. Through such interactions, they would feel something they possessed are in common. Maybe it's their occupations, as we don't see any coalmine owners appear in our gatherings. Most of our neighbours are professionals. Maybe it's the age, as most of the participants in resident gatherings are young couples. Maybe it's the mutual respect? I don't know...No matter what, the most important thing is we all feel the commonalities. Although as time goes by, KC's residents will be further divided into small groups based on their own preferences and habits, they still share similar recognitions as a KC homeowner...”

-- Mr. Zhao

Not only did the informal gatherings among neighbours helped develop close interpersonal relationships as well as a kind of community identity in KC, it also allowed the core members of the first action to remain active, helping the mobilization of residents into participating in subsequent collective actions. One example was Amy's husband, nicknamed Ta. As a contract employee working in CCTV, most of his works were done at home with professional equipments. Such a work arrangement gave Ta a

flexible time schedule. As a result, Ta volunteered to become the organizer of many informal gatherings before the first collective action. When housing defects in KC began to appear, as a victim who suffered from leaks in walls, Ta automatically became one of the core members, and was responsible for organizing KC's residents. Most residents would contact Ta when they met some problems and needed to discuss with neighbours or wanted to have resident gatherings, as he had the contact information of most of the KC's homeowners. Ta's reputation as a responsible coordinator held up even after the first collective action. Other core members like Mr. Li and Ms. Gao were also frequently contacted and well-known by KC's residents. With these active coordinators, KC's residents remained in contact with each other. When they encountered other common problems, with the help of these more experienced core members, KC's residents would be easily mobilized.

Quite true, so far the action concerning housing defects was the only completely successful collective action in KC. However, residents in KC recognized their power through collective action. This made them becoming confident in organizing future collective actions. All these factors paved the way for mobilizing participants in the subsequent struggles with the developer. As several residents who participated in the first collective actions expressed in the discussion of action against the developer's attempt of changing the clubhouse:

"... We have already succeeded in the first collective action to protect our rights. This time we shall too. It's necessary to let the developer see our power and determination..."

-- Mr. Wu

“...I suggested we would use similar strategies as we did in the first collective action! It will really hurt the developer and make them listen to us!”

-- Mr. Black

“...Indeed, the developer won't seriously pay attention to us unless we show them our strength. Remember last time when we posted banners to sell our houses in a very low price? It seems that this is the only thing that can hurt the developer! We should use the same strategy this time! Meanwhile, we should also prepare for the public media intervention. All these are useful experiences...”

-- Lily

Probably an outcome of this growing sense of solidarity and community identity was the facilitation of a gradual shift of residents' concern from control of ownership to community management pertinent to their everyday lifestyles. For KC's residents, the significance of property rights was not only that of ownership of their private property. Rather, it also included their rights to maintain control over their own ways of living. The following quotations of homeowners' discussions in the conflict against the restructuring of the community clubhouse clearly demonstrated their concerns:

“...I bought this house because the number of residents is quite limited, so that we can live here quietly. If the clubhouse is really transformed into serviced apartments, the environment in KC will be inevitably affected!”

-- Mr. Yang

“...I asked several of those sales promoting the serviced apartments. They told me that the buyers of the serviced apartments would be able to use our own community facilities. It means that they will be able to come into KC freely. Why did I pay so much money to buy this house? One particular reason is I like the garden here. Suddenly, so many people are going to share this beautiful garden together with me, can we not do something to protect our rights?”

-- Ms. Ikesi

“...Many buyers of the serviced apartments will rent the apartments to others. People from all kinds of social backgrounds are mixed together. That will make the neighbourhood become inevitably complicated, making the community less secure...The security of our community will then become a very serious problem.”

-- Lily

“...I guess our community swimming pool will become a big bath hall in future!”

-- Kitty

In their actions concerning housing defects, KC's homeowners were much annoyed by problems created by the low quality materials used in construction. They were forced to postpone the dates of moving in. Residents joined together for action because they were afraid that without a well-established protocol and channel to handle housing defects, they would have a lot to follow-up after they had moved in. Surely such nuisance was perceived as problematic as the conditions of their accommodation fell short of their expectations. For the second round of collective action, residents took action to oppose the restructuring of the community clubhouse into serviced apartments. They did so because the launching of the new development project would severely undermine their hopes of living in a low-density and secure community. Of course, as shown in the above quotations, the residents worried about the loss of a sense of exclusiveness once the service apartments were built and they were forced to share the community facilities with the outsiders. But in addition to the concerns of maintaining exclusiveness, the leading topic in the discussions among the residents were about the quality of living in KC. They had the idea that the current residents had formed a rather homogeneous neighborhood. They knew the quality (*suzhi*) of their neighbors and they

were happy with their shared, and more often mutually accommodated, ways of living in KC. Their resistance to the idea of changing the clubhouse into service apartments was structured by such concerns of community life. In the last round of collective action, residents were not satisfied with services provided by the property management company, so they tried to establish their own legitimate organization to assert control over the administration of their own community. All of these three collective actions were not aimed at protecting their ownership in the narrow sense of the word. Instead, they acted for the purpose of ensuring that they could lead their expected ways of life as the new middle class in KC.

Of course, I am not suggesting that the residents did not take issues directly related to ownership of property seriously. On the contrary, KC's residents decided to mount collective claims and to organize collective actions precisely because they saw themselves as property and felt having the rights to protect their properties in the broad sense of property ownership. In other words, they believed that their scope of concern should not be confined to the protection of property from infringement and damages. As homeowners, they also had the rights of ensuring that their the community environment would not be disturbed. What they had bought should be more than the physical structure of their house. They had also bought their rights to use various community facilities as well as to enjoy a desirable community environment. They wanted to have their own control over future development affecting their community and over the administration of community management. In their eyes, the developer's actions compromised their control over their own belongings.

They had high expectations of the kind of life they could live in KC. When such expectations were not fulfilled, dissatisfactions would easily emerge among residents, including those who were not directly affected, because they all shared the same identity as homeowners and what happened to others might happen to them as well. These common feelings provided the necessary social foundation of their collective actions.

In general, the three collective property right protection actions organized by the new middle class homeowners demonstrated the capability of KC's residents to mount large-scale struggles when other parties touched on their common concerns in the community. The understandings and solidarity among middle class residents developed during prior collective actions persisted and carried on to the subsequent ones, which exhibited a certain degree of continuity. However, it is one thing to say that middle class residents are quite ready to act, it is quite another to assume that they would easily articulate their community issues to broader political concerns such as democratic political participation in modern China. As we shall see in the following chapter, once the conflicts were over they would return to a peaceful community life. In the context of their everyday life, they were rather complacent.

Conclusion

As Bourdieu believes that social collectivities are formed primarily in the arena of consumption, his research focuses mainly on the phenomenon of taste in mundane daily life, and attempts to explain class conflicts from a symbolic understanding. According to Bourdieu, the free play of antagonistic consumption practices can generate a indeterminate, porous boundaries, which can be called powers of "primitive classification". Differences of dispositions or habitus at this "practical state" can be

gradually transformed into objectified codifications. The symbolic power embedded in this codification enables members of the class (or fraction) to know and recognize the discursive identity and become capable of acting in concert for a specified purpose. However, how discourse establishes the explicit consensus of the whole group and contributes to the shaping and reshaping of social space through mobilizing collective actions is not clearly demonstrated by empirical cases in his research. Therefore, in this chapter, I tried to sketch out the distinctiveness of middle class residents' actions of property right protection, with a particular focus on the process through which the convergence of lifestyles among China's new middle class brings them together as a new collective, mobilizes this group for common interests, and influences their strategies to pursue their common goals.

In sum, the three rounds of collective actions in KC have demonstrated that the new middle class residents were not shy from participating in organized action when they felt that their rights had been challenged. Although homeownership in the narrow sense was not the focus of their actions, it is important to recognize that their actions were based upon a new institutional environment of private property. As property owners, they were eager to assert their rights and to protect their own community. In a sense, what we have discussed in this chapter is closely connected to our earlier analysis of KC residents' construction of a homely home. Our discussion here in this chapter and in Chapter 4 were intended to show how KC residents planned and materialized their expectations of domestic and community life through interior decoration and participation in community action. Given their inputs into constructing a homely home in a house that matches their expectation, there is no way that they will let other parties to intervene or disturb their

expected lives easily. It is natural that they want to maintain the maximum amount of control over their domestic lives in the community, either through individual or collective action. In addition, since the middle class residents' expectations of domestic life are no longer limited to activities in their own houses and have expanded to the broader community, many of the collective struggles were stimulated by community issues. Indeed, for the middle class homeowners, domestic lives are no longer restricted to their own houses; rather, a large part of domestic lives is linked to the wider community. As a result, it appears that the middle class residents are more concerned about "communal issues" in the community.

Homeowners were determined to assert control over their domestic lives by establishing their own legitimate organization: the homeowner committee. This does not necessarily mean that these middle class homeowners had high political aspirations and intended to use their organization as a platform for political action addressing broader political concerns. Rather, so far their focus of attention was still within the scope of their own community

Despite the fact that KC's residents have already carried out three rounds of organized actions within a short period of time, their actions were mild, rational and non-violent. Their resourcefulness in terms of professional knowledge, social networking, and the use of external assistance (e.g. the news media) in the process of organizing works both ways. On the one hand, it facilitates mobilization. On the other, it also means that for most of the time they did not need to adopt disruptive and violent action for the purpose of enhancing their bargaining power. That they would organize collective action does not imply that they are radical. Their access to various channels of resources ensures

that they can make an impact on their counterparts without resorting to overly eye-catching actions.

