

Chinese Discourses on Happiness

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Introduction

Chinese Happiness, a Shared Discursive Terrain

Gerda Wielander

Happiness is on China's agenda. Happiness, often represented by the Chinese character *fu* 福, is part of the visual propaganda campaign of the Chinese Dream, and raising levels of happiness has become an official government target. Much is written and said about happiness by the Chinese government, by authors of self-help books, by journalists, TV chat show hosts, pop psychologists, and China's netizens. This book is the first attempt at analyzing these various writings and related images to see what concepts and agendas inform this proliferation of discourses on happiness. The essays in this volume show some of the many different contexts and discursive practices in which happiness is discussed by different social groups and actors, in order to illuminate different notions of happiness in China today.

The starting point of our analysis is the Chinese term *xingfu* 幸福, now the standard Chinese term to translate the English word happiness. The term is not a neologism; it was already used to indicate happiness back in the eleventh century.¹ Becky Hsu (2016) distinguishes between three different components in relation to the meaning of happiness: good mood, a good life, and a meaningful life. While, in her view, the English term happiness refers mostly to the notion of good mood and a good life, she argues that the Chinese term *xingfu* implies a longer-term state of mind based on moral values, referring to a combination of a good life and a meaningful life. However, these aspects are certainly all present in recent Western studies on happiness (e.g., Layard 2005) and are taken into account in the many different questions used to measure people's life satisfaction, happiness, or subjective well-being. There are also other groupings of words denoting happiness in Chinese, notably variations including *le* 樂 (joy), which are not excluded from our study. Indeed, one of the important contributions this volume makes is to map the linguistic field of happiness and well-being in China today.

1. According to Baidu Baike, *xingfu* was already recorded in the *Xin tangshu* 新唐書, which was compiled in 1060. <https://baike.baidu.com/item/幸福/18803>. Accessed August 17, 2017.

A search on the China Core Newspapers Full-text Database revealed 386 articles in *Renmin Ribao* 人民日報 (*People's Daily*) with *xingfu* in the title between the years 2000 and 2016. The amount per year was in single figures until 2005 and ranged from 13 to 38 per year in the years 2006 to 2010, jumping to 105 in 2011, followed by 71 in 2012, and has ebbed off since. This broadly mirrors the picture in all core newspapers, where 2011 also marks the high point of their concern with happiness, with a total of 9155 articles with *xingfu* in the title in that year. This culminated in a CCTV series called *Happiness Survey* (*Xingfu Diaocha* 幸福調查) broadcast in October 2012 in which journalists carried out interviews with members of the public, and which elicited a range of interesting responses (Leyre 2012). The series also led to a lively discussion in the public sphere as well as numerous publications on the topic of happiness, with titles such as *Guo fule! Xingfu ne?* 國富了！幸福呢？ (The country has become rich! What about happiness?) (Gao 2013). The theme of happiness has also been picked up in expensive public service advertising and features prominently in TV shows, in which members of the public undergo speed therapy to cure their unhappiness. This diversity and pervasiveness is reflected in the comprehensive analysis of texts and images in multimedia formats presented in this volume.

Global Happiness Discourse and Neoliberalism

Happiness as the telos of human existence has been debated since Aristotle and has been a key theme in the works of political philosophers in the West. Happiness studies, on the other hand, is a relatively recent academic discipline. The *Journal of Happiness Studies* was founded in 2000, and publishes research carried out in psychology, economics, anthropology, sociology, and related fields. Most studies on happiness either refer back to or respond to the so-called Easterlin Paradox. Richard Easterlin showed in 1974 that despite economic growth and widespread increase in prosperity, people in the Western world had not become happier. While this finding has since been refined and the statement qualified depending on a variety of variables, the essential truth remains: that more material wealth does not necessarily lead to increased happiness of individuals and societies (Easterlin 2010, Kahnemann 2006)—and China appears to be the world's biggest example of this paradox (Bartolini and Sarracino 2015).

A detailed overview and critique of all these works—political philosophy as well as happiness studies—is included in the two seminal treatises on happiness which are closely linked to the development of happiness studies, and which most authors in this book also refer to. In his book *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (2005) Richard Layard—professor of economics at the London School of Economics and the son of two Jungian therapists—argues that, following decades of economic and psychological research, we now know what factors impact most on happiness. It follows that we must devise policies designed to ensure the maximum happiness of

the maximum number of people. Layard builds directly on Jeremy Bentham's maxim of the "greatest happiness for the greatest number" as the guiding moral principle against which both individual decisions and policy formulation must be judged. Layard's argument and ensuing policy recommendations are based on the now, as he argues, scientifically proven premise that happiness is not entirely subjective, but that it is an objectively verifiable and measurable state of mind. This premise is built primarily on results from neuroscience which have shown that people's brains do show measurable changes that correspond to their self-reported states of happiness. Layard's work was instrumental in the development and publication of World Happiness Surveys and Reports as outlined below.

Sara Ahmed's critical study *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) is suspicious of the utilitarian maxim of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" as well as agreed-upon notions of what is good and hence conducive to happiness. Ahmed argues that, rather than the individual choosing a certain object (by which she means not only material objects, but also values, ideas, and beliefs), the judgment about certain objects being "happy" is already made, before they are even encountered. Certain objects are attributed as the cause of happiness, which means they are already circulated as social goods before we "happen" upon them; indeed, the reason we happen upon them is because they are already being circulated (Ahmed 2010, 28). In her approach to the concept of happiness, Ahmed is guided by Locke rather than Bentham, in particular his idea that freedom is the freedom to be made happy by different things (27).

The recent emphasis on happiness as a goal and object of study also owes much to the positive psychology movement and its seminal figure, Martin Seligman, founder and director of the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Seligman's main argument is that happiness comes principally from individuals' cultivation of positive emotions (Seligman 2002, xiii). According to Barbara Ehrenreich (2009, 92; 102), this approach has its roots in the positive thinking movement catalyzed by Norman Vincent Peale, an American Protestant minister and author, in his 1952 international bestseller *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Peale argued that through techniques such as mentally "imaging" a goal in a sustained way, and at the same time repeatedly believing in its achievability, one could banish self-doubt, strengthen one's personality, and solve intractable problems. Yet, Martin Seligman has pointed out that although there is a philosophical relationship between Peale's ideas and his positive psychology initiative, namely, the notion of a freely choosing individual, there is no empirical connection.

According to Binkley (2011), the current enthusiasm for the promotion of happiness and positive thinking/psychology by governments of varying political stripes across the globe is strongly inflected by a neoliberal mode of self-governance that aims to produce independent, resourceful, and enterprising subjects. The form, content, and effects of neoliberalism, or "advanced liberalism" (Rose 1999) across the world have been hotly debated in recent years, and no less so with regard to

China. The work of some scholars suggests that the concept of a neoliberal China is a productive way of understanding and explaining China's reengagement with global capitalist markets in the reform era (e.g., Harvey 2005; Ren 2010; 2013). Others are more cautious, choosing to examine how some policies and practices often associated with neoliberalism have been adapted and altered in particular ways in China (Anagnost 2004; Ong 2006; Rofel 2007; Yan 2003; Zheng 2015), such as how they combine with a "traditional political culture . . . that often contradicts the expected trajectory of evolution that links marketization with the decline of the role of the state" (Tomba 2014, 75). Ong characterizes neoliberalism as a malleable technology of governance that has been taken up globally in diverse ways in very different sociopolitical environments.

From a more skeptical perspective, Andrew Kipnis (2007; 2008) criticizes the misuse of neoliberalism as an overarching trope for analyzing contemporary China, taking particular aim at characterizations of *suzhi* 素質 and Chinese audit cultures as forms resulting from the dominance of a purported global neoliberalism. While not rejecting the value of the concept of neoliberalism outright, Kipnis reminds us that scholars must also pay attention to "unliberal and antiliberal" elements in contemporary Chinese governance (2007, 395–96). Finally, there are those scholars who deny that neoliberal policies and practices are present in any shape or form in China (e.g., Nonini 2008; Ringen 2016, and personal communication to one of the editors), and who criticize works that neglect the roles of non-neoliberal discursive traditions in China. These traditions have shaped an oligarchic corporate state that has little interest in neoliberal ideas and practices concerning the market, the individual, or an "audit culture" for professionals, argues Nonini.

