Digitalized lifestyle: middle-class and working-class leisure on 'simultaneous' experience

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Abstract—Digital equality has been a heated debate in the academic sphere in recent years. This paper presents how civil rights by using digital devices reinforces the identity of social classes in China. According to the latest Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, China had 940 million netizens as of June 2020. The proportion of China's netizens accessing the Internet via their mobile phones had amounted to 99.2%. This demonstrates that the government of the People's Republic of China succeeds in putting an official emphasis on the internet's capacity of bringing additional benefits to every level of the industry. Further, the government has promoted the concept of a sharing economy derived from internet+, hoping to stimulate economic growth and industry development through the internet. The aim of this paper is to disclose that the concept of 'sharing' cultivated in Chinese daily life originally for the economic purpose now has unexpectedly fostered into another level as sub-cultures, which has a close association with the online and offline experience provided by the internet and portable devices. The paper proposes two significant cases that are currently ongoing– the current civil marathon boom and the internet-based migrant worker culture, to explain the situation. In particular, the sense of simultaneity is crucial. This article concludes that under the political-economic framework, the Chinese internet has gradually formed a symbolic force of the media, which has replaced the national language and promoted the modes of civil life.

Keywords—sub-culture; sharing; lifestyle; simultaneity; digital media

I. Introduction

As known, China has had its specific political economic framework, and the media has played a special role in society in its developing paths. In the recent decade, the internet has been becoming a very popular term for Chinese people to mention, from the government to ordinary people. With all the government strength, the internet+ policy was primarily set to recommend to apply to multi-aspects of the society, such as official sectors, private organizations, commercial transactions, and individual lifestyles. The propaganda has demonstrated to prove to be effective in social practice. Ordinary people in China make use of the internet in their daily life and accommodate themselves to it. Based on the emphasis of internet position in society as a whole, China has further promoted the concept of a sharing economy, hoping to stimulate economic growth and industry development through the internet. After a period of time, the results now remain to be evaluated. However, this 'sharing' concept unexpectedly contributes to fostering sub-popular cultures in China's society. Notably, the popularity of digital platforms on the internet and portable devices enables new media users to receive, share, release any forms of media content. This situation causes the social members to be in a particular condition which is full of multiple and interactive texts and it is to further deepen a sense of their cultural identity.

The social influence brought about by the digital platforms in China can be associated with the media's symbolic power, that of what Nick Couldry proposes. Couldry's premise refers that media institutions, whether national or private ones have the capability to frame and mediate social reality and then urge ordinary people to adopt "the patterns of thought, language, and action" conveyed in media as the 'routine' for their everyday life [1]. He claims the symbolic power of media can be demonstrated in "the complex outcome of practice at every level of social interaction … [it is] reproduced through the details of what social actors (including audience members) do and say" [1]. In this sense, digital platforms perform this symbolic act by providing specific cultural elements to Chinese people to adopt in their daily life. Moreover, the digital platforms in Chinese new media appear to evolve into the symbolic form of framing cultural identity for society.

The purpose of this study is to explore how specific digital platforms enable Chinese people to highlight their preferences, tastes, opinions, and lifestyles by exchanging them with the public. By the 'sharing' action, the social members form collective practice among the community. To demonstrate the phenomenon, this study proposes two outstanding cases – the current civil marathon boom and the internet-based migrant worker culture. The cases are chosen to highlight the cultural division of the middle class and the working class, which is somehow strengthened by their sharing actions. Nevertheless, the two both have a peculiar feature in common, simultaneity. This represents that the members involved are provided with online and offline activities to experience at the same time. The key factor is the

use of digital platforms. In other words, they are both cultural participants and frequent digital platform users. By using the digital platforms, the members are empowered to emphasize their identity by continuously creating new cultural forms in media communication and in the real life.

My argument is, the new media combining civil practice performs as a specific symbolic form rendering all relevant elements to agglomerates, associates, and solidifies sub-popular cultures in China. In particular, the sense of simultaneity is crucial. With the portable device and its accessibility, ordinary people easily display their social presence, which is defined as the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction, and gain instant feedback from it. Through this sort of sharing, feeling, and interacting with others, people obtain circular deepening cultural identity. Integrating the situation, it is demonstrated that China's new media has symbolic power to encourage every level of society to relate their subculture to the circulation of social media and co-create their own lifestyle and taste. It is important to note that civil practice has not been pushed by the top-down power, the government's policy. Instead, it is driven by the bottom-up force.