Finally, the impacts of the three collective actions on residents' daily lives were significant. Through frequent discussions and communications, KC's residents got more opportunities to understand their neighbours. An intimate and friendly neighbourhood was formed, which in turn facilitated the establishment of a middle class moral order in the community. When the large-scale collective actions finally wrapped up, middle class residents in KC soon found out that their daily lives were occupied with trivial disturbances from neighbours. To maintain the expected private and peaceful life, a well-established community moral order was absolutely necessary. In the following chapter, we shall look at the everyday life in KC and see how the residents there developed a moral order to regulate tensions and conflicts within the community.

Chapter 6

The Moral Order of Neighborhoods

The actions of property right protection in KC had significant influence on many aspects of its residents' lives. The most explicit outcome was probably that the property developer repaired most of the structural, electrical or plumbing-related construction defects in KC's houses within a short period of time after the residents launched their action concerning housing defects. Through a series of collective actions, KC's residents showed the property developer their strength. But after that series of actions, instead of pushing towards more sophisticated form of participation (such as social and political participation outside the community or further confrontation with the developer), KC's residents were happy to return to their earlier quiet and peaceful life.

At the same time, such community actions also facilitated the formation of an intimate neighborhood in KC. Having gone through the actions and the process of mobilization together, KC's residents had a deeper understanding of their neighbors. It did not take a long time for KC's residents to find out that most of the residents were in the same age group, with shared experiences, interests, and attitudes toward life. This mutual understanding and appreciation through intensive communication and interactions among KC's residents during the organization of collective action provided the foundation of the formation of an intimate neighborhood.

As noted earlier, as the actions of property right protection wrapped up, life in KC returned to its ordinariness. Trivial and mundane matters in daily life again came to form the main discussion topics within the community. Home-making, leisure activities, visits

to neighbors, and community gatherings were those activities that formed the basic routines of their social life. Instead of large-scale collective actions, it is through this kind of routine, basic, and mundane activities that every middle class resident got a chance to express and exchange their perspectives and underlying values about the community they were living in. While each of the residents had his/her own habits and views on various issues, s/he had to accommodate his/her neighbors. It is in this process of mutual adjustment and accommodation that the neighborhood was shaped. Indeed, through interacting with their neighbors, KC's residents explored how certain tacit understandings about daily routines in community life, that matched their expectations of a middle class community, would emerge. Through such interactions and mutual adjustments, a middle class way of life was in formation. To investigate the social characteristics of the emerging China's middle class as reflected in their domestic lives, it is necessary to closely examine their social practices in the community in their everyday life context.

Research on the middle class and their ways of life is largely study of middle class community (Whyte 1957; Gans 1968). The daily life of the middle class is examined and the coverage of these middle class community studies includes individual residents' sense of loneliness, their worries, family life, neighbor interaction, organizational participation, consumption styles, religious attendance, and so forth. Needless to say, these activities are important aspects of domestic lives under normal circumstances, and reveal certain social characteristics of middle class homeowners. However, underneath their discussions of a middle class community life lies an assumption that modern persons are increasingly isolated as a result of the intensification of urbanization. Their domestic lives are primarily "private" in character. However, since

market-driven urbanization in China has only started, whether this assumption is valid in Chinese society is still questionable.

To be more in line with the reality in China, residential community should be perceived as a place where the shared public area and residents' private space co-exist. Residents need to continuously balance their private needs and the expectations from their neighbors. This is a process of adjustment and compromise through which a neighborhood emerges. Of course, contrary to the idealized portrait of community life, conflicts among neighbors are inevitable. What I find interesting is not whether there is conflict or otherwise, but the way KC's new middle class residents deal with such differences and conflicts.

Similar to any other residential communities, barking dogs, improper parking, and a variety of other annoyances and minor offences were common throughout KC. Such problems might sound rather petty, but they did require cautious management. What I want to argue is that how KC's residents deal with such mundane issues reflect an emerging set of norms and expectations among the newly formed middle class in contemporary China. In his book *The Moral Order of a Suburb* (1988), Baumgartner illustrated how middle class residents in a suburb called Hampton managed conflicts among neighbors through non-confrontational strategies. He showed that young and working-class people in Hampton were more likely to confront their neighbors offenders openly. Conflict management in the community was conditioned by the demographic and class background of the residents.

Baumgartner attributed the prevailed non-confrontational strategies in Hampton to the structure of personal relationships of middle class residents. According to him, due to

their high rate of geographical mobility, the world of middle class suburbanites was one characterized by weak ties, in which people had assorted contacts rather than close relationships with many neighbors. Such weak ties undermined social solidarity (and thus the social basis for a confrontational approach to community conflict) and promoted a state of moral minimalism---an aversion to confrontation and conflict as well as a preference for spare, even weak strategies of social control. No doubt, geographical mobility and the resultant structure of interpersonal relationships among neighbors would have their impacts on the way conflict was managed. However, the assumption that middle class suburbanites tended to be socially anchored only loosely into their atomized and shifting networks of associates was by no means unproblematic. At least, this should be an empirical question and the character of middle class suburbs varies from one place to another. The strength of interpersonal relationships is significantly influenced not only by the duration of time, but also by the frequency of interactions. It is not necessary to assume *a priori* that middle class residents are necessarily detached from their community. The extent and the way the residents attach to their community vary according to the conditions of the community itself. In the case of KC, as shown in our earlier discussions, the residents developed a sense of belonging and to some extent a sense of solidarity through their participation in community action and other joint activities. Indeed, different from middle class families living in Hampton, KC's residents had rather close relationships with their neighbors, though most of them were geographically mobile (as they well new inhabitants of the community). In the previous chapters, I have demonstrated how this kind of intimate relationship was established and how mutual understandings and consensus were developed through intensive interactions

in the home making and property right protection processes. Through such interactions, KC's residents had gradually developed shared social perspectives, values, and expectations of life in their community. An emergent homogeneity was found among the residents living in KC. This was an important factor in shaping the way the residents manage conflict within the community. Despite that they were resourceful enough to leave the community and to move to a new house elsewhere if they wanted to, KC's residents rather chose to stay and to find a mutually agreed way to deal with their community problems.

Everyday Conflict Management

In KC, instead of tolerating and avoiding the offenders (as Baumgartner observed in Hampton), many residents preferred a proactive approach to manage conflict when their domestic lives were disturbed by their neighbor's nuisance.

Taking the example of the annoying dogs or the wrongly parked cars, solutions of such problems were relatively simple and straightforward. Indeed these unhappy incidents rarely got the chance to provoke confrontation among neighbors. Through previous interactions and conversations in the process of remodeling and decorating houses, or when they got together to protect their property right against KC's developers and property management company, or during informal neighbor gatherings afterwards, the disturbed residents and offenders got many chances to exchange and share their views and perspectives on domestic and community lives. Therefore, it is usually easier for dog owners to develop sympathies when they recognized that some of their friends in the community were quite sensitive to dog barking at night because they had sleeping problems, or were quite afraid of dogs as they were attacked by dogs previously. With

such sympathies, dog owners would be more willing to cooperate, control their pets and minimize the annoyances, and they would apologize sincerely if their dogs caused any troubles to their human friends. At the same time, the disturbed residents appeared to be more tolerant of those dogs of their acquaintances. Even when they were awakened from their dreams by the sound of dog barking from their friends' houses, all they would do was to gently remind their neighbors. As the owner of an Old English sheepdog, Mr. Nian, stated his opinions:

“...The dog problem is not about dog at all. It's about people, or personal relations. If you have good relations with your neighbors, they won't be really angry with you if your dog barks. They may feel annoying, but they may also wonder whether there is something wrong with your dog. So next time when you meet each other, say sorry and try to explain, they will understand, and then let the unhappy experience go away. Barking dogs won't damage your relations with neighbors. However, if there is someone who never tolerates their neighbors, when their dog disturbs my life, I will definitely take some serious actions against them or their dogs, although I am a dog owner myself...”

-- Mr. Nian

Another dog owner, Ms. Ma, confirmed this cooperative perspective:

“...I totally understand the frustration of my neighbors about dog barking at night. It's very annoying. I know some of my neighbors have sleeping problems and are very sensitive to sounds. If my dog barks and wakes them up, they won't be able to fall asleep again. How can they get the expected peaceful life here? So I never let my dogs stay in the balcony by themselves, as they may create noise and make my neighbors feel unhappy. As a dog owner, we should love our dogs, but we should also respect our friends living in this community...”

-- Ms. Ma

Residents who did not have a dog at home also support this point of view. Didi said:

“... We know we can directly speak out our opinions to Mr. and Mrs. Nian (the previously mentioned dog owners) if we feel being disturbed by their dog, as we were friends. They will listen to and respect our feelings. One of their neighbors living next door once told the Nians that she was afraid of dogs, and they paid attention not to pass her yard when they walk their dog. That is how we solve this kind of problem...”

-- Didi

Similarly, when residents knew their neighbors well, occupying other's parking lot was not likely to become a problem at all. Those households with more than one car would get more accurate information of which parking lot had already sold, and would be more careful to avoid using the purchased parking spaces. Before their neighbors moved into the new houses, they might even get permission to use their neighbors' parking lots, as Amy described her experiences:

“... My neighbor living downstairs is a nice guy. He knew my husband and I have two cars, but only one parking lot, so he allowed us to use his before he moved in. It's more convenient as I didn't need to park my car to the public parking area and walk a long way back home everyday. Whenever he came to KC, he just called my cell phone so that I had time to remove my car from his parking lot. Now he has moved in for a while, and I'm not using his parking space anymore. Anyway, I appreciate his help at that time, and our relationship has been well maintained...”

-- Amy

However, unhappy incidents could easily evolve into neighbor conflicts when the offended residents and offenders did not know each other well. When encountered such trivial and mundane nuisance for the first time, KC's residents usually took no action for a short period of time to gather more information about the offender and waited for further development. At this initial stage, most of them were willing to believe that such

annoyances were not made intentionally, and they should give the offenders a chance to correct such misconducts by themselves. As put by Gigi:

“...The disturbances from dog barking, I think some are occasional, and others seem to be regular. For occasional barking, I believe the offended should show enough patience and forbearance. Remember we are dealing with neighborhood relations, not total strangers. However, I don’t think anyone can or should tolerate regular malicious disturbances. Definitely I will adopt some defensive measures to deal with the problem...”