Chinese discourses on happiness are undeniably linked into, informed by, and in some ways mirror similar discourses in other parts of the world. However, we deliberately chose not to include comparisons to other parts of the world, although some authors make reference to connections or similarities (e.g., Yang), and indeed much of the available self-help literature in Chinese in fact comprises translations from Western languages (mostly English). These translations complement works written in Chinese and together make for a diverse field of discourse, which is informed by very different ideas and sociopolitical history than the "same" discourses in the West. One of the aims of this volume is to bring out the Chinese voices on happiness: what do different social groups and different philosophical, psychological, cultural, and political ideas bring to the subject of happiness in contemporary China?

Measuring China's Happiness

The sudden surge in China's attention to happiness as outlined in the opening paragraph is directly linked to the publication of the first World Happiness Report in 2012. It was published in support of the United Nations High Level Meeting on

Happiness and Well-Being, held on April 2, 2012. That meeting itself followed the July 2011 Resolution of the UN General Assembly, proposed by the prime minister of Bhutan, inviting member countries to measure the happiness of their people and to use this to help guide their public policies (Helliwell et al. 2015, 3). There have since been five further reports, the latest published in 2018.²

Rankings in the survey are based on the mean scores to the main life evaluation questions on a scale from 0 to 10. In 2017, China ranked 79 out of 155 countries, while Taiwan ranked 33 and Hong Kong ranked 71 (Helliwell et al. 2017, 20–22). These rankings are very similar to those of the previous year, when China ranked 83 out of 157, Taiwan ranked 35, and Hong Kong 75 (Hrálá 2016). We can see that China occupies a distinctly middling position.³

In *The Distribution of World Happiness*, which forms part of the 2016 World Happiness Report, the authors compare data from 2005–2007 and 2013–2015. Their data analysis shows that life evaluation is influenced by factors beyond economic growth and rise in per capita income. Among the noneconomic factors considered to impact on the life evaluations of individuals is the importance of social context for happiness-supporting resilience under crisis and the consequences of a relative rise or fall in inequality (Helliwell et al. 2016). The authors' analysis shows that China ranks among the top twenty countries (just, at number nineteen) where happiness scores have improved significantly between 2005 and 2015, more than would be expected on the basis of economic factors alone.

Easterlin et al. (2017) provide an in-depth analysis of China's data. GDP growth is generally held to be the most reliable predictor of a country's levels of happiness. However, in China, GDP has multiplied over five times in the past twenty-five years, but well-being⁴ in China today is less than in 1990. China's reported levels of happiness have seen a U-shaped development since 1990; levels kept dropping until reaching a trough in the period of 2000–2005, and have recovered since, but have not yet reached the same levels as in 1990, when China's levels of happiness were high for what was then a poor country. Pretransition Russia reported equally high levels of subjective well-being. It would seem that the “iron rice bowl system” made people happy.

Growth of GDP is not a reliable indicator of happiness in China; in fact, GDP growth in China was highest when happiness levels were falling. The economy was viewed by the public as much worse in 2002 than in 2014, when the GDP rate in 2002 was in fact much higher. In fact, none of the six predictors used in the World Happiness Reports (Helliwell et al. 2017, 4) prove to be reliable predictors in China. Neither GDP per capita, healthy years of life expectancy, social support (defined as having somebody to rely on in times of trouble), trust (defined as perceived absence

2. All World Happiness Reports can be accessed online at <http://worldhappiness.report/>.

3. In 2017, the leader in the world happiness rankings was Norway, followed by Denmark and Iceland; Burundi and the Central African Republic were at the bottom of the table.

4. Easterlin et al. use the terms happiness, life satisfaction, and subjective well-being interchangeably.

of corruption in government and business), perceived freedom to make life decisions, nor generosity (defined as giving to charity) show much or any correlation to reported levels of happiness in China. Nor is there any correlation between house prices or pollution and happiness, or between the rate of inequality. While the gap between rich and poor has grown in the new millennium, gaps in the levels of happiness between different income groups have in fact lessened (57), another counter-intuitive development in China.

Instead, the two main factors explaining China's trajectory in happiness levels are unemployment and the social safety net. Unemployment rose sharply after 1990, reaching its peak in 2000–2005—the trough of China's happiness—and has since declined moderately, as happiness levels have risen moderately. The level of unemployment is mirrored by the relative coverage of the social safety net over the same time period.

It seems that the restructuring of state-owned enterprises (SOE) has had the most profound effect on the happiness of Chinese people. This mirrors developments in Eastern European countries. However, while European transition countries abandoned the entire public sector to privatization and experienced major GDP collapse (with accompanying drops in levels of happiness), China invested heavily in the most productive SOEs and was rewarded with significant output growth (55); China's "economic miracle" is in large measure built on state-owned enterprises, which puts another question mark over the claims of China's pursuit of neoliberal practices in the reform era.

In addition to unemployment rates and the social safety net, education and age are also important factors in determining Chinese people's happiness over the period. Not surprisingly, the older generation who experienced the iron rice bowl system was most affected by unemployment and the withdrawal of the safety net, and hence recorded the biggest drop in subjective well-being. Furthermore, the lower the level of education, the more affected people were (63). Yang's chapter in this volume provides us with an illustrative example of women who found themselves as "housewives" following their layoff from SOEs and the ways in which they were encouraged to find new fulfillment and meaning. The youngest generation at the time restructuring began (1961–1970) was best able to adapt to the transformation, most notably by acquiring a college education (64). It seems that levels of education and levels of happiness are indeed linked; not only does a college education provide access to better job opportunities, but it also makes one more adaptable to changing circumstances and better equipped to engage with a variety of methods offered by cultural resources (as described in Wielander's, Zhang's, and Matthyssen's chapters, for example) to look after individual levels of happiness.

Bartolini and Sarrancino (2015) provide another in-depth analysis of China's happiness data between 1990 and 2007 and argue that not only is GDP not a reliable indicator, but China is also a good example that the importance of social capital is not a phenomenon restricted to developed countries. Social capital is defined

as “networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups” (OECD 2014). It is a decline in these networks that is considered to lie behind the decrease in happiness in developed countries like the US.⁵ But Bartolini and Sarracino show that a decline in social capital also seems to be central to China’s falling levels of happiness. During the same period, they also observe a rise in materialism, which they see as a personal value system attributing a high priority in life goals to extrinsic motivations and low priority to intrinsic motivations—a phenomenon sometimes referred to as China’s moral or spiritual “vacuum.”

Social capital refers to personal relationships and the support (emotional, financial, material, practical) derived from these, as well as civic engagement (contribution to community life) and social trust and norms (OECD 2014). Keeley (2007) distinguishes between bonds, bridges, and linkages, where bonds are links based on a sense of common identity (“people like us”) and form the closest connections, while bridges and linkages relate to people further removed (socially and emotionally) from the individual—a definition of social capital which is remarkably similar to Fei Xiaotong’s simile of concentric circles appearing on the surface of the lake when a rock is thrown in to describe how the individual relates to society in traditional China ([1947] 1992).

Bartolini and Sarracino’s study ended with data from 2007, just shortly after Chinese happiness levels had bottomed out. Since then, happiness levels have risen at a faster rate than China’s growth in GDP would suggest. We have seen that this can be linked to the fall of unemployment and the improvement of the social safety net. However, following Bartolini and Sarracino’s argument, we would need to conclude that social capital must have risen in the years from 2007 to 2017, in order to explain the rise in happiness levels since then.

Certainly, during this decade, China has seen a proliferation of social organizations, ranging from the purely leisurely and intellectual (e.g., yoga groups or book clubs) to the spiritual (as evidenced in the continuous growth of religion), to the highly political network of the New Citizen Movement, for example. The chapters in this book provide some examples of networks and social support (“someone to turn to”) from within the LGBTQ community, which illustrate the ways in which people seek the support of communities to discuss matters of concern in their lives. They also provide examples of the way cultural resources and values are updated to fit the contemporary context. What is clear through these case studies is that normative values as promoted through official discourses—on “Chinese values” (*Zhongguo jiazhi guan* 中國價值觀) or the “Chinese Dream” (*Zhongguo meng* 中國夢) do resonate at the grassroots. Far from being diametrically opposed or juxtaposed, we can observe a common discursive terrain. A shared core theme is the importance of family—one type of network with shared values and understandings which the

5. Robert Putnam (2000) famously illustrated this through the example of bowling in the US, where, as a result of a decline in community networks, people are now literally “bowling alone” (Putnam 2000).

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is keen to promote and which it supports with more enthusiasm than it does religious groups or civil society organizations. This concept of the family is extended to the nation and is built around common ethnicity and a shared culture, symbolized so effectively (and emotively) in the chopsticks of the eponymous film analyzed in Giovanna Puppini's chapter.