II. PORTABILITY CREATING CIVIL MARATHON BOOM IN CHINA

Recently, the number of Chinese marathon races has increased at an unprecedented rate, and it has ignited a 'running China' boom in the major cities of China and even in the countryside. According to Beijing News, there were 1072 marathon races with a total number of 6 million participants within a year [2]. Zhaoqing, marked out as a prefecture-level city in Guangdong Province in China, has semiyearly organized the vigorous event - Zhaoqing International Marathon, in the months of March and December. The year's Zhaoqing International Marathon held in March of 2019 was upgraded from a half marathon to a full marathon, and the entrants' qualification was more stringent. According to the registration requirements, those who were top 10 of the half-marathon finishers in the previous year were able to directly enter this competition [3]. For other entrants who were not eligible but desired to register for the competition, the registration requirements can be met by completing a full marathon or a half marathon within the recent two years, or, by having participated in sufficient 'online marathons'. This alternative option has therefore rendered online marathons as an emerging phenomenon eye-catching among the marathon runner circle.

The so-called online marathon refers to the virtual race held on digital platforms. On the day of the online marathon event, runners can choose any specified journey at any location to finish and subsequently get corresponding certificates and medals like offline marathon finishers. Compared with the offline marathon, the online marathon breaks through time and space limitations and provides a diverse community of runners to share the joy of running. In particular, 'sharing' has nearly become the most popular term on the internet that Chinese people pay the most attention to in their social life in the past three years, and consequently become the common concept in the society. The digital platforms on Chinese new media are mostly designed and improved to possess the sharing function as social media and thereby reinforces the trend of Chinese marathon. Such as Keep, Joyrun, and Codoon, the applications on iOS and Android, these platforms are well-known and generally-used among the Chinese runners. With the APPs, runners can view kilometers of each athlete, speed, and duration. After the end of running, the runner can sign in the spot of the running journey and snapshot his/her own record, and then send it onto another digital platform for sharing. This kind of action becomes so common that Alipay and WeChat, originally not designed for function sports-related, began to create their own Alipay Sports and WeChat Sports for their users [4].

The popularity of online marathon among Chinese runners is not only due to sharing the running experience and joy, but also for its convenience of exchanging relevant knowledge such as correct running postures for long-distance races, the first-aid method on the marathon runway, and urban cultural characteristics of the host cities [5]. This kind of trend that is contributed by the digital platforms has gained official catching-up. For instance, in 2017's Chongqing International Marathon, the host city opened a special session inviting a senior marathon runner to introduce the most advanced first-aid techniques [6]. Except for the official sharing session, the individual sharing action on social media also turns the official session into informal but vivid sharing events. This situation has further evolved into a grand occasion online, vigorous, bustling, instant-exchanged, keen-participating, highly curious, and appealing. The marathon boom brought about by the digital platforms can be demonstrated in another example – the 2018 Beijing Marathon. It is the illustration that apparently gained better post-event engagement. After the completion of the Beijing Marathon in 2018, the screens of social media were filled with ample posts of marathon runners' sharing –PB (Personal Best), delicious local cuisine, sun-bathing while training, runner reunions, rewarding metals, etc. Following this, some people displayed the collection of all information related to the platforms of social media, naming it '2018 Beijing Marathon Funny Social-networking' [7]. With the vigorous development of new media in China, the sharing of offline marathons is no longer limited to the locations. The sharing 'on move' is not only convenient for Chinese people to participate in the marathon events. Above all, the real marathon is accordingly highlighted and becomes attractive to the public.