-- Gigi

Many KC’s residents shared similar experiences and attitudes. Another example was Nancy. Attacked by a large dog when she was young, Nancy was quite afraid of dogs, and such fear could not be overcome or controlled. However, living in KC where many neighbors had dogs at home, it was impossible to avoid interacting with her most feared animals.

“...One day I met a husky (i.e. a medium-sized, dense-coat working dog breed) in the community. It came to scratch its back against my lower leg. I understand that it wouldn’t bite me, as this breed is very friendly to human beings, but I couldn’t help being a bit unhappy that its owner walked it without collar and leash. However, I didn’t say anything to its owner, as it was the first time, and I felt a bit embarrassed to be too harsh or unkind to my neighbors when we first met each other...”

-- Nancy

However, nuisance would not be a problem at all if they were merely temporary. When the disturbed residents recognized that the offenses would not stop automatically, they would take certain actions to protect their rights of living in the community peacefully. After years of hard work to realize their dream home in KC, when they finally moved into their dream houses, started enjoying their lives, and found persistent annoyances or offenses from neighbors. This was surely something extremely intolerable.

In order to maintain their peaceful lives in KC, they must find out effective measures to solve the neighbor problems. Avoiding or pretending there were no problems would not help.

Generally, two different types of strategies were available: solving the problem internally among neighbors, or seeking intervention from outsiders, usually meaning bringing in the local officials. Both of these two approaches were aimed at expressing their grievances to the offenders and stopping the annoyances or offenses so that the disturbed residents could get their expected lives back. Each of the strategies had their pros and cons. Most KC's residents strategically combined these two approaches or switched from one technique to the other according to the responses from the offenders. Although they usually started with the milder ones, when the offenders' responses did not meet their expectations, they would not hesitate to adopt more confrontational techniques to deal with the issue at stake.

The former approach usually included strategies such as communicating with the offenders and expressing grievances to other residents in the community. It granted the offended a chance to inform the offenders of the existing disturbances, express feelings of the annoyances, and suggest possible accommodations. The disturbed would either knock on the offenders' door directly, or post a message to the community online forum hoping the latter could see it. Sometimes they would write notes or letters and drop them to the wrongdoers' mailboxes. Whatever methods they adopted, the crucial thing was to let the offenders know their behaviors were disturbing others' lives.

Didi and Jessie were very unhappy with one of their neighbors who formed a band with his friends and used to practice at night. The sound of guitar, bass, and drum

combined was reinforced through the loud speakers, and the noise made Jessie's sleeping problem more severe than ever. After several sleepless nights, Jessie's husband, Didi, contacted their neighbor directly.

"...I directly asked the young man: 'Is it possible for you and your friends to control the volume of sound while practicing? Although there is a long distance between our houses, we can still hear you practicing very clearly. My wife has a sleeping problem, and the noise makes her unable to sleep at all.' I don't think my request was unreasonable, as it was really annoying, not only to my wife, but also other residents. You can play your guitar, bass, or drum set at home, as long as the noise insulation work of your house is good enough so that no unpleasant noise will be heard by your neighbors. If not, then you must consider the impact of your behaviors and find another place to practice..."

-- Didi

Sometimes, approaching the offenders and expressing the unpleasant feelings directly could solve the problem right away. As in Didi's case, when the band man recognized that his hobby was disturbing others' lives, he soon apologized and found another place outside the community to practice with his band members. However, not all disturbed residents knew who were creating the annoyances. In such cases, they were more willing to share their feelings with other residents by posting messages to the community online forum. One example is Stephanie, who posted a message called "dog problem" when she found dog waste outside her house. Her original post is quoted as follows:

"Dog problem

When I got back home the day before yesterday, I found some dog waste outside my building. I felt very strange, as for almost one year after I moved in, it was the first time of seeing such problem. Fortunately, it was not quite dark outside, so I didn't step on it. My friends living in the same building also told me she found dog waste outside as well.

Around 8:50 in this morning when I was walking in the community, I saw a huge bear-like white dog. It was very cute. But after it pooped in front of No. 19 Building, its owner didn't pick up the waste and directly walked away. They left so fast that I couldn't stop them at all. I feel sorry for what I saw today. I'm not a dog owner, but my parents and many of my friends are. I never saw them leaving dog waste behind when they walk their dogs.

We are living in the same community, and we all hope the environment surrounding us is tidy and clean. Therefore, I hope friends with dogs can pay attention to this issue, at least not leaving the dog waste in front of our buildings. Stepping on dog waste is definitely not a good experience.

Besides, I'm not sure whether the one I saw today was a house owner, as she looked like a domestic helper to me. Anyone who might know the owner of the dog please remind him/her, as they may not be aware of the problem at all."

Many KC's residents expressed grievances by listing evidence in a gentle manner, which made their complaints looked reasonable and acceptable to other residents. When the offenders saw this kind of posting, they might not necessarily make apologies to the offended residents, but they would be more careful about their behaviors. In addition, such rational approach also won them comfort, help and moral support of other neighbors. When another resident, Mr. Young, posted a message to complain about dog barking problem, many residents showed their sympathy and urged the dog owner to pay attention. The followings are some of their replies:

"...Many neighbors in this community are kind and considerate, and they are reluctant to complain directly to dog owners who disturb their peaceful life. However, this doesn't mean dog owners need not regulate or control their dogs, as the existence of annoyances may eventually damage neighbourhood relationships..."

-- Lily

“...KC is one of the two experimental communities in Beijing where dog owners are free to decide the number and breed of dogs to keep at home. However, the residents’ acceptance of dogs is the most crucial factor to decide whether this special benefit can be continued or not. If neighbor conflicts over dogs are getting serious, the experiment may be cancelled, and no large dogs will be allowed to stay in the community. Therefore, I urge owners of dogs to control your babies carefully...”

-- Mr. Li

“...I used to work in a non-governmental animal protection organization. My work experiences make me realize that most animal problems are not about animals at all. It’s about people. I don’t know whether the dog owner is registered in this forum, but I’d like to offer some professional advices to help you control your dog’s behavior. If you can see this message, please feel free to contact me...”

-- Nancy

While some residents chose to express their feelings on the Internet, others preferred to handle things in a more traditional way. These people usually grumbled to other residents in various types of neighbor gatherings. One of the residents kept several Tibetan mastiffs at home, and these giant guardian dogs frightened many neighbors when they passed in front of the building. Consequently, these offended neighbors complained to each other during chic chats after dinner. Once, Didi complained to some of his neighbor friends that the Tibetan mastiffs were big and scary. He simply could not help thinking whether the dogs would jump out of the yard and knock him down. Many residents attending that gathering shared similar feelings and suggested they should do something before the dog really attacked someone. Dog owners who were already very cautious while walking dogs also showed their willingness to pay more attention in the future. Indeed, after the action of property right protection, neighborhood annoyances or offenses became one of the main chic chat topics among KC’s residents, and many useful

suggestions were developed through this kind of chic chats. Another example is the residents' action toward car parking problem.

For almost two weeks, KC's residents noticed that a car was frequently parked improperly near the community green area. It was not in any parking lot, but was left on street. Some residents happened to see the car owner, and each of them tried to remind him that he should drive his car to his private parking lot or the public parking area. However, such suggestions or friendly reminders from individual residents were not well respected. After sharing opinions during gatherings, some of the residents decided that they should tell the car owner about their dissatisfaction together. They wrote a note advising that he should not park his car on the public street any longer, and signed their names on the note. The note was attached to the front window of the car. After that, the car was never found on the public street again.

No matter posting messages to the online forum or complaining to neighbor friends face-to-face, the communication and discussion process provided the offended residents a channel where they could direct their dissatisfactions, together with possible solutions to the annoyances. Furthermore, discussion among residents also facilitated the establishment and development of moral order in the community. Mr. Chen said:

"...One can understand the preferences of his neighbors through neighbor gatherings. No one wants to lose his good relations with neighbors. Therefore, he may become more considerate. Now if I want to do something at home, I may consider my friends' opinion, whether they like it or not. What's more, through discussions of our neighbors' annoying experiences, such as illegal remodeling of the house or careless dog keeping, people will adjust their behaviors according to their neighbors' preferences. In this way, a moral order in this community is gradually developed..."

-- Mr. Chen

Gigi shared similar perspective with Mr. Chen, although she was a bit less optimistic about the development of codes of various behaviors in KC. In responding to careless dog keeping, she posted a message to the online forum, namely, "The Nine Uncivilized Dog Breeding Behaviors". Her explanation of this action was:

"...I think what we need to reinforce in this community is a moral order. If there are no rules or codes, we can't handle things well. Some of dog owners may know how to breed dogs, but they have little knowledge of how to educate their dogs. So I posted that message. I didn't write that article by myself. It was found online. You know, they are your neighbors, and sometimes you can't say things to your neighbors directly. Most of the time what we need in this community is self-control. I posted that article because I hope to remind some of our neighbors that they should control themselves and follow the codes. You can say it is a kind of 'soft struggle', or an implicit way to influence or educate your neighbors..."

-- Gigi

Unlike Gigi who expressed her opinions implicitly, some residents would directly post their persuasions to the online forum. As a resident, nicknamed GKP, commented on car parking problems in KC:

"It's really commonplace and I don't want to mention it again: if you have only one car, park it in your own parking lot. For those who have more than one car, please rent a public parking lot. Don't park on the public street or green area..."