The Chinese Dream, *Suzhi*, and Ah Q

This film is one example of the ways in which the Chinese government has stepped up its efforts on the ideological front to create shared norms, values, and understandings of what it means to be Chinese and to belong to the Chinese nation. This ideological articulation started with the coining of a “harmonious society” in 2006 and has since moved to the Chinese Dream, one of the dominant discourses of Xi Jinping's leadership since 2013. Recently, the term “Chinese values” has also become a prominent element of Chinese cultural nationalism. Dismissing these discourses as mere propaganda that washes over people would amount to disregarding the importance of ideology for the CCP and the significant role ideology plays in its hegemonic rule (Brady 2008). The CCP does not only wish to rule by coercion. Winning over the hearts and minds of people through carefully chosen discourses that resonate in the population was an important factor of its ascendancy to power, and this has remained a key feature of the mechanics of CCP rule. China's ideological discourse makes rich use of emotional and spiritual language. We can see this in the sources from the 1950s, and we can observe this very clearly in the language and the images used around the Chinese Dream. Recently, “hurting China's (or the Chinese people's) feelings” is a new and recurrent reproach, when China's actions are being criticized.

Happiness, specifically, has been core to Chinese socialist discourse from its inception. The Revolutionary Alliance Programme of 1905, from which the CCP ultimately developed, used the term *fuzhi* 福祉 (welfare) to express its aspirations for a new society, a term Xi Jinping reintroduced in his communiqué following the third plenum of the Eighteenth People's Congress in 2013. Chinese sources of the 1950s spoke of building a “prosperous and happy socialist” country (*fanrong xingfu shehui zhuyi guojia* 繁榮幸福社會主義國家) and clearly show that socialism has never just been an aspiration to equal prosperity through the redistribution of resources, but has always also held the promise of a new society, which would bring spiritual as well as materialistic transformation. This can also be observed in contemporary political counterdiscourse. Happiness features prominently in the writings of Xu Zhiyong, for example, lawyer and initiator of the New Citizen Movement (*Xin gongmin yundong* 新公民運動). When questioned in 2005 about his motives in engaging in social action, he responded by saying, “Today, what brings me the greatest happiness is working hard to use individual cases or my research to push

for social progress that will bring dignity and happiness to even more Chinese people” (Xu 2017, 145).⁶

With the Chinese Dream, Xi Jinping signaled the start of a new phase where the goal of restoring China’s greatness has come within clear reach. It also seems to serve as a reminder to the Chinese people that it was the party which delivered the economic improvements that lifted millions out of poverty and brought into existence a now reasonably affluent middle class. The Chinese Dream is, among other things, a way to remind Chinese individuals that their prosperity and well-being, including their mental well-being, are tied to the party-state. Nowhere in this volume is this clearer than in Yeshe Lama’s chapter on Tibet.

China’s hegemonic discourse now builds on nationalistic sentiments around an understanding of Chinese culture as Han culture, practiced by “moderately well-off members of society.” The public service advertising campaign around the theme of “homecoming” broadcast during the New Year Gala, analyzed in Puppini’s chapter, provides one vibrant example of such discourse; Zhang’s and Matthyssen’s chapters show in more detail what qualities and virtues these discourses rooted in Confucian and Daoist philosophies promote, and how traditional sayings and terms have been updated and translated for the contemporary self-cultivation and self-help market.

In the government’s happiness campaigns, which invoke the individual’s ability to learn the correct attitude (to be happy) and to be inspired by the correct values, we can also detect attempts to link the ability to be happy with higher levels of *suzhi*. *Suzhi* is an important example of China’s hegemonic discourse and yet almost impossible to define, let alone translate. It derives from both nature and nurture; it is closely linked to education. According to Kipnis (2007, 390), it now offers a way of speaking about class without using the term. *Suzhi* anchors quality in the individual rather than a defined collective like “the proletariat,” but like class discourse, *suzhi* discourse is decidedly unliberal. It asserts morally justified hierarchies linked to the party’s leadership, which alone can ensure the nation’s success. It is the party itself that has the right to declare who has the highest *suzhi* (Kipnis 2007, 390). Nonetheless, it is a concept with a lot of currency in the population at large.

A person of higher quality is perceived to have the inner resources and capabilities to avail him- or herself of appropriate happiness maximization strategies. This link is particularly evident in Confucian-inflected notions of happiness (see Zhang’s chapter). Happiness seems to have become a new marker of high *suzhi*, if understood as an inner quality, which is cultivated and perfected, regardless of the individual’s material circumstances. As with traditional Confucianism, there is a democratic, egalitarian element to this: in theory, everybody can elevate themselves to higher levels of education (and happiness), provided they work hard enough on their self-improvement. (In reality, this is of course highly debatable.) As we have seen, studies from the social sciences show that higher levels of education do indeed

6. For the original blog post in Chinese, which returns many times to the feelings of happiness, see Xu 2012.

seem to be tied to higher levels of happiness (Bartolini and Sarracino 2015)—the younger, better educated generation of Chinese adapted more easily in the period of transformation and reported higher levels of happiness.

Ah Q, created in 1921 by Lu Xun, China's leading modern writer, is China's archetypal low *suzhi* character, and features in several of the chapters in this volume. Ah Q, perhaps modern literature's most famous Chinese character, is the master of "spiritual victory," a particular technique with which to deceive himself in the power struggles that make up social relations, and which ultimately leads to his own execution. Ah Q's method allows him to wrestle personal victory from the most humiliating defeats life serves him, an uneducated, uncultured, and unsophisticated subaltern at the very bottom of Chinese society.

Ah Q became a symbol of doomed China in the collective Chinese socialist unconscious. It has fed Chinese national sentiment, fueled for a century by the idea of national humiliation and demise, and has instilled the need to change fundamentally the Chinese collective psyche as a prerequisite for the modernization and development of China through the conscious adoption of the correct "spirit" or *jingshen* 精神. These conscious attempts have been informed by Chinese culture's belief in the capacity for self-improvement, brought sharper into focus by the writings of Liang Qichao (1873–1929)—a great idol of Mao's—who emphasized the importance of fiction in the process of changing people's thinking.

Jingshen remains a key term in China's political and psychological vocabulary. The concept lies at the heart of a specifically Chinese approach to the psyche, which emphasizes the conscious mind, the importance of human agency, and the individual's ability to learn and internalize the correct attitude. According to Wendy Larson, in modern China, spirit is the significant concept of orientation through which one negotiates one's social position or one's relationship to power in society. Like the unconscious, the spirit node is deeply situated within the mind and has significant intellectual and emotional implications (Larson 2009).

Some of the psychological methods recommended to the Chinese people in China's vibrant self-help market today (much of it government-sponsored)—be they culturally inflected or informed by positive psychology—are reminiscent of Ah Q's spiritual victory: when it comes to the individual's emotional state in China today it is not so much about "seeking truth from facts," as Deng Xiaoping famously advocated, but about adopting the correct positive mental attitude quite regardless of one's actual situation. As such, Ah Q remains an important archetype, who has gained new significance in postsocialist China.

Conceptual Approaches to Happiness

While existing (limited) studies on happiness in China (often in the form of journal articles) tend to focus on the link between psychology and economics, this volume engages with a much wider variety of discourses and images. The scholars

contributing to this volume all employ different methodologies and disciplines in their investigation of one aspect of happiness discourse in China today, including historical, psychological, literary, artistic, anthropological, ethnographic, and political approaches. We argue that only by attempting to capture a variety of these discourses and their mutual interconnectedness in one volume can we begin to understand the multifaceted ways of searching for happiness in contemporary China.

This multifaceted way is also represented in the wealth of different sources analyzed in the ten chapters that make up this volume. They include magazine articles (both historical and contemporary), popular fiction, proverbs, educational material, documentary films, TV chat shows, public service advertising—ranging from expensive government-commissioned films to small stickers on handgrips on public transport—messages on billboards, self-help books, public lectures, postings in online chat forums, news media, government reports, blogs, and so on.

Befitting its multidisciplinary and multimethodological nature, the different authors bring a number of theoretical perspectives and conceptual approaches to the study of happiness. We are very aware of the dangers and pitfalls of imposing Western theory on Chinese sources; however, as editors we believe in a globally shared knowledge economy. We are not convinced that the China-West dichotomy (while readily employed in China, and certainly in its official discourse) serves scholars and academics well in our shared endeavor to make sense of the complex social phenomena of contemporary China (and the world). Chinese works on happiness, which take a more theoretical or conceptual approach, refer almost exclusively to Western philosophers, a bit of Confucianism, and Marx.⁷ Where more contemporary theories on happiness are referred to, they include Layard and the core tenets of positive psychology. One of the aims of this volume is to bring out the Chinese voices on happiness from different social groups and actors. In their endeavor to understand these voices, different authors employ different theoretical frameworks. They can be grouped in the following way.