The prosperity of the Chinese marathon combining with new media applications has further urged the trend of the online-and-offline simultaneous marathon experience. Zhiwei Qiu, an expert in sports events in China, says: "marathon events are to connect runners to be together for sharing a glory" [8]. He indicates that the events provide runners with a platform to promote their sport levels, but more importantly, the events are strengthening the collectiveness via sharing the glory. Qiu described: "It has been thinking if we can join marathons with our friends, colleagues, and families for pursuing the glory in unison" [8]. Undoubtedly, the digital platforms of online marathon carry out this social practice. It makes the target mentioned above vivid. Marathon team members are able to connect with one another via online-and-offline simultaneous marathon experience. Codoon, popular Chinese sports, and wellness service provider created an online-marathon application for marathon fanatics in 2014, and its application was devised to be endowed with the function of social networking. Its success has been proved in the following years by obtaining more than 30 officially authorized online marathons in 2015 and more than 100 up to 2016 [9]. In recent years, Codoon has gradually taken the leading position in holding online marathons and developed its personalised IP business model with its own-invented devices, from regularly tracing runner's physical conditions, building personal health profiles, comparing customer ratings to sharing the personal running activity with friends [9]. Using with ease by lower-standard race entrance and running at anywhere anytime, online and offline marathons have subsequently promoted the national marathon boom.

III. 'WE' EXCLUSIVE CULTURE - MIGRANT WORKERS' SOCIAL NETWORKING

Located in Picun, the edge of Beijing, Migrant Workers Home was set up as an NGO for a specific group – intra-migrant workers, who are referred to move across provinces and cities within China. The group of the intra-migrant workers will be represented by 'Chinese migrant workers' hereafter in this article. Chinese migrant workers come from villages to economically developed cities for earning their living. In Chinese society, all the jobs they do are generally called 'dagong', which literally means the temporary and cheap wage labour force in the market. Culturally, the term implies a lower social class, grassroots. However, this group can be deemed a major China's internal migratory population (both inter-and intra-provincial) exceeding nearly 18 million people in 2018 [10]. Within the group, the majority is the floating population, pointing to those without household registration in their own country. In the duration of the Opening of China, this group of the population had been acknowledged as the main contributors to China's economic development and urbanization [11], due to the demand of tremendous labour force.

Leaving their homes to work in the industrial centers of the big cities, Chinese migrant workers have frequently suffered hardships and difficulties. Migrant Workers Home aims to serve labours in many aspects as the general NGOs, but it has a particular goal to create many cultural events for them in recent years. Among the services, Picun Literature Club has become the most famous.

In 2014, Picun Literature Club formally commenced owning its digital public platform, which is embedded in the largest social media in China, WeChat. In the beginning, it experimented to share a few literary works by quotation on the platform and then started to publish original works created by their members in 2018. This is the kind of special online magazine exclusively belonging to the migrant workers. Through the platform, Chinese migrant workers have made efforts to free themselves from being-edged. Through the platform, they express, share and disperse their thoughts, feelings, suffering, weariness, lifestyle, and accordingly obtain their collective identity. The online literary magazine published by the Club on the WeChat official account platform is named New Worker Literature. Before this, there have existed significantly diverse stories and narratives about Chinese migrant workers and their circle, which have been displayed on multiple mass media including magazines, TV, cinema, documentary, literature, theater drama, and emerging new media [12]. Nevertheless, the self-confidence in the migrant workers' identity had not been clear until the use of the WeChat official account platform. The brief introduction shown on the home page of New Worker Literature says:

New Worker Literature is the field for new workers in the new era to exchange literary and artistic works. This is also a platform for the study of literature and art created by and belong to new workers. New workers are the builders of the new world and the creators of a better life. [13]

These words are seeming to deliver self-expression and self-declaration. Chinese migrant workers are hoping to be given a new identity, which is no longer in the shadow of being-edged. Until now, there are thirty-one originality articles on the platform, among which some are labeled as a genre of non-fiction as diaries. The authors narrate their life stories mostly from their childhood to the present time. It is as if a flashback, reviewing their life track based on their adult-perspectives.

One of the authors is Fang Yu Su, who has become widely known since she published an article entitled by her own name "I am Fang Yu Su" on another space of the WeChat digital platform. Reportedly, the article had been clicked beyond 100 thousand times within twenty-four hours and circulated by re-posting on WeChat's friend circle [14]. The article opens in self-narrative, "My life is a book

that I can't bear to read. Destiny is binding me as the shabby ..." [15]. Fang narrows her lifetime down to two thousand words. The sentences signify self-mockery having a vein of black humor through it. Even it, the description had a broad resonance. In addition to the peers giving echo, the middle class and the conventional media also took note of this article, and began to generate curiosity and focus on workers' literature. The public views the story a microcosm of the community of Chinese migrant workers. Some news media describes it as "we are not Fang Yu Shu, but we are also Fang Yu Shu" [6]. This situation represents the voice of Chinese migrant workers through literature online does not merely gain the collective identity but appeal to the outside communities. Previous studies support that after the voice being conveyed on internet, the group become visible to the society.