-- GKP

Consideration, self-control, and mutual understanding were the most frequent words appeared in communications and discussions of annoyances or offenses among neighbors in KC, and many residents in KC really lived in this way. Many offenses occurred in the community were not intentionally made, and the offenders were willing to

respect their neighbors' preferences and adjust their behaviors accordingly. The only obstacle was they did not know where to get such information. Neighbor gatherings and the community online forum provided a platform where residents could communicate their feelings and thoughts. In this sense, sharing grievances with other residents did not only facilitate mutual accommodation to annoyances, but also helped preventing further disturbances from happening. In addition, managing neighbor conflicts in this way could minimize the damage occurred to relations between offenders and their neighbors. It was even possible that both parties started to establish positive personal relations if the annoyances were handled properly, as described by an old Chinese saying: no discord, no concord (*bu da bu cheng jiao*). These personal relationships would reduce neighborhood conflicts and facilitate future conflict management. As a result, most KC's residents preferred to adopt this approach when their daily lives were disturbed. David talked about his view on the management of neighborhood conflicts:

“...The offended should try to communicate with the offenders first. Asking the police to come won't do any good. The most important thing is that community residents should come to a consensus on this issue. After all, this is a conflict between residents. The police, property management company, or the neighborhood committee won't really solve the problem. So try your best to communicate with others...”

-- David

However, when the offended residents chose to solve problems internally with neighbors, they must realize that the way of expression could significantly affect the offenders' responses. Inappropriate wording could make them lose support from other residents or ruin the negotiation completely. Furthermore, even when words were properly chosen, they still needed to face another problem: the tactics involved in this

approach were usually non-binding as they were based on mutual understanding and self-control, and therefore the ultimate effects on the annoyances or offenses were relatively limited. Pak Choi described the vexing and miserable experiences of her friends in the community a neighbor living upstairs:

“...I’m so angry about what my friend has gone through. Her upstairs neighbor always put trash in her private parking lot, and she found nails in the tyre of her car several times. Her car was even hit by an electric drill falling from above sometimes earlier. The most irritating thing is that her neighbor poured dirty water out of window directly while she was walking out of the building, and she was wet all over. She complained to the offender several times. It was the decoration workers, not the house owner, who did these terrible things. The owner said he didn’t know such things. All he could do was to tell his workers not to do these in the future, but he couldn’t guarantee that this wouldn’t happen again. She was quite upset now. Her only hope is the decoration team will leave sooner or later, and then she can get her life back...”

-- Pak Choi

Another example was Mr. Li’s unhappy experiences in dealing with neighbor’s barking dogs.

After being waken up at midnight by a barking dog, Mr. Li waited for almost half an hour before the dog stopped. Repeatedly, he told himself that it would stop in the next minute, but it didn’t. He asked for neighbors’ advices by posting a complaint message to the online forum. There were many replies to his posting showing sympathy and support, urging the offender to adjust her pattern of breeding dogs. What Mr. Li didn’t expect was that the offender was angry with these messages. The dog owner thought Mr. Li was accusing her and her dog in front of others, and embarrassed her. She claimed that she didn’t hear her dog barking at all. The dog was kept in her private yard on the opposite side of her bedroom. She also gave four reasons explaining why she chose to keep her dog in the yard. These explanations were supported by some dog owners. They argued that residents in KC should emanate sympathy not only to the offended person, but also to dog owners, as the latter also had their rights to choose how to live their lives in the community. Situation got a bit out of control as the controversy tended to get heated up. It also became the main topic of chic chats in that period of time. Although the offender finally showed her regret and sympathy to Mr. Li

who accepted her apologies, the dog was still left in the yard from time to time, and Mr. Li needed to tolerate the barking dog after all.

Most offended residents in KC were quite realistic and they did not expect the annoyances would disappear immediately after the negotiation. If they saw some positive signals from the offenders showing that some accommodations would be made, they would be willing to tolerate the annoyances for a longer period. As Mr. Chen said in an interview:

“...If I find cat waste in my yard, and I know it is because my neighbors are feeding abandoned cats around my house, I would approach them and see what could be done to satisfy both of us. If my neighbor showed his compassion and tried to work things out with me, I’m fine with it. It may need some time to solve the problem, and I can’t get instant result; but at least I know he is trying hard, and willing to help me with my suffering. Thus, I won’t take any radical actions. However, if there is no change at all, then I must give him some warnings. Definitely I’ll take some actions...”

-- Mr. Chen

When the disturbed residents saw no hope of finding accommodations through direct nonviolent communications among neighbors, either because they could not identify the offenders and hence could not get in touch with the offenders directly, or the offenders were not willing to adjust their behavior, the offended residents needed to find other ways to handle the conflict and to protect their lives in KC. Usually they would employ strategies involving a third party, usually the police or the property management company who had the authority to manage community orders. Compared with the former approach, the most obvious advantage of seeking intervention from a third party was the enforcement it could bring to make offender stop disturbing their neighbors’ lives immediately. The instant effect brought about by this approach made it become the only

option to handle offenses when the disturbed residents felt unable to tolerate any longer.

GKP said:

“...Today when I came back to KC, and drove my car to the rented parking lot, I found a blue Magotan (i.e. a model produced by Volkswagen) with a license plate of LHxxxx in my parking lot. I couldn't park my car in others' parking lot, nor could I leave my car on the street. There was no way that I could find the car owner by myself, so I asked a security guard to look for the car owner. The security guard confirmed that the car belonged to one of the neighbors, and contacted him directly. After that, he came down and moved the car...”

-- GKP

Officers of the police station nearby were also asked to intervene and look into such neighborhood conflicts, especially those related to uncivilized dog keeping. Compared with staff of property management company, the police officers were the only people with the legal authority to deal with arguments and conflicts among the residents. Their words were respected by the residents and their action made the annoyances disappear immediately. A resident, Julia, witnessed an incident which involved the police's intervention:

“...From what I heard, it is not the first time that police officers came to solve dog problems. Last Sunday, I saw two police vehicles in KC, responding to a resident's call. The neighbor called 110 (i.e., the police emergency number in China), as his kid was frightened by an unleashed dog while walking in the community. The dog owner didn't show any sympathy and regret, only saying that her dog was quite gentle and would not attack people anyway. The offended neighbor couldn't hold his anger and called the police. Staff of the property management company also tried to mediate the two parties, but they wouldn't listen. They would only follow orders from the police, as they are the official party who has the authority to solve neighbor problems...”

-- Julia

When contacted by security guards or police officers, the complained residents usually stopped the disturbing actions immediately. Didi noted:

“...Usually I’m the one who is being disturbed. However, I was also complained once for disturbing others. It was one night during the golden week holidays, when Jessie and I held a gathering at home with Ms. Gao, Amy and her husband. We had some wine and everyone got high. You know people like to talk loudly when they are high. We didn’t notice at all that it was late, our voices were loud, and our windows were open. Later on a security guard knocked on my door, asking us to lower the voice and close the window, as some neighbors complained that they couldn’t sleep at all while we were talking. We felt sorry for being inconsiderate, and lowered our voices immediately. I think it’s good that my neighbor let me know I’m disturbing his life...”

-- Didi

However, despite the police’s ability of dealing with neighborhood problems instantly, many residents were reluctant to use this tactic unless they had no other options. The main reason behind was that seeking intervention from a third party appeared to be more confrontational than communicating and reconciling with the offenders by themselves. Many residents felt embarrassed when a third party told them that they had made some annoyances to their neighbors. Sometimes they might even feel that they were the disturbed ones. Mrs. Nian said:

“...I think complaining to the property management company or the police was not a good way to solve neighbor problems. As a dog owner, I’m always contacted by staff of property management company for neighbors’ complaints about my dog. I start to feel this is annoying, you know, as I’ve already been very cautious in keeping my dog. I never let it stay in the yard alone, as it barks to strangers passing in front; I always put it on leash before walking it, as I know some neighbors are afraid of dogs. However, I can’t guarantee that my dog won’t bark at all, or it will always be on leash. I can only do that much, and others should not take advantage of me, just because I’m a careful dog keeper. Plus my dog is quite famous in KC. This also causes me trouble, as some

neighbors tend to blame it for other dogs' faults. In such cases, I feel being offended, especially when the police is involved..."

-- Mrs. Nian

Indeed, KC's residents were very careful in choosing different approaches to deal with various counterparties. Compared with unpleasant nuisances from unfamiliar homeowners in KC, staffs of the property management company and the police officers were more frequently requested to handle disturbances from outsiders, such as residents living nearby KC. One of my informants, nicknamed Red Lily, once said:

"...My house is close to the artificial lake in KC. Sometimes when I look out of my window, I can see people catching fishes that some of our residents put in the lake. Most of them don't look like KC's residents - you know you can tell the difference from their appearances. In such circumstances, I usually call the property management company and ask them to send someone here to stop this kind of behavior."

-- Red Lily

Mrs. Nian also adopted similar non-confrontational approach to deal with annoyances from outsiders. She explained:

"...Many local residents like our community, and they prefer to take a walk in KC after dinner. We homeowners are paying the property management company to maintain our community environment, but these outsiders just enjoy it for free. What's more, since they don't have to pay for the environment, they are not treating it well. They never pick up dog wastes. I also caught them destroying plants in our community. I can't tolerate these behaviors, but I can't talk to them directly. Why? Because I cannot be a hundred percent sure that these people are outsiders. What if I am wrong? What if they just appear to be outsiders but in fact homeowners? And even if they are not homeowners in KC, I don't have the authority to ask them leave. But I will ask the property management company to send these people away. It's their responsibility to keep these people out of the community, not mine."

-- Mrs. Nian

When decided to seek intervention from a third party, the disturbed residents might need to sacrifice the probability of constructing positive relations with some of their neighbors, and this might damage their expected peaceful life in KC. Furthermore, with a broken relationship, it was very likely that similar annoyances would happen repeatedly and become more intentional. The offended residents still needed to tolerate the annoyances from time to time. In this sense, intervention from an outsider only removed the symptoms, but did not provide a long term solution to neighbor conflicts. For most KC's residents, the fundamental solution to all neighbor conflicts would still be a well-established moral order based on mutual trust, respect, understanding and compassion, as well as a solid neighborhood that helped reinforce this moral order. Before such a moral order was established, KC's residents needed to determine how to live their lives under such circumstances. Apparently, there were only two options: to leave, or to stay. Most of them chose to stay.