Firstly, there are those conceptual approaches that seek to analyze how people are responding to the currently prominent discursive positioning of individuals as primarily responsible for their own fortunes in life, especially through working on improving their personal skills and emotional states (Ehrenreich 2009; Hochschild 1979; Kleinman et al. 2011; Rofel 2007; Stafford 2015; Welzel and Ingelhart 2010), which are referred to by Hird, Wielander, Zhang, and Engebretsen.

Secondly, theories and concepts of affect and imagining are used in this volume to inform discussions on how shifting emotions, moods, and states of mind are produced, received, and used to inspire orientations to the future (Mannheim 1955; Massumi 2002; McCracken 1998; Stewart 2007), including specifically in Confucian

7. For example, Luo (2013).

(Bell 2010; Feng 1997; Tseng et al. 2005;) and queer (Muñoz 2009) contexts. We can see these woven through the essays by Schroeder, Zhang, and Inwood.

A third category of theoretical approaches adopted in this book are those that elucidate the relationality of emotional states. Through their emphasis on how individual subjectivities are always constructed in relationships with other people, these theories provide a useful contextualization to approaches that focus on individualization processes (Mathews and Izquierdo 2008; Stafford 2015; Stoller 2014; Walker and Kavedžija 2015; Yan 2011), used, for example, by Engebretsen, Schroeder, and Yang.

Theories and conceptualizations of class and gender differentials form the fourth category of approaches (Dai 2004; Illouz 2007; Kingfisher 2002; Lee 2006; Osburg 2013; Scott 1990; Wang 2003), as employed by Yeshe Lama and Yang, while Hird and Puppin, for example, engage with several theories that shed light on the propagandizing and semiotic aspects of political and media messages (Barthes 2004; Hong and Chan 2009; Liu and He 2014).

Despite the different disciplines from which the scholars writing in this volume conduct their analysis, as editors we subscribe to the notion and significance of “New Sinology,” which promotes a multifaceted understanding of China and the Sinophone world. It promotes an integrated approach to the study of contemporary China.⁸ New Sinology reaffirms the importance of language and text in the engagement with and understanding of China; this approach will be evident in every single contribution to this volume.

The Chapters

The contributions to this volume show the wide range of media through which psychological language around happiness shapes political discourse and people’s everyday lives in China. Different chapters illuminate how the recent discourse of happiness encompasses both motifs of individual self-interest and collective socialist ethics. Happiness seems to have emerged as a culturally and historically specific and relevant topic for China’s population that resonates across class divisions.

Wielander’s opening chapter analyzes the appearance of happiness in public and political discourse in China in the wider context of socialist modernization underpinned by Chinese socialist views of the psyche. Wielander examines the link between the spiritual and the political and argues that this emphasis on happiness needs to be understood as a continued effort on the part of the CCP to instill the “correct spirit” (*zhengque de jingshen* 正確的精神) in China’s population. She illustrates this point with her findings from close reading of a debate on the meaning of happiness as conducted in *Zhongguo Qingnian* 中國青年 (*China Youth Journal*) in 1954.

8. For a detailed outline of this approach, see www.thechinastory.org/new-sinology/, accessed August 7, 2017.

One clear characteristic of China's continued socialist character is the continued presence of the "visible hand"—a commonly used adaptation of Adam Smith's metaphor to indicate the state's direction—which now comes in many colorful guises, guiding with the help of glossy publications and advertising (see Hird's and Puppin's chapters). It promotes certain "happiness maximization strategies" over others, with particular emphasis on positive psychology. In a context where the level of happiness in the Chinese population has not only become a target of development but also serves as one measure of the ruling party's legitimacy, happiness has become the required emotional state of the Chinese people, even if reaching the target may require a considerable amount of self-deception akin to Ah Q's famous "spiritual victory" method, argues Wielander.

There is no spiritual victory for the party in Tibet, where the CCP's hegemonic discourse on happiness seems to be far from successful, as Jigme Yeshe Lama's chapter (Chapter 2) argues so poignantly. Yeshe Lama analyzes the "official" and "hidden" transcripts (Scott 1990) about Tibetan happiness through close reading of a wide range of media sources. The official designation of Tibet as a "happy" place stands in stark contrast to the realities of harsh suppression and desperate acts of self-immolation. According to the official transcript, Tibetans are enjoying a "happy and healthy" life due to the party's pursuit of the correct development path in Tibet. The happiness of Tibetans is linked to liberation, modernization, and economic development. The building of infrastructure, social welfare schemes, poverty alleviation programs, housing projects, old age pension schemes, as well as strong ethnic unity are all considered to be sources of Tibet's happiness—as well as a gift from China.

Such focus on material gains alone has now shifted in the party's discourse on happiness as far as the general (more developed) Chinese population is concerned, where spiritual aspect of happiness are now emphasized (see, for example, Zhang's and Matthyssen's chapters). In Tibet, which is still lagging behind in development, improvements in the population's socioeconomic situation trump all other concerns. Previous discourse rooted in historic materialism has now changed, but the principle approach remains: Tibet is backward and requires Han Chinese help in order to improve its material situation, and, as a consequence, its happiness.

However, as Yeshe Lama shows, Tibetan spiritual culture, including the values and rituals of Tibetan Buddhism and the teachings of the Dalai Lama, are of great importance to the local population, and much of the newly created material wealth is spent on the regeneration of Tibetan religion. Yeshe Lama shows the presence of strong alternative ideas and sources of happiness among Tibetans, which stands in contrast to the public transcript on happiness.

The establishment of hegemonic discourses relies on effective dissemination, both in terms of the reach of dissemination and in terms of appeal factor. Much of China's creative talent and energy has gone into the production of visuals to illustrate and communicate the party-state's agenda. Chinese socialist propaganda art

now spans nearly seventy years and offers a uniquely appealing catalog of aesthetics, with an unsettling ability to draw one in, despite our knowledge of the social realities and historical events that produced them and the tragic realities that lie behind the beautiful images. In 2014, Xi Jinping reiterated the need for art to “uphold socialist core values” and to “uphold the Chinese spirit” (Roberts 2014), and in the autumn of 2016 the Chinese state passed a law on Chinese film to ensure it “serves the people and socialism” (Evans 2016).

In China’s socialist market economy in the digital age, the party state has found many more spaces and formats in which to display its messages to the population in an artful manner. Giovanna Puppini’s chapter (Chapter 3) takes a very close look at public service advertising, a subgenre of advertising that was launched “to fully realize the ideological role of advertising . . . and give priority to social effects, rather than economic effects” (Gao 2003) as the main tool for the promotion of official happiness in China. Her chapter analyzes the happiness-related cultural representations and signifying practices activated by public service announcements (PSAs), that, by definition, do not sell a product or commodity as such, but promote public goods like “freedom from fear” or “happiness.” She does so on the basis of one particular PSA called “Chopsticks” (*Kuaizi pian* 筷子篇), a lavishly and artfully produced series of short films, which was broadcast during the China Central Television’s (CCTV) 2014 Spring Festival Gala, the most coveted and most expensive advertising slot of all.

All the PSAs broadcast in this primetime slot since 2013 address the topic of reuniting for the Chinese New Year and as such are all related to happiness, the media event itself being referred to as a “happy gathering” (Zhao 1998). Through close analysis of this PSA, Puppini shows that the happiness promoted by the party through the medium of a professionally produced PSA with maximum reach is culturally anchored through the use of chopsticks and the invocation of virtues, which vaguely chime with Confucian notions of happiness, as expounded in Yanhua Zhang’s chapter. Chopsticks, representative of Chinese culture, play an essential part at every stage of a person’s life; the family, representative of the Chinese nation, provides a place of belonging for all those who conform to the promoted values.

This happy nation consists of a range of “reasonably well-off” Han Chinese conforming to heteronormative, extended family arrangements, where the younger generation defers to the older and the older nourishes and guides the young. No minority groups of any kind are represented in this PSA, suggesting that these are not included in the vision of a happy China. It seems that in order to be happy, one has to become like the Han Chinese; only adaptation to Han Chinese cultural values and customs promises happiness.