The fever of "I am Fang Yu Su" on the digital platform urged the author to walk out from the edge to the focus of the spotlight. The group she belongs to was meanwhile paid attention. Picun Literature Club became the interest of mainstream media's news coverage. The mainstream media unexpectedly found the offline social networking is even more active than the digital platform. The club insists to maintain the convention that the workers spend the weekend talking and discussing literature with cultural volunteers from the city [16]. Chinese migrant workers represented by Fan Yu Su still hold their passion for literature no matter what kind of jobs they do. Through the digital platform, they tell their stories in a literary way, making invisible life visible and invisible experience readable. Depending on the cultural volunteers' assistance, the club compiled several volumes of its book, Picun literature. On the back of the book, two lines are printed: "Without our culture, there will be no history of us. Without our history, there will be no future for us" [16]. These words are also written on a band hanging on the gate of Migrant Workers Home. News media summaries the scenarios, indicating that by creating literary works, this group finds the meaning of survival.

The devotion of the online and offline simultaneous activities had accordingly evolved into a specific cultural ritual for Chinese migrant workers to attend– Dagong Spring Gala on the evening before Chinese New Year. This is meaningful to the workers, since they might be not able to go home to be with their families. Besides, Dagong Spring Gala is distinct from other Spring Galas held by satellite TV stations or commercial institutes. In Dagong Spring Gala, there are not stars, celebrities and materialism. Instead, all elements of the gross-root culture are purely showcased. In 2017's Dagong Spring Gala, the six members from Picun Literature Club showed up altogether on the stage, reading out the poem of their co-writing, Laborers' murmuring, which was previously published on the digital platform. Besides, the program was filled with various forms of arts, including

short funny play, Chinese Traditional Cross Talk (Xiangsheng in Chinese pronunciation), musicals, poetry recitation and singing and dancing to express various themes, such as labor disputes, labor dignity, left-behind children, discrimination against female workers, etc. The elements of the program are usually related to labor, family, children, dignity and freedom [10].

Dagong Spring Gala as the specific cultural ritual for Chinese migrant workers has legitimized to equally exist among other popular celebrating programs. Its legitimation has even attracted a famous host in China, Cui Yongyuan, becoming the long-term volunteer anchor of the program. The program has become the offline stage for Chinese migrant workers in the New Workers Home. On the stage, they reproduce their aspirations in a way of practicing cultural rituals. According to the reviewed literature, prior to the sixth Dagong Spring Gala with a total of a hundred eleven programs, 30% is conveying labour values and labour lifestyle, 24 % is expressing affection to homelands and families, the 29% is concerning workers' development in society, and the rest is 9% [17]. It is noticeable that, in Dagong Spring Gala, the workers are their own 'roles', having titles to speaking the voice of their life and thoughts. Bu indicates that in the Gala, the workers are no longer a weak group that needs to be cared for. They are the narrators of their own point of view.

Based on the contemporary multiple media forms — internet, application programs, social media and all kinds of digital platforms included, Beijing Migrant Workers Home now is naturalized acknowledged in Chinese society. Its social networking has enlarged in the conjunction with the use of new media, incorporating more resources and connections. The portability of new media stimulates the members to make a move, dispersing their aspirations in other cultural forms to other places. Another club subordinating Migrant Workers Home, New Worker's Band commenced their national-tour show in name of Earth Folk Ballads, walking into villages, communities, institutions in the different provinces. In 2017's Earth Folk Ballads, the Band practiced twenty-three performing shows during the third and twenty-seventh in November [14]. Liu (2018) indicates that whether they went there were crowds formed to receive them. The crowds were usually formed by ordinary villagers, private institutions, and independent philanthropic organizations. Now, Earth Folk Ballads has developed as the goings-on that is comparable to national-wide scale event. On its WeChat official account platform, New Worker's Band had released the recruiting information for 2019's Earth Folk Ballads to the public:

This year's National Tour of Earth Folk Ballads will be held from September to November 2019. Now, we are beginning to solicit partners who are willing to cooperate with us all over the country. Earth Folk Ballads is not for a remote place, nor for the so-called

farm field, but to take root in the earth and serve the people like you and me. New workers come from the countryside, and they care about their hometown. They are the bridge connecting urban and rural areas. They are the main force in urban construction and will become the main force in revitalizing the new countryside. Vitalizing the countryside is not only an economic revitalization but also a cultural revitalization, because there are roots in culture. Earth Folk Ballads is a long march of culture. [18]

The passage apparently signifies the Band's passion, aspiring to provoke more participants to identify with them, a group who has endeavored to establish the spirit of Chinese migrant workers according to their own interpretation.

Summarizing all mentioned above, originally a group of unknown migrant workers had lived their plain and struggling lives in an insignificant area. However, from the establishment of NGOs, Picun Literature Group, Fang Yu Su's appearing, Dagong Spring Gala to Earth Folk Ballads, Picun with a population of merely 30,000 has reshaped the culture of the new working class, and because of it, Picun now has its prestige in China.

IV. MODERN CHINA: CULTURAL PREACTICE OF HIGHTER-END AND LOWER-END POPULATION

In point of fact, the two cases proposed in this study is to examine the benefit that the digital platforms bring forth in social influence. That is the very appeal of which digital equality seems acts among the ordinary people no matter what social classes they are belonging to. However, from the cases, it is obvious the leisure that the two groups have developed based on digital technology are inter-distinction between the two social classes within China's society itself. A large-scale survey conducted by Nielsen cooperated with China Athletics Association based on the final 3459 effective samples covering 31 provinces, Investigation Report on Running Population in China in 2015 shows that a large proportion of the growing number of Marathon enthusiasts comes from the country's rapidly growing middle class, younger people and affluent people ("Marathon brings huge business opportunities", 2016). Further, according to the Chinese news reporting, in terms of the distribution of the marathon participants, people living in the North, East, and South regions of China's richer economy are most enthusiastic about this sport. Economically highly developed megacities such as Beijing and Shanghai are the two cities with the largest number of marathon runners, respectively accounting for 17.1% and 11.6% of the country's totality. In the underdeveloped western and central regions, people's participation is the lowest [19]. Specifically, those with higher education levels, higher social status, and more assets will be more enthusiastic about participating in marathons.

The city as the case mentioned previously, Zhaoqing is one of the cities that China emphasizes the construction of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), but because of its marginal position, it has been actively promoted for its importance by the local government's media publicity in the past two years. The same purpose is true for holding international marathons, and the name of the marathon, Zhao-Ma, is also defined by the pronunciation of the city with its initial 'Zhao'. 'Ma' is literally 'horse' in Chinese, referring to running like a horse. In China, Zhaoqing International Marathons are held quite frequently. In general, this kind of grand event needs to be prepared beforehand for at least two months since the organizer and its co-sponsors, including the local government, have to arrange transportation routes, publicity, etc. For example, the event held in the March of 2019 had been promoted since the December of 2018 [20]. If combined with the operation of the event days, the two marathons held in the city could be accounted for taking half of the year in the total length of time. It explains that the city is keen to demonstrate its middle class is in a large number for being worthy of the name of a member of GBA.

In comparison, an area concealed in the mega-city, Picun has developed its prestige without the halo of Beijing. The popularity of New Worker Literature represents a rise of Chinese migrant workers' self-consciousness. Their cultural practice is merely to highlight their having an attitude. The founder of New Workers Home, Sun Heng said:

In the past, society used to call us people of dagong. This means that we are a group of the rural labour employee, while 'new workers' has a connotation of
subjectivity and represent the role with social status. Moreover, 'new workers' is our conscious aspiration, which also includes the impulse of desiring to create a new working class and a new type of social culture. [6]

It can be said that New Workers Home is just a self-help organization for the lower social class. Its existence has embodied the feelings of its class. Their new culture is created through re-interpreting and reconstructing by Chinese immigrant workers themselves actively. More importantly, culture cannot be highlighted by the individual's preference. Instead, it needs to be formed by a group of a large number of social members. Further, culture represents a specific collectiveness and is embodied in their social practice. In particular, digital equality enables all the practices to be realized. Therefore, the phenomenon of 'New Worker Culture' emerges.