A Status of "Complacency"

Staying in KC means the disturbed residents had to tolerate the annoyances which interrupted their quiet lives from time to time. One of the reasons that explained why they chose to stay and live with the annoyances was that they expected situation would not be any better if they lived in another residential community. Having gone through the tremendous change of urbanization all these years, the original life patterns of urban residents were replaced by a variety of new life styles. The transforming class structure altered the original composition of urban residential communities, and many mixed-class communities emerged correspondingly. The old moral orders regulating people's everyday lives in traditional (and work-unit based) neighborhoods also collapsed. As

middle-aged citizens with wide range of work and social experiences, most of KC's residents were fully aware of this changing condition of urban life in China and they had to accept the fact that they were living in such new urban communities. Mr. and Mrs. Chen said:

“...For uncivilized dog keeping, or other annoyances in this community, nobody would think they are good or moral behaviors. However, you don't have a choice. This is the truth. They are affecting my life, and becoming a part of my life. You can discipline yourself or your kids, tell them dos and don'ts, but you can't ask your neighbors to change for you...I will try my best to accept the reality. I've been accepting surrounding things and people all my life. I'm used to change myself and adapt to the environment. If you are a leader, you can influence others' behaviors and make things work in your way. However, if you are not powerful or influential enough, you will either follow others, or you will have to leave. We left a residential community before, just because we couldn't change things there...”

-- Mr. and Mrs. Chen

That most of the KC's residents were rather complacent had to do with the fact that they could afford to relocate their home, if so required in the last instance. Most of them were affluent and had the chance of further moving upward in the existing social hierarchy. Many interviewees indicated that KC would not be their last destination. There would always be other options. In short, they could opt for exit. With that kind of confidence and the ability of making a choice, they could at least afford to try to be tolerant of annoyances from their neighbors and wait to see if things could be changed.

Yet, having said that, although the objective resourcefulness of KC's residents made it theoretically possible for them to relocate their home to other residential communities to avoid disturbances from neighbors, it did not mean that they would easily give up their homes. In general, they would not leave the community unless they found the annoyances were out of their limits. Different from cases at Hampton mentioned by

Baumgartner, KC residents' complacency usually also included efforts to voice out their dissatisfactions, to negotiate with offenders, and/or to seek support from other residents. In other words, they were not passively tolerating or avoiding the problem. Instead, KC's residents believed that things would change in the future once most of the residents of the community had become conscious of the need of taking care of others. As suggested by Mrs. Chen suggested, they would not lose their optimism as long as they had some channels to express their opinions so that a moral order would be eventually created.

"...My neighbors want to take care of abandoned cats. What should I do? I need to tell her that her conduct has already interrupted my life. Yet, I still need to continue my life, right? To protect my own right, the most important thing is that I need to have right to express my opinion. What's more, there must be a channel through which I can make my opinion heard by other residents..."

-- Mrs. Chen

Similar to Mrs. Chen, most KC's residents tried to cope with such unpleasant disturbance by communicating with their neighbors so that they could figure out an acceptable balance between the individual resident's private rights and other residents' preferences. In this way, each resident could enjoy the expected domestic life without creating substantial annoyance to other homeowners in KC. The preference of this approach to handle neighborhood conflicts implied that a shared expectation of how people living in KC should behave was emerging. Indeed, with a growing understanding of people living in the same community, KC's residents started to feel that they could develop a reasonable anticipation on their neighbors, expecting the latter to do things properly, such as listening to their needs and respecting them correspondingly. Such expectations were mutual in nature. They were also prepared to consider their neighbors'

preferences and to restrain their own behavior if necessary. Gigi talked about uncivilized dog-keeping behavior:

“...The current discussion about dog-keeping problem is intense. Honestly speaking, I’m an anti-dog person. But I’m trying to understand from dog-keepers’ perspective. However, I think we shouldn’t impose our own thoughts to others. You want others to respect your needs, then you should respect others first. I’m not a person with strong social responsibility. As long as my life at home is not affected by these dog-keepers, I’m fine with it. This is my bottom line. ...I don’t think the dog-keeping issue is something between human being and animal. It’s about people. You need to deal with it more carefully, maybe using some “soft” techniques, to reconcile disputes among our neighbors. Neighbor relationships should not be damaged because of a few pets. It doesn’t worth it. The dog-keeper should try to fully understand those who don’t have pets at home, while the latter should show more tolerance towards the dog-keepers and their pets.”

-- Gigi

Through intensive interactions in the process of making home and struggling with various outsiders, KC’s residents became increasingly familiar with their neighbors, and generated an idea of their habitus reflected in everyday life. Knowing that they could not interfere with other individuals’ choices and preferences, such understanding gave them hope that through communication and negotiation, they could eventually figure out solutions to deal with nuisance from neighbors without creating significant damage to the friendly and peaceful atmosphere in the neighborhood. Therefore, despite the annoyances or offenses from their neighbors, most of the residents remained optimistic and satisfied with their lives in KC. Mr. Chen’s statement clearly showed his attitude:

“...There are some annoyances here in KC, just like in any other residential communities. It’s normal. Plus, there are many other good things in KC. So why should we always focus on the negative aspect of lives? That will only make everyone unhappy to live here...”

-- Mr. Chen

This kind of complacent perspective was shared by many residents. As a message titled "The Reason Why I love KC" from the online forum showed:

Recently I found my affections to KC have been increasing.

When I first came here, I was immediately attracted by its garden. It is so gorgeous and fabulous. That is the first reason why I love KC.

Right now, I love KC more because of my neighbors. You are so kind and always willing to help. First of all is my downstairs neighbor, Albert, who introduced me to this forum, and answered all my silly questions about decoration. Others also introduced their decoration experiences with a great deal of warmth, like Mr. Li and Ms. Cai and many other neighbors who either have already moved in for a while or are in their decoration process just like me. Some of them patiently answered my phone calls even without knowing me at all. I feel really happy to live with these good neighbors in KC.

-- Frank

Another resident confirmed Frank's feelings by replying the following message:

"I think our neighbor are just like family members, and living in KC is like living in a huge family. It's inevitable to have conflicts or problems when we are living together, but we can talk and share our feelings with neighbors through this online forum. After discussing with neighbors, you will find most of the problems are not a big deal. The most important thing is we can live happily together. What a wonderful thing!"

-- Yoyo

All of these statements or articles pointed to one of the reasons why most residents in KC were optimistic about their lives - that is, their neighbors were open-minded and sociable just like themselves. However, simply attributing these characteristics of KC's residents to their personalities would miss the point. Apparently, with the work and social experiences accumulated all these years, most residents were

definitely not permissive to everything or everyone. There must be some fundamental reasons to explain why people living in KC were relatively easy to approach and communicate.

Among all the possible explanations of the generally amicable atmosphere in KC, a kind of social homogeneity may be the most obvious one. Even before moving in, residents began to realize that most of their neighbors in KC would be people of certain “quality” just like themselves, and were ready to assume that their neighbors should be agreeable, as Frank put it:

“... People who can afford a house over 300 m² should generally be good people. At least the household economic status should be good enough. To some extent, our society contains different social strata, and the economic status is a crucial indicator that eliminates several social strata that are not economically compatible...”

-- Frank

KC’s residents’ expectations of neighbors to be compatible greatly affected their way of interacting with neighbors. Mr. Chen said:

“... When promoting the houses, the property developer had a very clear idea about their potential customers. As a result, when we bought the house, we would be implicitly affected by these ideas, and categorized ourselves accordingly. For example, we start to think about whether we are the elites of this society? We will also start to consider about our neighbors. Are they upstarts from Zhejiang Province just like our neighbors in the previous community? Or are they professional managers? I can’t reveal my ugly side in front of a bunch of professional managers. When we meet our neighbors, we usually assume that they are well-educated, cultured people with successful careers. We will control and restrict our own behaviors accordingly. You know, interacting with neighbors in KC is totally different from being together with my primary schoolmates. Some of my schoolmates are ordinary blue-collar workers, and we have a completely different communication style. With neighbors, the communication style is more friendly and polite...”

-- Mr. Chen

Mr. Chen's statement revealed the first reason why a homogeneous social composition of KC's residents was important in facilitating the development of a complacent living status. When they understood their neighbors were people similar to themselves, they would not reveal the ugly side and interact with other residents amicably. They tended to be more thoughtful and kind, as could not stand being despised by their outstanding peers for not being considerate. This would reduce neighborhood conflicts from the beginning, making residents feel satisfied about their lives. Nana said:

"...I think my neighbors living next door are really nice people. You can feel it through their behaviors such as car parking. Our car is a big one, and the parking lot seems to be a bit narrow. Sometimes I need to get off first before my husband parks the car, otherwise it would be no enough space for both of us to get off easily. Also, it would be quite difficult for my neighbor who parks next to us to get on his car. My neighbor's car is a Volkswagen beetle which is quite small. He seems to have similar idea of our common situation, and try his best to leave us more space. I haven't met him yet, but I believe with such mutual consideration, we will easily become good friends."

-- Nana

It has been argued by many suburban studies that homogeneous residents can easily create conformity. In KC, a certain level of conformity was also observable. As Red Lily talked about her daughter playing in the artificial lake of KC:

"...You know now is summer vacation, and my girl invited her cousin to spend the holiday with us. They usually play at home, however, one day they decided to play water in the artificial lake. I was busy with my own stuff and didn't pay attention. Even if I did pay attention, I wouldn't think it's a big deal. However, later at that night, I saw a message posted on the community online forum, saying that there were some kids playing in the lake which he/she thought was inappropriate. I was a bit embarrassed, although no one knows they are my kids. So I told the girls not to play water in the lake again. I'm not feeling offended, you know. I tended to think that my neighbors are kindly reminding me, as the water is quite

dirty, and it can be quite dangerous with no adults watching them playing...”