However, happiness discourse does transcend the heteronormative ideal, as portrayed in the “Chopsticks” PSA. In Chapter 4, Elisabeth Engebretsen maps and analyzes the striking emergence and establishment of stories of parental support, love, and understanding—or “love advocacy” (Broad 2011)—in recently published

film media in parental support-narratives for LGBTQ children. The founding of PFLAG China—Parents, Friends, Family and Allies of Lesbians and Gay—exemplifies an ongoing transformation of parenting practices and ideals in China, where affective articulations are key. Engebretsen maps and analyzes this unfolding discursive terrain from the lens of happiness and contributes important perspectives to the broader debate on happiness in China that this volume engages, as well as to happiness studies more generally.

Engebretsen illustrates her discussion by focusing on three recent films featuring PFLAG China volunteers and affiliates: Popo Fan's *Mama Rainbow* (2012) and *Pink Dads* (2015), and a fictionalized short film titled *Coming Home* (*Huijia* 回家), posted online just before Chinese New Year in 2015. All three films articulate happiness as a foundational quality of the good Chinese life in modern times and acceptance as the premise of support for a gay/lesbian child. Engebretsen asks how parents talk about the process of making sense of and accepting a child's homosexuality and how figurations of happiness, family relationships, and parenthood are constructed in such narratives. Her ethnographic inquiry into happiness in the context of supportive parental narratives of LGBTQ children offers a nuanced approach, and demonstrates that "happiness is best understood as relational and intersubjective aspiration, informed by broader cultural expectations beyond the issue of accepting homosexuality per se. But happiness is also clearly predicated upon preexisting norms for sociofamilial harmony and collective equilibrium, in a stable, harmonious society."

Derek Hird returns to the subject of public service advertising in Chapter 5, but examines more mundane examples by conducting a Barthian analysis of the messages displayed on handgrips in Beijing underground and bus shelters. The starting point of his analysis is an examination of the holistic and embodied dimensions of *zheng nengliang* 正能量 (positive energy) in popular discourse. The term provides a good example of how positive psychology and happiness trends in China have charted their own course by linking happiness and well-being to *zheng nengliang*, which draws from Western and Chinese cultural resources.

Hird's chapter explores how an analysis of *zheng nengliang* in PSAs can help inform our understanding of the kinds of happy subjects that inhabit Chinese discourse today; but he also contributes to broader discussions on modes of subject-making in China's postsocialist modernity. According to Hird, the subway adverts speak to a sophisticated, emotionally aware, self-governing subject that uses *zheng nengliang* to cultivate inner happiness, whereas the bus stop shelter advert addresses a relatively unsophisticated and potentially unruly subject who needs firm guidance on how to spread *zheng nengliang* and create happiness among others. He argues that these differences suggest multiple imagined subjects in contemporary happiness education.

Positive energy and self-governance also feature in Jie Yang's contribution (Chapter 6) on "happy housewives." Yang analyzes representations of "happy

housewives” in popular psychological self-help media in order to examine the relationship between gender, psychology, and privatization in China today. She demonstrates that while both gender and psychology are represented as sites of regulation and value extraction, the heart of the housewife is the true space of commodification, where emotions, value, and virtue are all generated. This felt space of possibility and potentiality, constructed by media in concert with state interests, intensifies women’s attachment to commodities and to the world and enhances consumption and entrepreneurship. Yang argues that happiness promotion, of which the figure of the “happy housewife” is a key part, not only objectifies women and renders invisible their complex subjectivities, but also downplays the intensified gendered exploitation and class stratification between middle-class housewives and working-class domestic workers since the mid-1990s when privatization began.

The example of “housewives” shows that “happiness is both a psychologizing technology and a mode of self-regulation, evoked to govern subjects in terms of their inner strength and self-fulfillment.” According to Yang, it derives from human agency, and the power to seek happiness is a mode of self-governance that can be coopted for broader political and economic ends.

In Chapter 7, Yanhua Zhang examines Confucian notions of happiness—invoked in the government’s lavish PSAs—in more detail. She investigates what accounts for the Confucian turn in happiness “production” in today’s China and how we can make sense of the present “Confucianism for happiness” movement that traverses diverse plains of social life and motivates participants from all walks of life. She does so by focusing on a distinctive Chinese happiness engagement that moves away from the external object-oriented happiness seeking associated with consumerism (in contrast to Yang’s argument) to attend to Confucian self-cultivation as “relational, dialogical, and embodied social practices for developing the ‘moral character and inner capacity for happiness’ (*xingfu pingge/nengli* 幸福品格/能力).”

Zhang draws on the diverse public discourses on “the Confucian notion of happiness” (*rujia xingfu guan* 儒家幸福觀) and the relevant textual sources to examine how Confucian *le* 樂 is interpreted to articulate different needs for happiness in contemporary Chinese life. Zhang shows how Confucian happiness has acquired a meaning of cultivated inner capacity for the good life through the dialogical processes of engaging Confucian texts and negotiating among multiple social and political interests and concerns. Based mainly on the visual and textual data collected online from a private Confucian Academy in Beijing, she examines the ritual dimensions of engaging Confucianism and explores the role of *li* 禮 (Confucian propriety/rituals) in cultivating happiness capacity.

Zhang argues that the Confucian project for happiness should be understood as part of Chinese efforts to negotiate an alternative narrative of modernity which is able to accommodate Chinese cultural sensibilities and mediate the tensions between the existing social formations and the market-based ideologies and

practices in contemporary China. It is a way of finding spiritual comfort and practices from within China's cultural heritage which resonate across wide sectors of society, she says. It is one example where China's official discourses on happiness seems to perfectly chime with a wide part of the population, albeit a predominantly Han population, as we see portrayed in the "Chopsticks" PSA.

William Schroeder's contribution (Chapter 8) provides an example of counter-discourse to established cultural notions of happiness. Based on a detailed analysis of one particular online forum hosted on a queer lifestyle portal, he explores what it means to discuss, look for, and feel happiness in the postmillennial queer PRC. What he noticed when examining the discursive strategies taken in many of the posts about happiness in that archive is that, far from merely demonstrating cultural patterns, the posts more often refuse definitive accounts of what happiness is and use the concept as a foundation for creating contexts in which joy becomes imaginable.

Twenty-first-century online forums fulfill a similar function to the readers' letters sections in magazines of previous decades. They give a personal voice to challenges and dilemmas individuals face, and initiate discussions in which other participants put forward various sides of the argument. As with the discussions from the 1950s outlined in Wielander's chapter, one can never be quite sure about the true identity of its participants. However, since the forum that Schroeder investigates is the online discussion space of a real-world gay yoga club whose offline activities he also participated in, Schroeder is able to present convincingly the identities of the yoga club members whose posts he analyzes.

Schroeder discovered that some kinds of happiness talk were more successful in bringing about togetherness and generating hope than others. A widely circulating happiness meme posted on the forum which presented strident propositions that seemed to diminish possibilities of happiness, did not elicit much shared or enduring approval. By contrast, two posts from well-known yoga club members that carefully discussed the affective benefits and drawbacks of respectively either coming out or meeting heteronormative parental expectations in a filial manner (an issue also explored in Engebretsen's chapter) were much commented on. Paradoxically, Schroeder argues that it is "in the postings of the participant who chooses not to come out, in order not to hurt his father, that happiness reveals itself most strongly, as a sense of openness and hopefulness about potential future rewards."

One aspect of Chinese discourse concerned with happiness is the flourishing self-help market containing popular books, blogs and counseling sites. These sources offer a valuable platform for investigating typical perceptions of happiness and well-being in contemporary China, and how these are promoted and experienced by common people. In such sources, popular philosophies of life are often expressed in proverbs and sayings containing happiness (*fu*), contentment (*zu* 足), and joy (*le*), with their characteristic dialectical phrasing. These proverbs and sayings represent

wisdoms of life strongly rooted in Daoist and Confucian cosmology and ethics, such as constant change, cyclic thinking, and moral self-cultivation.

Mieke Matthyssen (Chapter 9) shows that the wisdoms of life articulated in these sayings are not only products of a cultural philosophical tradition; they also offer concrete tools to navigate positively through life. On the one hand, they embody individual strategies for coping with conflicts, failure, grief, feelings of powerlessness, and the whims of fate in order to stay mentally and physically healthy; on the other hand, these sayings emphasize the importance of harmonizing interpersonal relations (*zuo ren* 做人), Matthyssen argues.

Matthyssen demonstrates how these popular philosophies permeate today's popular psychology and popular health discourse, providing practical guides for pursuing inner peace and social harmony. They advocate endurance, tolerance, contentment, rejoicing in fate, and pretended muddle-headedness; they are built on Confucian virtues and the Daoist ideals of spontaneity and carefree living resulting from the knowledge of Dao. Although they do not encourage immediate action, they are active and intentional strategies for coping with stress and unfortunate events. They are vital elements of the process of self-cultivation. The emphasis is on "training" and "educating" the self, on consciously and contextually adjusting one's emotions and thoughts towards a more balanced, harmonious situation, according to Matthyssen.