Lull (2000) indicates "culture is grounded ... in social class" [21]. However, it does not mean that culture is fixed in social class. Lull further proposes, culture states in the dynamic conditions where existed

"collective consciousness, subconsciousness, memory, and social practice" [21]. Culture is also embodied in people's everyday routines, including regular social interaction. The viewpoints demonstrate culture can be created based on 'sharing', and through it, collective consciousness can be fostered to be a spirit. Therefore, in the era of digitalization, the boom of the Chinese civil marathon and the rise of new worker culture deemed as sub-popular cultures in the Chinese society can credit to China's internet+ policy and the advancement of digital platforms. According to China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), up to June 2020, the number of mobile Internet users in China had reached 932 million. In particular, The proportion of China's netizens accessing the Internet via their mobile phones had amounted to 99.2%, and the number of mobile instant messaging users had reached 930 millio n, up 40.24 million from March 2020, making up 99.8% of mobile Internet users. This means that more than half of China's 1.395.38 million people are using social media via mobile phones [22]. The statistics provided by the National Bureau of Statistics of China in 2020 indicates information equality in the society. However, the top-down influence of internet+ policy and its sharing economy unexpectedly contributes to the bottom-up formation of subcultures. Specifically, the media's portability motivates the middle class to walk out from their offices and encourages the migrant workers to step out from their 'shabby outward' into their respective social-networking. The digital platforms enhance the social presence of the two classes, highlighting the members' self-exposure to the public. The internet-based cultures have therefore deepened the cultural identities of the two classes. Online and offline simultaneity, on the one hand, has enlarged the scale of marathons, providing a sense of belonging to the middle class. On the other hand, the simultaneity brings Chinese migrant workers into the common history, reshaping the culture of the working class.

V. Conclusion

Recently, convergent media, all media, and omni media are popular new terms in China, and they are advocated by the government. In addition to emphasizing the convergence of the media itself, based on internet+, the concept of convergence has been extended to all areas of daily life. This study is not to place the media at the top above all, but as a researcher of media studies, we have to clarify that the essence of the media is constantly changing in the development of technology. The contemporary media converge with one another, so all the media text is more intermingled and interwoven than ever. The symbols converged on the digital platforms are reproduced and interlaced to produce the power of intertextuality. Plus, possessing social-networked functions highlighted by the Chinese new media enables civilian social networking to develop a virtual community online, forming a convergent point of collective consciousness.

Actually, the boom of the Chinese marathon can be deemed a product of its time. The arising economy and the development of the internet at the peak point drive the emergence of the new leisure culture for the middle class. On the platforms of social media, the people having the same preferences form imagined circles and the circle can be enlarged by embedding more circles. This situation becomes a symbolic form to legitimize the specific leisure culture. Even more, the Chinese marathon itself becomes 'not simply a sporting event'. Its influence far beyond the sports community, generating the spill-over effect. The events have seemingly evolved into the point of convergence for political and commercial purposes. Local governments promote their cities by marathon events, and businesses turn the events into the platforms for their product marketing. As to the rise of New Worker Culture, it is given birth by the strong social function of Chinese new media. All the sub-clubs under New Workers Home, have established respective the official account on the digital platforms. In such a situation, the purpose and spirit of the NGO have been emphasized in different forms of media texts with poems, literature, lyrics, performances, short videos, etc. to constantly reproduce has been the same concept, putting forward – we are new workers and we cannot be ignored. The symbols created soon spread out, forming the atmosphere legitimately existing in society.

The situation mentioned above can be attributed to the development of new media, focusing on the Chinese Internet. This article concludes that under the governance framework, the Chinese Internet has gradually formed a symbolic force of the media, which has replaced the national language and promoted the mode of civil life.

In the research environment as a huge and complex laboratory itself, this study, especially in the aspect of the methodology, still needs to be improved. However, mixed with a minor-scale but the appropriate quantity of literature analysis, observation of the development of new media in China, media textual analysis, and personal interviews, this study attempts to outline the most suitable media research in the Chinese context and expects to contribute the research results to the academic field.

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