-- Red Lily

Secondly, their shared experiences helped generate similar problem-solving approaches. Most KC's residents emphasized the importance of negotiation and communication in dealing with annoyances or offences, because they appreciated from their work and social experiences that it was unrealistic to expect other people follow their requirements all the time, and making compromises was usually inevitable. Civilized negotiation was the most normal conduct to effectively solve disagreement, and extreme methods usually caused additional harm. This was the mainstream thought in KC. As a result, radical responses to offenses or annoyances, such as poisoning dogs to death, were seldom observed in KC. The experiences of Ms. Cai, who lives in Phase One of the big Cannes community next to KC, clearly illustrated the impact of neighbors' compatibility on the effects of negotiation.

Cannes Phase One offers townhouses and single houses. Being the first townhouse residential community in Beijing, it attracted the first batch of the new rich in China, including entrepreneurs such as coalmine owners and Zhejiang businessmen, as well as professional employees such as those working in TV stations. The heterogeneous composition of Cannes Phase One made communications between neighbors become very difficult. Ms. Cai said:

“...My next-door neighbor and I haven't talked to each other for a long time. All of our problems were trivial, but quite annoying. For example, when we first moved in, we were told that the developer wouldn't install paving tiles for our parking lots. My neighbors and I decided to do it by ourselves. But after the project was finished, I soon found out that whenever it rains, the dirty water from her parking lot comes directly to my yard. It's because she made a small slope when installing tiles to make

her parking lot slightly higher than my yard. It's really nothing. But I'm really uncomfortable with it. She didn't even think that she should ask for my opinion before doing so, and I was forced to accept the result. Actually we could have discussed this issue and found out a way that works for both of us. But now I have to tolerate the dirty water flowing in my beautiful yard. [...] This is the fact. At that time, no matter where we locate our home, we need to deal with neighbors like that. [...] That's why I like to hang out with KC's residents. Although there are also disagreements among neighbors in KC, such as those regarding to pets keeping and car parking, at least people are communicating and trying to find a way that satisfies both parties..."

-- Ms. Cai

Residents with similar backgrounds and social outlooks were more likely to develop a consensus on moral standards. The shared judgment of what was right and wrong provided the very foundation of communications among residents. Without it, discussions and communications among residents about annoyances or offenses would become completely pointless and useless. In such circumstances, most of the offended would not bother to express and explain their opinions to their neighbors at all. Instead, they would just leave and move to another community. An informant, nicknamed Tabasco recalled her previous experiences:

"...My previous home was located in a common apartment in a housing compound not far from KC. Many of my neighbors were entrepreneurs from Wenzhou. Most of them were manufacturers and wholesalers of clothes or accessories. They were quite rich and owned many properties, but were definitely the worst neighbors one can imagine. For example, my next-door neighbor at that time transformed his apartment to a small factory. The machine in his apartment was turned on 24 hours, 7 days a week. The noise was not very loud, but the longer you heard it, the more annoying and intolerable it became. I thought about persuading him to consider my feelings and stop at night, but gave up eventually. Why? Judging from their appearance, I don't think they can understand my point. The only possible way was to leave that place."

-- Tabasco

Just like Tabasco, Nana also mentioned their previous unhappy experiences with unsuitable neighbors. Many of her previous neighbors were from Korea. When Nana first moved into that community, foreigners in Beijing were considered to have more economic advantages than ordinary Chinese citizens. However, the different upbringing background also created a lot of trouble in Nana's life. As she said:

“...The Koreans like to drink after work, and they were often drunk at night. Then they would shout and sing loudly. Some other Korean neighbors liked motorcycle racing at night. The engines of their motorcycle made a lot of noise, you know. For thousands of times I was waked up after 1 am. And I couldn't talk to them, as they didn't understand Chinese, and I'm not familiar with Korean. Besides, I don't think they really care about others, especially their Chinese neighbors. For them, making noise after drinking and motorcycle racing in Beijing were nothing wrong. Therefore, I don't want to waste my time arguing with them...”

-- Nana

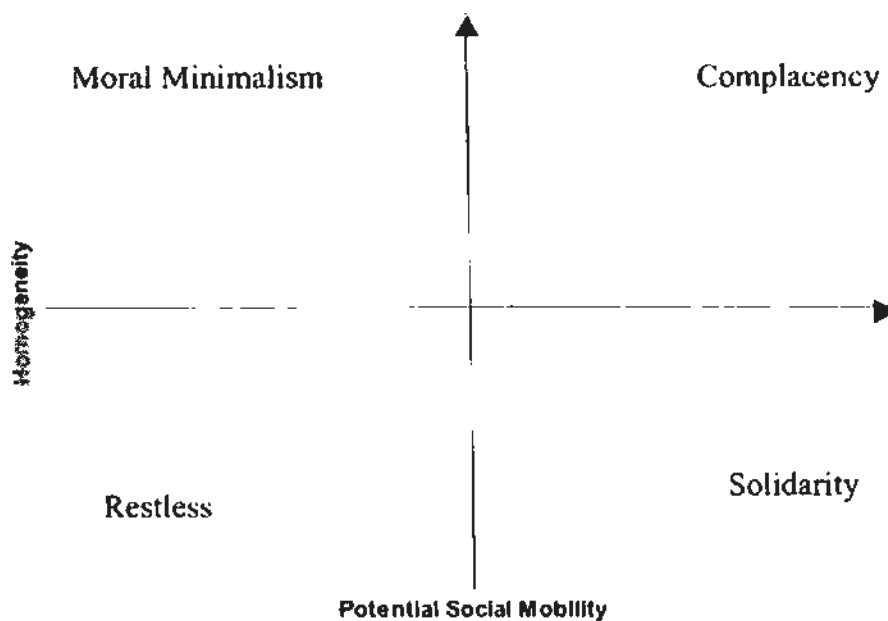
Lastly and most importantly, above advantages of a homogeneous community altogether facilitated the emerging of a solid neighborhood, which helped implement the moral order and draw boundaries of residents' behaviors in the community. Besides, with intimate neighborhood relationships, residents could expect their neighbors' support when they had grievances. Residents making annoyances to their neighbors would eventually tarnish their reputations, making their lives increasingly uncomfortable. In a community where neighbors did not share certain norms and values, enforcing any shared codes of behavior will be very difficult. Ms. Cai said:

“...In Cannes Phase One, I seldom complain to my neighbors about the inappropriate behaviors of some residents. I'd rather post a message on KC's online forum to get more support. One reason is many people living in my neighborhood are not well-educated, and they can't fully understand my concerns. For example, some of my male neighbors like to take off their shirts at home. That's perfectly Okay if they stay

inside. But they are not. They are half-naked even in their yards. I can't tolerate that. But if I complain to my female neighbors, they may think that I'm hypercritical. Expecting them to support my point is quite unrealistic, not to mention enforcing any codes of behaviors. Generally speaking, residents living in my community are used to taking care of themselves. They won't pay attention to others' problems. This is also the reason why there is no action of property right protection in my community. I'm putting my hope in KC..."

-- Ms. Cai

The combination of social mobility (and thus the availability of choice) and homogeneity made KC a complacent residential community. Can this combination be applicable to explain conflict management in other residential communities such as Baumgartner's Hampton and Cannes Phase One? Although this research is not designed to include a comprehensive comparative study of conflict management in different communities, a sketchy comparison of various strategies adopted by residents in communities with different combinations of objective conditions of residents that helps determine the possibility to relocate and the level of community homogeneity may provide a general idea of the applicability of this explanation. The combination is demonstrated by the following four quadrants:



As suggested in Baumgartner's book, people in Hampton tended to adopt non-confrontational methods to handle neighborhood conflicts. This was mainly because of the kind of assorted contacts with their neighbors in Hampton. Similar neighborhood relationships can be found in Cannes Phase One and other communities in urban China. These were urban community where the residents were not prepared to settle down. Most of the middle class residents in such communities treated the town as a temporary place of residence, and they would leave sooner or later to improve upon their dwelling or neighborhood. Baumgartner argued that the transient nature of middle class residents made them loosely anchored into personal networks. However, simply attributing the "weak-ties" neighborhood in Hampton to residents' social mobility would overlook the influence of the residents' homogeneity. The neighborhood was a mixed class, including both working and middle class residents of various age groups. Without similar background and experiences, residents were unable to establish a solid neighborhood, even if their social mobility was low. Therefore, the low homogeneity of people in

Hampton also explained their atomized personal networks. In such circumstances, a status called moral minimalism prevails, with few grievances ever giving rise to full-scale conflict.

When residents' potential mobility and homogeneity are both low, residents will come to a state of "restless". The low homogeneity makes residents feel difficult to communicate with neighbors, and without a solid neighborhood, the offended residents can only depend on themselves. In addition, with little resources to relocate their home, residents have no other options but to stay in the community. As a result, people were stuck in the interrupted lives with huge dissatisfaction. When tensions finally break out, they will prefer to adopt some irrational and confrontational actions to seek revenge for their interrupted lives. Examples can be easily found in many such communities, like the serial killing of dogs in Fang Zhuang (i.e., the earliest residential community in Beijing), and the car window breaking in Tian Tong Yuan (i.e., one of the biggest residential communities in Beijing).

Lastly, highly homogeneous residents with lower level of external resources to move to other places will facilitate the development of their solidarity. With easy and frequent negotiations and discussions, moral orders in such communities can be fully established. Moreover, the solid neighborhood facilitates the implementation of these moral orders through sanctioning the offenders and supporting the disturbed residents. The aggrieved residents who are in danger of losing mutual aid from neighbors will be under pressure to preserve their reputations and honor, and more likely to adjust their behaviors accordingly. Therefore, conflicts are usually managed well with minimal damage to residents' personal relations with neighbors. This kind of neighborhood may

be approximately resembled by traditional residential communities constructed and managed by state-owned work units before the housing reform, where traditional community moral order was easily implemented.