These virtues are the polar opposite of the principles that guide the life of Lin Wanrong, the protagonist of the 691-chapter long online novel *Top Quality House Servant*, which is the subject of Heather Inwood's analysis in Chapter 10. Inwood juxtaposes Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream with the kinds of dream-like narratives contained within contemporary Chinese popular "YY fiction" in order to consider how the latter might produce a sense of pleasure in its readers that defies the logic of pursuing happiness via realistic and practical goals. Li Wanrong's story is one of perfect wish fulfilment; no obstacles are put in his pursuit of pleasure which include both sensual and materialistic riches with little concern for morality. Readers of these novels may be holding onto one of the handgrips analyzed in Hird's chapter, which exhort them to be a simple person, to not indulge in fantasies and not worry about imaginary troubles, while deriving escapist pleasure reading about Lin Wanrong's fantastical and imaginary exploits on their smartphones.

Inwood is interested in what the fantasy settings and imaginative acts of pleasure can tell us about the origins and ethical implications of feeling good, a sensation that can be linked to the current global obsession with happiness and well-being. What does it mean that in order to be happy we would need to be capable of traveling back in time, of pushing aside those who stand in the way of our success, and of largely relinquishing our sense of moral goodness in the process, she asks?

According to Inwood, Chinese netizens have referred to the Chinese Dream as a "spring dream" or "wet dream" and described their own dream narratives as the "sleep talking" of losers. While this kind of talk seems far removed from the

idealistic political dream of the rejuvenated Chinese nation, both tap into a shared cultural tradition. When Xi first invoked the phrase of the Chinese Dream, ten days after taking office, people were quick to liken it to the American Dream, even considered it a copy of it. However, for most Chinese the phrase draws on imagery in Chinese statecraft, philosophy, and literature. Chinese rulers framed questions on how to rule as interpretations of dreams, and dreams have figured prominently in Daoist philosophy and Chinese novels (Johnson 2017, 281). The consensus, then, lies in the act of dreaming itself.

Conclusion

Between 2005 and 2017 reported levels of happiness in China have risen more significantly than would be expected based on economic factors alone. Fall in unemployment and the improvement in social safety as well as a rise in social capital are three strong explanatory factors offered up by social science research. The chapters in this volume provide unprecedented insight into the many and varied discourses on happiness in China during this same time period and make a significant contribution from the perspective of the humanities to the understanding of individual and collective happiness.

From the essays in this volume, we can see that the multiple mix of influences on the current happiness boom include no less than the following lengthy list: market-oriented policies and practices, socialist views of the psyche, the strong and visible hand of the CCP, notions of Buddhist spirituality, Han-centered nationalism, mainstream views about “traditional values” and heteronormative family relationships, recently emerging conceptions of homosexual identities, positive psychology reimagined in the light of cosmological forces of *dao* 道 and *qi* 氣, self-regulating discursive practices, Confucian self-cultivation and notions of the good life, internet technologies circulating memes and hosting discussion forums, strong feelings of hope for a better future, harmonizing concepts from millennia-old literature, and the latest feel-good narratives detailing the time-traveling exploits of online fictional protagonists.

Transnationally circulating yet historically embedded, progressive and yet also conservative, happiness discourses and practices in contemporary China reveal the field of happiness as a lively, pluralistic, and contested arena. Collectively, the chapters point towards an important link between ideology, government discourses, and the way they inform and are in turn informed by discussions, deliberations, and feelings circulated in society. The many opportunities for civic engagement, the continuing rise and proliferation of spiritual and religious practices, and the emotional language of political counter-discourses have all impacted on official discourses on happiness. In turn, the increased efforts on the part of the government, which emphasize the importance of intrinsic values over extrinsic values, and its

attempts to build a value system around the Chinese Dream and Chinese cultural traditions based around the family, clearly strike a chord with the wider population.

Underscoring Chinese dreams of happiness is the aspirational model of the “relatively prosperous” Han Chinese with high levels of *suzhi*—a key ingredient of China’s hegemonic discourse; ethnic or cultural diversity is absent in the discourses on happiness. This seems to mirror government visions of ethnicity and nationhood in which Han identity plays a key role (*The Economist* 2016). The one example where we can find a distinct rejection of the hegemonic discourse is in Tibet, where the “happiness” brought through economic development cannot supplant the importance of and desire for Tibetan culture. Another key element, which we detect in all the different sources analyzed in this volume, is the presence of the family as the source of happiness. Here, the dominance and appeal of the traditional happy family built on vaguely Confucian values is striking, even in what one would expect to be more progressive or marginal discourses. There seems to exist a strong consensus across the entire spectrum of the different discourses (apart from Tibet) that harmonious familial relations built on shared values rooted in a plethora of Chinese cultural resources are the main objective and source of happiness.

This volume demonstrates that expressions and practices of happiness in contemporary China derive from much more than simply neoliberal modes of governance. It shows that while there is clear direction from the party-state’s visible hand about preferable strategies of happiness maximization, there is also a considerable degree of engagement with and elaboration on the different philosophies, practices, and idealistic imaginings, resulting in a diverse but broadly shared discursive terrain—provided that the participants have reached a degree of social security through employment and education and feel they are part of the extended family that is the Han.

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Smile Yourself Happy

Zheng Nengliang *and the Discursive Construction of Happy Subjects*

Derek Hird

“Happiness is consistently described as the object of human desire, as being what we aim for, as what gives purpose, meaning and order to human life” (Ahmed 2010, 1). This twenty-first century “happiness turn” owes much to the positive psychology movement and its founding figure, Martin Seligman, former president of the American Psychological Association, professor of psychology, and director of the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Seligman contends that happiness comes principally from individuals’ cultivation of positive emotions (Seligman 2002, xiii). He aims to restore “the rugged individualism and sense of individual responsibility that used to be [America’s] hallmark,” and asserts that positive thinking can overcome any kind of psychological or social challenge (ibid., 68). However, critics of positive psychology cite poverty, racism, sexism, low social status, and trauma caused by childhood abuse and neglect as examples of socio-economic, psychological, and structural factors that are not easily overcome in the quest for happiness (Ferguson 2007).

According to Barbara Ehrenreich, Seligman’s approach reproduces a victim-blaming narrative that claims that illness, unemployment, poverty, and depression are the hallmarks of losers responsible for their own misfortune (Ehrenreich 2009, 115, 146, 168–69, 206). Ehrenreich also sees Seligman’s approach as having its roots in the positive thinking movement spawned by the American Protestant minister and self-help guru Norman Vincent Peale in his 1952 international bestseller book, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (ibid., 92, 102).¹ Yet the ideas behind positive psychology can also be traced back to William James’s advocacy of positive subjective experiences for personal development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to the postwar humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow (Froh 2004, 18–19).

1. The introduction in this volume addresses some of the multiple influences upon the current generation of positive psychology advocates.

Scholars in China and elsewhere have raised concerns that the normative tenets of positive psychology are based on research that insufficiently attends to the diversity of attitudes towards happy lives found around the world and in different sections of society, and to the fluidity of attitudes during an individual's life course (Ren and Ye 2006, 790–91). “Western” cultural and moral values are deemed to be implicitly embedded in positive psychology, acting as underlying assumptions in its conceptualizations of virtue and the good life (Wang and Li 2010, 51). In particular, positive psychology is charged with privileging a set of values principally popular among white, metropolitan, middle-class Americans (Ren and Ye 2006, 791). Psychologists Wang Qian and Li Hui (2010, 50) argue that culturally normative virtues in China, such as *xiaodao* 孝道 (filial piety), compel individuals to consider the happiness of others even before their own. Furthermore, they suggest that in China a certain amount of “negative emotion” (*xiaoji ganqing* 消極情感) is not necessarily considered undesirable. For example, a student who feels guilty about not living up to her or his parents' expectations, and consequently works harder, is generally considered to display virtue (*meide* 美德) and maturity (*chengshu* 成熟) in not wishing to hurt those close to her or him (*ibid.*). Wang and Li fear that without sufficient attention to local culture, positive psychology becomes twisted, unreflective of sociocultural realities, and ultimately unacceptable to the local population. In other words, they argue for a culturally aware interpretation and implementation of positive psychology.

That the autonomous self is called forth in contemporary positive psychology and happiness discourses is no accident, according to Sam Binkley, as this kind of subjectivity is formed through the “micro-practices of self-government” typical of neoliberal modes of governance (2011, 372). In his reading, the construction of happiness as a daily regimen fits the neoliberal agenda to produce independent, resourceful, enterprising subjects:

To govern oneself through the maximization of one's potential for happiness is to govern oneself as a subject of neoliberal enterprise: agency, autonomy, freedom from dependence and external constraint, and the cognitive wherewithal necessary for the pursuit of self-interest are metonymically aligned with the content of happiness itself. (*ibid.*, 391)

While the privatized pursuit of happiness may enable the practitioner to feel happier at least some of the time, the emphasis on individual responsibility for one's emotional state relieves governments and businesses of their responsibility for workers' unhappiness, and encourages individuals to contentedly accept the world as it is rather than seek to change external conditions that cause unhappiness. The current pervasiveness of the idea that self-directed inner change is the route to happiness is also exemplified in the happiness-promising, Buddhist-inflected “mindfulness” programs that Western businesses, governments, and health services have

enthusiastically coopted during the last couple of decades.² Such programs directly serve the interests of big business and governments, according to Matthias Steingass, because they depict the (often unpleasant) socioeconomic relations of capitalism as an inevitability that the individual must adjust to: “Meditation becomes a Trojan Horse to control the mind from within,” as it is “just another tool to enhance individual auto-regulation with an agenda not set by the meditator” (2013, 201).

Positive psychology and mindfulness programs promise happiness through “neoliberal” self-governing regimens. Yet the propagators of such programs often have additional objectives: Seligman’s positive psychology agenda is deeply steeped in American foundational myths of self-reliance and is tied to reinvigorating American national character; corporate mindfulness programs teach employees that they are the source and resolver of their own stress and frustration, not the employers. This individualization of happiness is deeply attractive to political and business elites beyond America with their own objectives. In China, happiness levels have been falling in stark contrast to the marked rise in living standards in the post-Mao reform era. This phenomenon is partly due to the increasingly unequal division of wealth, as a result of which “most income groups find themselves in a more disadvantageous relative position, despite absolute income gains,” giving rise to “frustrated achievers” unhappy about their “relative deprivation” (Brockmann et al. 2009, 389, 391–92). Yet rather than tackle such obvious socioeconomic causes of unhappiness, the Chinese government has responded to this malcontent with its own version of individual-centered positive psychology, which encourages those people marginalized by economic reforms to embrace counseling and learn to “perform happiness” (Yang 2013, 292). China Central Television (CCTV) documentaries on this topic claim the route to happiness requires a smile and cheery demeanor regardless of how miserable one might feel (*ibid.*, 297–98). Unsurprisingly, some commentators have called this “fake happiness” (*wei xingfu* 偽幸福) (*ibid.*, 293).

The Chinese government’s promotion of happiness is part of a shift to a “psychologization” mode of governance, according to Jie Yang, which “manage[s] socioeconomic issues in psychological terms . . . glorifies the psychological well-being of the marginalized and mobilizes their emotions and potentials for political reordering and economic advancement” (2013, 294). The government’s goal is twofold, Yang argues: first, to encourage entrepreneurial individual responses to setbacks; and second, to neutralize negative responses to setbacks that could potentially result in self-harm, family conflict, or social unrest (*ibid.*, 298). This individualized approach is aimed at distracting from the government’s unwillingness to address structural issues behind job layoffs and other hardships, and in effect “psychologizes” the consequences of state policies: for example, the negative consequences of state economic restructuring are depicted as primarily psychological problems, such as depression, rather than political and social ones (*ibid.*, 300).

2. Significant numbers of young Han professionals in China are also turning to Buddhism as an antidote to their high-pressure jobs (Jigme, this volume).

The individual as entrepreneur of her own soul, propelled to find personal solutions to structurally caused problems, is a core element of both Seligman's and the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) varieties of "neoliberal" positive psychology. Nevertheless, despite these resemblances, positive psychology programs around the world are not necessarily predicated tout court on a psyche of "rugged individualism." Formulations of happiness in China combine "preexisting cultural values, folk ideologies, and expert knowledge" (Yang 2013, 297). In particular, the psychologization mode of governance in China infuses therapeutic psyche-centered practices from the West with long-embedded Chinese health paradigms that favor "embodied and holistic" approaches (*ibid.*, 294).

A good example of how positive psychology and happiness trends in China have charted their own course is the vibrant discourse linking happiness and well-being to *zheng nengliang* 正能量 ("positive energy"), which draws from Western and Chinese cultural resources.³ *Zheng nengliang* was the title chosen for the bestselling Chinese edition (published in 2012) of *Rip It Up*, a British positive psychology self-help book by Richard Wiseman. At the same time, ancient Chinese cosmological notions such as *dao* 道 and *qi* 氣 have also shaped the interpretation of this concept. Additionally, *zheng nengliang* as a discursive practice is inseparable from wider processes that connect emotional intelligence and happiness with subject-making and socioeconomic stratification in the reform era. As Sam Binkley (2011, 372) argues, "contemporary formations of happiness [are] implicated in a more general logic of neoliberal subjectification" that facilitates particular "emotional subjectivities." Similarly, Eva Illouz has noted how "new hierarchies of emotional well-being" have emerged under contemporary capitalism (2007, 73).

In just a few years, calls to cultivate *zheng nengliang* have become pervasive in popular, academic, and political debates about happiness in China (Liu and Chang 2016, 61). However, there has been little critical analysis of discursive manifestations of *zheng nengliang* or the kinds of subjects associated with it. To help fill this gap, this chapter examines the holistic and embodied dimensions of *zheng nengliang* in popular discourse, and provides a Barthian analysis of how *zheng nengliang* is used to express emotional well-being and socioeconomic stratification in four public service adverts (PSAs): three on handgrips in Beijing's subway system and one in large poster form at a bus stop shelter. It thus contributes fresh insights into how happiness is promulgated and how happy subjects are constructed in China, and extends the scholarly literature at the intersections of Chinese studies, happiness studies, and media studies.

My aim is not just to explore how analysis of *zheng nengliang* in PSAs can help inform our understanding of the kinds of happy subjects that inhabit Chinese discourse today, but also to contribute to broader discussions on modes of subject-making in China's postsocialist modernity. According to my analysis, the subway

3. I retain the Chinese term *zheng nengliang* throughout this chapter, rather than the literal English translation "positive energy," to convey a sense of its Chinese cultural associations.

advert speak to a sophisticated, emotionally aware, self-governing subject that uses *zheng nengliang* to cultivate inner happiness, whereas the bus stop shelter advert addresses a relatively unsophisticated and potentially unruly subject who needs firm guidance on how to spread *zheng nengliang* and create happiness among others. I argue that these differences suggest multiple imagined subjects in contemporary happiness initiatives, which include but are not limited to the “neoliberal” self-governing subject.

In the remainder of the chapter, I examine *zheng nengliang* in Chinese-language media discourse, then analyze the subway and bus stop shelter PSAs, and finally conclude with reflections on the kinds of happy subjects that they construct.

Zheng Nengliang in Media Discourse

The term *zheng nengliang* came to prominence on the Chinese internet in 2012, reaching number fourteen out of twenty in a media experts’ poll of the “hottest” internet expressions; at number two was the phrase “are you happy?” (*ni xingfu ma* 你幸福嗎?) (Barmé and Goldkorn 2013, 313). The online encyclopedia Baidu Baike entry for *zheng nengliang* relates the wide use of the term in popular discourse:

Currently, Chinese people stick the *zheng nengliang* label on all positive, healthy, endeavor-encouraging, power-bestowing, hope-filled people and things. It has already risen to become full of symbolic meaning and deeply intertwined with our feelings, expressing our hopes and expectations. (“Zheng nengliang”)⁴

The entry further states that “positive energy” was originally a term from physics referring to magnetic fields coined by the English physicist Paul Dirac in the 1920s but only became popularized in its Chinese translation of *zheng nengliang* as the title for *Rip It Up*, Richard Wiseman’s positive psychology self-help guide, published in China in August 2012 just a month after its original UK publication.

According to its English-language marketing blurb, Wiseman’s book “turns conventional self-help on its head and demonstrates how simple actions represent the quickest, easiest, and most powerful way to instantly change how you think and feel.” In short, it argues: “Forget positive thinking, it’s time for positive action” (“Rip It Up”). The book draws on the 1880s’ argument of William James that one can smile oneself happy or frown oneself sad (Wiseman 2012a), which “turned the conventional view of the human psyche on its head” (Wiseman 2012b, 336). Wiseman argues that physical actions, postures, and surroundings can significantly change an individual’s feelings and thoughts; hence, awareness and manipulation of actions and expressions can create a state of happiness. Wiseman “rips up” the

4. All translations are my own. The Chinese-language text reads: “當下，中國人為所有積極的、健康的、催人奮進的、給人力量的、充滿希望的人和事，貼上「正能量」標籤。它已經上升成為一個充滿象徵意義的符號，與我們的情感深深相繫，表達著我們的渴望，我們的期待。”

idea of thinking oneself happy and instead advocates acting oneself happy—such as smiling and moving about confidently—in order to trick the mind into a happy state.