The above exploratory assessment suggested that the different combination of residents' potential social mobility and homogeneity leads to diversified styles of conflict management among urban inhabitants. However, such analysis is preliminary and tentative. A comprehensive comparative study of these different styles of conflict management in these residential communities is necessary to provide more evidences to examine and verify this explanation. But this would be beyond the scope of the present research.

Conclusion

After investigating collective activities among KC's residents to protect their property rights, this research does not follow traditional lead to further explore the political implication of these middle class collective actions. This is partially because, influenced by Bourdieu, I believe that class analysis should repudiate the amalgamation of political and scientific interests (Bourdieu 1984). Instead of elaborating practical questions such as the political attitude and political power of the emerging middle class in China, we should focus on "the mode of existence" of this emerging collective--how they differentiate themselves from other social classes, and jumping too quick to the political implication of the emergence of this group of people does not help us accomplish the goal.

In addition, my empirical findings indicate that although middle class homeowners can be quickly mobilized by common interests that are connected to their

everyday lives, they appear to be more conservative to participate in collective struggles within the political field. My observations of their daily life suggest that the KC's residents are still developing a codification of their behaviors as "middle class" homeowners in the community through neighbor interactions, which are inevitable in their daily lives. It is precisely through this process that the middle class homeowners continue to draw lines of division separating themselves from other social classes, and these boundaries definitely constitute part of their "class habitus". Although it may still be porous and blur, not showing much "middle class" distinctiveness, the process of KC's residents to develop a codification of behaviors in their life-context deserves further exploration.

Just like most ordinary urban inhabitants in China, residents' lives in KC were occupied with trivial and mundane issues. KC's residents soon found their domestic lives in the community relatively peaceful and yet not totally free from arguments among neighbors. To maintain their expected undisturbed domestic lives, KC's residents tried handling annoyances from their neighbors.

To a certain extent, all the mundane issues discussed by KC's residents involved how to draw the line between what is private and what is public. Each individual may have his own way of expressing expectations of neighbors' behaviors and at the same time, accommodating differences, and these different strategies were frequently tested and compared in different neighbor arguments.

Generally speaking, the emphasis of dealing with neighbor arguments in KC was placed upon being reasonable and considerate. The high level of homogeneity of residents in KC provided the foundation of neighborhood formation. Residents had

channels to express and share their opinions on their grievances to annoyances or offenses from neighbors, which helped the establishment and implementation of a moral order in KC. Also, with frequent and opportune communications and discussions, people in KC were more likely to develop sympathies and compassions to their neighbors, and that enhanced the tolerance level of these people. At the first glimpse, KC's residents showed a tendency of conforming to the expectations and behaviors of their neighbors. However, unlike previous suburban studies suggested, KC's residents were not passively following and conforming to their neighbors' behaviors, or in other words, simply "keeping up with the Joneses". Negotiation and communication through which residents shared and exchanged their expectations of community life were quite common in KC. Other ways of life were respected and judged positively, as they were learning from their compatible neighbors about how to live in the suburbs. Moreover, residents would not hesitate to adopt more confrontational approach to protect their lives if their neighbors showed no goodwill and compassion at all. The resourcefulness of KC's residents had given them another option to handle neighborhood conflict, i.e. to leave community and to avoid the annoying people. Investigation of how the middle class residents draw the private/public boundary is of great importance, as it illustrates how a loosely defined code of behavior, or a local system in the neighborhood is gradually developing, which constitutes an important part of the emerging middle class domestic lifestyle.

With the prevalence of this style of conflict management among neighbors, most residents considered KC a complacent community where every one of them could maintain their expected domestic lives to a certain extent. A preliminary comparison of various communities with different combinations of social mobility and homogeneity of

suggested that they are the two key factors that produce various preferences of residents.

Low homogeneity and high social mobility make residents reluctant to exercise social control on the offending residents, leading to a culture of moral minimalism.

Communities whose residents are heterogeneous and have low social mobility appear to be restless, as residents usually take radical actions of social control to deal with neighbor arguments. Lastly, residents with high homogeneity and low social mobility are more likely to develop solidarity, which helps them exercise social control on the neighbor conflicts more effectively. Although more comprehensive comparison studies of these different cultures of conflict management must be conducted before any conclusions can be made, one thing is certain: under certain circumstances, the new middle class urban residents could be rather accommodating. They were totally passive and quiet. But, at the same time, they were not necessarily assertive and confrontational. They were trying to establish a new way of life in urban China wherein they could find mutual accommodation.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This research attempts to investigate the formation of a specific segment of China's middle class. Thirty years' economic reform in contemporary China has brought about transformation in its socio-economic and political environment. The implementation of a series of policies that changed the occupational structure, reinvented the resources allocation system, and increased the purchasing power of China's urban citizens has facilitated the emergence of a new social stratum. Nonetheless, as this new middle stratum is still emerging and expanding, its composition is extremely diversified. As a result, it is necessary to decompose the aggregate concept of middle class into different segments and examine each of them individually.

This research specifically focused on white-collar employees and the new generation of private entrepreneurs in urban area. While traditional theoretical perspectives such as neo-Marxism and Weberian theories still provide important insights for our understanding of this group of people, their application to an analysis of the middle class in contemporary China is by no means unproblematic. Therefore, instead of drawing class maps to describe the composition of China's middle class, this research borrowed some insights from Bourdieu, combined them with existing studies based on the two traditional approaches, and tried to understand the special segment of middle class in China through their social practices in everyday life. Most existing research following Bourdieu's approach pays attention to middle class' consumption behaviour. Few attempts have been made to view the emerging middle class in the context of its

living environment. Affected by the market reform, the housing provision in urban area has experienced tremendous change, which inevitably influenced middle class' domestic lifestyle. This transformation should not be neglected. Hence, this research aimed to demonstrate how China's middle class is gradually developing their lifestyle and plays an active role in forming middle class communities. Their domestic lives evolve around their residential community and their own home. Through an examination of their home making activities, attempts to protect their own property rights, and how a moral order is formed within their community, my research offers an opportunity of taking a glimpse of how the new middle class leads its life in real social context.

Besides existing class analysis, some of the ideas in this research are borrowed from anthropological community studies. People's domestic lifestyles reflect their social choices, preferences and tastes, as well as their social values and attitudes. These symbolic meanings of everyday practices help them differentiate from other social groups. However, such social values and preferences must be understood in context. A residential community provides us with a natural social context for understanding the informants' attitudes and behaviours. Residents with various backgrounds and upbringing experiences are brought together into the same place. Through daily interactions, a certain kind of mutual understanding and some degree of social coherence are developed. I strongly believe that a residential community is an appropriate social context for researching the new middle class in their everyday life environment .

To capture the latest development of domestic lifestyles of China's middle class, three interrelated aspects have been closely examined in a specific middle class residential community. These are: the home making process of China's middle class

homeowners, collective actions of property right protection, and the formation of a middle class community. In each of these three aspects, the middle class residents need to make decisions and select the most appropriate options, and subsequently, a sense of identity which helps bring them together as a group. In addition, all these three aspects of domestic life involve certain level of communication among residents, which provide the best field to observe how a particular lifestyle emerges.

Although the white-collar employees and the new private entrepreneurs have arrived at their new middle class position through different combinations of economic, cultural and social capitals and through diverse channels of mobility, these different fragments of the affluent group begin to develop certain commonalities. This convergence is demonstrated by these people's high expectations of home. Despite that these people have diversified prior experiences before becoming the new middle class, they share the dream of making one's home. In KC, where I carried out my fieldwork, the notion of ownership (i.e. a legally recognized and protected ownership of property) is minimal. As most of the residents in the community are not first-time homeowners, they have long gone beyond the stage of deciding to buy or otherwise. To them, homeownership carries deeper meanings. It is about how to live comfortably and safely at home. They expect themselves to be able to enjoy more private living space at home, more practical and stylish home design, more freedom to choose domestic activities that help them relax from work, better physical and cultural community environment, etc. They are willing to pay a reasonable amount of money for their preferred lifestyles. The making home process shows us the kind of life that the new middle class aspires to. It is

also an opportunity through which we can see how the new middle class defines a so-called good life.

Since China's middle class is still in its infancy, it is still too early to find highly individualized and stylized ways of living. What I can find in KC is quite different from Bourdieu's portrait of the French middle class. Taste is not, perhaps not yet, the keyword in KC residents' discussion of home decoration. They have not yet developed a codified symbolic system to differentiate themselves from other social classes. Their home making strategy is still a combination of being fashionable and being practical. But this does not imply that the new middle class in contemporary China is not looking forward to its own lifestyle. Indeed, my fieldwork in KC witnessed the formation of a prototypical middle class community. At their early stage of development, KC's residents share the same aspiration and the same emphasis of building one's private and personalized home. The items on their wish list have gone beyond simply buying a flat. They highlight the importance of community environment. They care about the composition and quality of their neighbors. They think home decoration should be an expression of the own personal feelings and preferences. All these seem to be important elements of their expectations of a middle class's life..

When their projected lifestyle is jeopardized, the middle class homeowners will not hesitate to come forward to protect their property rights. The purpose of their actions is no longer limited to the protection of homeownership. Instead, they are more concerned about the control over their domestic lifestyles. The combination of economic, cultural and social capital possessed by the emerging middle class makes them a recognizable social force. Though whether their collective actions can be perceived as the

beginning of more ambitious demands for further political participation is still arguable, no doubt the new middle class is capable of getting themselves organized. .

I repeatedly emphasize the importance of understanding the new middle class in a living environment. Despite their experience in confronting the developer, KC's residents remain complacent. Their internet forum allows me to look at their lives in the everyday life context. Topics posted on the forum are not always about confrontation and mobilization. They are more about mundane and trivial daily routines. But they are important sources of information that allows me to understand their mindset as well as how the residents interact within the community. Living in a middle class community presents to the residents a new living experience. It is very different from the traditional neighborhood as they are no longer staying in accommodation provided by their work-units. It is also different from their earlier experience of staying in a mixed community. They move to KC in the hope of leading a quiet and peaceful life. This research shows how the middle class residents have handled daily routine, especially neighborhood nuisance, in order to balance private needs and public interests. A loosely defined code of behavior among the middle class homeowners is found emerging in this process. The early stage of the formation of a middle class neighborhood and concomitantly a moral order of that neighborhood is witnessed.

This research is intended to demonstrating the emergence of the new middle class in contemporary China. It shows how this middle class is gradually coming into its formation. This research also confirms that China's new middle class is developing its class practices in everyday life. Current discussions have already recognized the importance of daily practice in shaping the middle class by looking at their consumption

patterns. Because of a focus on consumption, the discussion is likely to analyze the consumption of brand names and luxurious items. The present research offers to look at the lives of the new middle class in an everyday life context. It shows how some preliminary forms of identity and group-ness are constituted in their daily practices.

As China's urbanization project continues, China's middle class homeowners inevitably experience tremendous change of domestic lifestyles. Traditional neighborhoods are diminishing, while new communities and organizations are established to handle daily issues that affect everyone's life at home. The impacts of urbanization and community on the middle class homeowners should not be underestimated. How do the middle class cope with such macro-environment transformation? How do these changes affect the domestic lifestyles of China's middle class? These are all important questions that this research attempts to address, and they certainly deserve further investigations.

Focusing on domestic lifestyles of the middle class in community context, this research has sketched the distinctive characteristics of China's middle class, and provided some useful insights for middle class analysis. However, this research also has its limitations. As an ethnographic study in a particular community, its results should be interpreted with caution. Particularly, generalization should be treated with care. Indeed, this research should be followed by carrying out comparative studies of urban communities within the middle class and across different classes. Without such comparative studies, it would be difficult to assert the class specificities of observed lifestyle and behavior. But it would be beyond the scope of this study to address the above issue concerning systemic comparison. Indeed, the objective of this research is rather humble. The emphasis of this research, i.e., how the new middle class develops its

own lifestyles, is to generate hypotheses for further statistical or comparative studies. Its findings can be used as references for developing some benchmarks for comparisons (e.g. middle class complacency vs working class restlessness in different urban settings). In this regard, this is only the beginning of some kind of grounded and qualitative research on the middle class in contemporary China..

Appendix 1

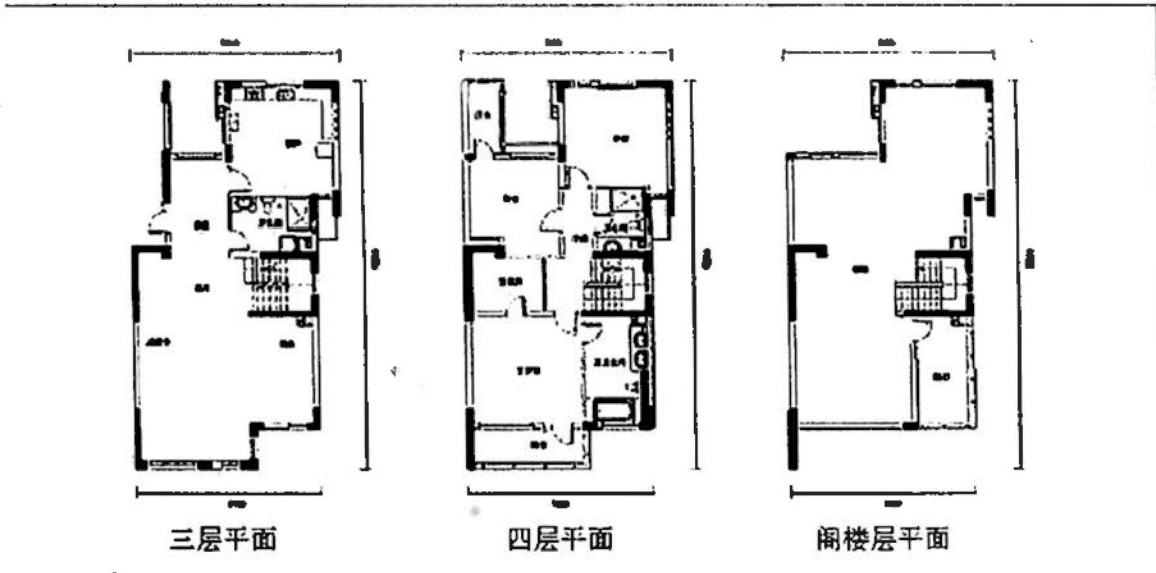
Table 3.1 The summary of demographic information of the interviewees

Name	Age	Education	Occupation	Household Size	Annual household income (RMB)
Amy/Ta	30-40	Master/Junior college	Director of a media company	2	500,000-800,000
Ms. Cai	30-40	Master	Housewife, used to be a television host	2	Over 1,000,000
Mr. Chen/ Mrs. Chen	30-40	Master/Bachelor	Senior managers of pharmaceutical companies	3	800,000-1,000,000
Didi/Jessie	30/29	Bachelor/Junior college	Manager of an automobile company/ Senior secretary of a US based company	2	250,000-300,000
Frank	30-40	Bachelor	Partner of a Nasdaq listed IT company	5	500,000-800,000
Ms. Gao	40-50	N.A.	Owner of a houseware manufacturing company	2	300,000-500,000
Gigi/Gigi's fiancé	30/40	Bachelor/Master	Senior CEO assistant in a Korean company/Senior director in a transnational company	2	Over 1,000,000
GKP	26	Bachelor	Owner of family-owned company	4	300,000-500,000
Imen	30-40	Bachelor	Senior director of a major fireproof material supplier	2	800,000-1,000,000
Mr. Li	50-60	Master	Retired	2	150,000-200,000
Lily	30-40	Bachelor	Senior director of a property company	4	600,000
Ms. Ma	30-40	Bachelor	Senior director of a property company	3	300,000
Nana	30-40	Junior	Manager	3	Over 1,000,000
Mr. Nian/	30-40	Bachelor/N.A.	Senior director of	2	Over 1,000,000

Mrs. Nian			a large-scale state-owned enterprise/ Officer in the same company		
Nancy	30-40	Bachelor	Housewife, used to work as senior director of an international NGO	2	Over 1,000,000
Pak Choi	30-40	Bachelor	Manager in a logistic company	4	500,000-800,000
Red Lily	40-50	Bachelor	Housewife	3	500,000
Tabasco/ Tabasco's husband	30-40/ 50-60	Junior college/ Bachelor	Housewife/ Owner of a decorating company	2	Over 1,000,000
Mrs. Tu	50-60	Bachelor	Senior director in public administration sector	4	200,000
Vivian	30-40	Master	Senior editor of a newspaper	2	400,000-600,000
Mr. Wu	40	Bachelor	Owner of a healthcare product company	2	600,000-800,000

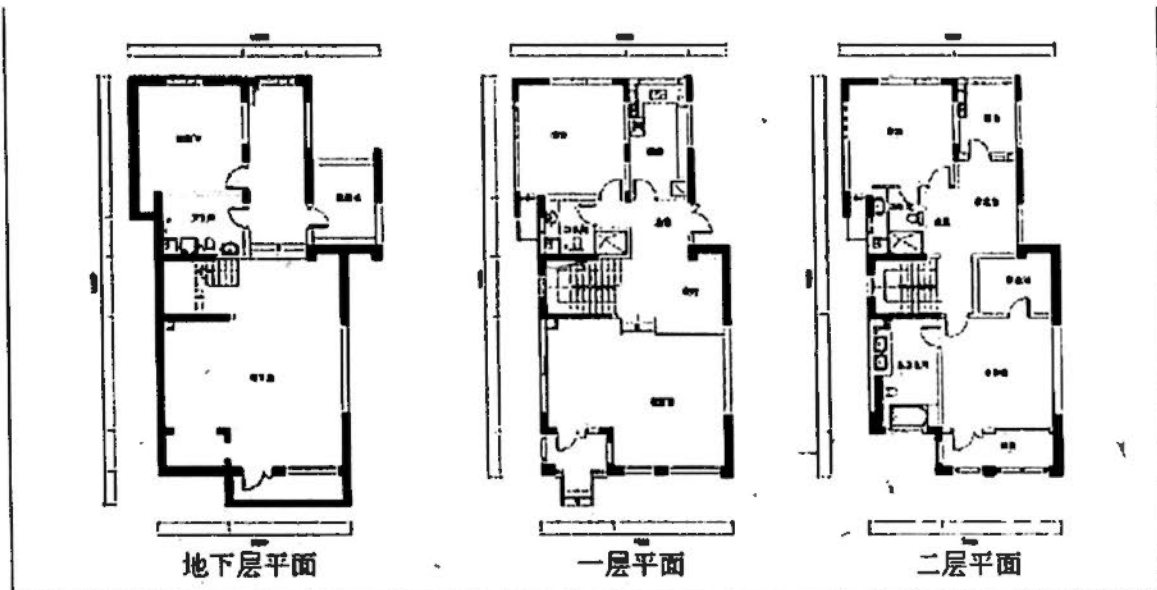
Appendix 2 Information of Interior Decoration of KC's Houses

Figure 1 Floor Plan of Upper Stack Unit in KC



Source: Ushome.com (Accessed December 2008)

Figure 2 Floor Plan of Lower stack Unit in KC



Source: Ushome.com (Accessed December 2008)

Figure 3 Sample of Interior Decoration for Upper Stack in KC



Source: LookHouse.cn (Accessed December 2008)

Figure 4 Sample of Interior Decoration for Lower Stack in KC



Source: Sina.com.cn (Accessed December 2008)

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