Wiseman's approach has similarities to the “fake happiness” practices of the “psychologizing” CCTV documentaries mentioned above, such as in the account that Jie Yang provides of Song Shuru, a woman in her eighties, who is featured in the CCTV series *Secrets of My Happiness* (*Wode xingfu jinnang* 我的幸福錦囊):

[Song] began by describing how faking happiness had helped her to overcome her fear upon being diagnosed with breast cancer during the Cultural Revolution. She forced herself to fake happiness and to try to smile, even though her life was miserable. She had a serious illness. Her husband was far away at a labor camp. Red Guards subjected her to torture. However, her will to live was strong; she sang and played the accordion at night and smiled (secretly, in her heart), willing herself to stay happy and positive. Song discovered that when she felt happy, her tumor became smaller. She then decided to try and improve her physical health by faking happiness, regardless of the circumstances of her life. After several months, her tumor miraculously disappeared. (Yang 2013, 302)

Song and Wiseman both emphasize that faking or acting happiness is vital to achieving true happiness and well-being. This embodied understanding of happiness is emphasized in the psychologization mode of governance in China, which is more holistic and corporeal than the psyche-oriented approaches commonplace in mainstream Western positive psychology (Yang 2013, 294).⁵

Embodied and holistic connotations are also more prominent in the Chinese-language version of *Rip It Up* than in the English-language text. According to Baidu Baike, the Chinese-language version compares human bodies to magnetic “energy fields” (*nengliang chang* 能量場) that operate according to the laws of physics in the universe's all-encompassing magnetic field (despite there being no such reference in the English-language edition, nor indeed to the term “positive energy” itself):

People are magnets, the universe is a magnetic field. There is a scientific law in the world called the scientific law of attractive force. Whatever you want from the universe, the universe will give you. So there is a kind of positive, healthy, endeavor-encouraging, power-bestowing, hope-filled energy. This energy will promote your speedy success: this is *zheng nengliang*. (“Zheng nengliang”)⁶

Stimulating the innate potential of one's bodily energy field enables people to manifest a more confident and energetic self. *Zheng nengliang* in this sense refers to “healthy, optimistic, and positive upward forces and feelings” (*jiankang leguan*,

5. Here I am making an observation about the emphasis on embodiment in faking happiness techniques, not a judgment about whether faking happiness has the potential to realize “true” happiness or its potential consequences on an individual's capacity to think and express herself critically.

6. “人就是一個磁體，宇宙就是一個磁場，世界上有一種定律叫：吸引力定律，你向宇宙要什麼，宇宙就給你什麼，所以有一種積極的、健康的、催人奮進的、給人力量的、充滿希望的能量，這個能量會促進你快速成功，這就是‘正能量’。”

jiji xiangshang de dongli he qinggan 健康樂觀、積極向上的動力和情感) that bring about happiness in both transitory (*kuai* 快樂) and enduring (*xingfu* 幸福) varieties. At the same time, the universe's positive energy is a "regulating force" (*zhiyue li* 制約力) that will limit the parameters of the possible if people deviate from the "specific properties" (*texing* 特性) of the universe. Large-scale societal disasters may also ensue if people do not keep themselves in line with these properties ("Zheng nengliang").

The alignment of individual bodies with the properties of the universe is a more holistic approach to positive psychology than those which position the psyche as foundational. It brings into play the historically prominent idea in Chinese philosophy of the "dynamic harmony" (Chang 2011, 14) between humans and nature: the *dao* 道 is the ineffable unity of the universe and all things in it, with which individuals should align themselves in their daily activities to lead serene and joyful lives. Thus, through bodily taking up *zheng nengliang*'s discursive invocation to act happily, one places oneself in tune with the positive energy forces of the universe.

The correlation of cosmological forces with energized bodies is a reform-era phenomenon found in popular discourse that echoes premodern usage in distinction to relatively materialist understandings of the body in medical discourse since 1949. Nancy Chen draws on Judith Farquhar's research on shifts in the meaning of *qi* ("vital energy") to show that in traditional texts *qi* was both "cosmic force" and "bodily substance," and the body was regarded as "a microcosm of the universe." Although contemporary medical texts present *qi* as purely bodily, present-day practitioners and *qigong* manuals depict it as a transformative atmospheric or environmental "universal force" (Chen 2002, 319).

This reform-era revival of historical formulations of the body as a "microcosm of the universe" helps illuminate the notion that *zheng nengliang* resides in the related energy fields of the universe and individual bodies. The correlation was very evident in two phrases that became popular in the Chinese blogosphere during the 2012 London Olympics torch relay, when the Olympic torch became a symbol of *zheng nengliang*. The first phrase called upon people to "ignite *zheng nengliang*, detonate a small universe" (*dianran zheng nengliang, yinbao xiao yuzhou* 點燃正能量，引爆小宇宙); and the second phrase delivered the message: "If you ignite *zheng nengliang*, your luck won't be blocked" (*dianran zheng nengliang, yunqi dangbuzhu* 點燃正能量，運氣擋不住). These two phrases are inspired by the Chinese edition of a well-known 1980s Japanese manga and anime series, *Saint Seiya*, also known as *Knights of the Zodiac* (*Shengdoushi xingshi* 聖鬥士星矢), which subsequently became very popular in China ("Shengdoushi xingshi"). The series' catchphrases—"Burn, my small universe!" (*ranshao ba, wode xiao yuzhou!* 燃燒吧！我的小宇宙！) and "Small universe, explode!" (*xiao yuzhou baofa!* 小宇宙暴發！)—refer to the idea that there is a little universe inside everybody, which, if cultivated, will explosively unleash amazing powers ("Xiao yuzhou baofa"). This example also underlines the significance of East Asian regional circulations of cultural products

in the shaping of contemporary popular discursive formations in China (Berry, Liscutin, and Mackintosh 2009).

The extent of the popularity of *zheng nengliang* is demonstrated on the *Zheng nengliang* Filling Station (*zheng nengliang jiayou zhan* 正能量加油站) website, which features a vast range of *zheng nengliang*-associated quotations, articles, books, films, songs, videos, and more.⁷ The concept is deployed by a variety of individuals and organizations. Many popular TV reality shows are permeated with *zheng nengliang* in the themes they promulgate, the attitude and aims of the participants, and the slant the program makers produce through captions and audiovisual editing. One typical example is the CCTV reality/variety show “Infinite Challenge” (*Liaobuqi de tiaozhan* 了不起的挑戰) (Liu and Chang 2016, 61–64). An example of NGO use of *zheng nengliang* comes in a Chinese LGBT organization’s video, which describes the increasing number of gay films made in China as a manifestation of *zheng nengliang*.⁸ In religious circles, Dayuan fashi (大願法師), a leading Buddhist monk in Guangdong, claims in his popular talks for students and entrepreneurs that there is a scientific basis for the production of *zheng nengliang* through the Buddhist practice of “right mindfulness” (*zhengnian* 正念) (Li 2013). Business studies experts, too, are keen to advocate the merits of *zheng nengliang* in fostering a more productive workforce: the leadership guru Liu Jian’s 2012 book *Cultivating employees’ zheng nengliang* (*Peiyang zheng nengliang gong* 培養正能量員工) mixes Western management theory, Daoism, Buddhism, and the classical Chinese philosophical, historical and literary works associated with “national studies” (*guoxue* 國學) (“Peiyang zheng nengliang”).

The rise of *zheng nengliang* in cultural, religious, and business spheres has coincided with Xi Jinping’s elevation to the top offices of state in China, commencing in November 2012 with his confirmation as CPC general secretary at its Eighteenth National Congress. Xi has harnessed *zheng nengliang* for his policy aims at global, national, and local levels. In December 2012, Xi called for China and the US to bring more *zheng nengliang* into their relationship-building (“More ‘positive energy’”). In January 2013, following an announcement during the Eighteenth Congress that the CPC aimed to spread more *zheng nengliang* online, the head of Beijing’s propaganda office urged Beijing’s “2.06 million propaganda workers” to advocate *zheng nengliang* in their online posts, reportedly leaving some bloggers “bemused and angry” (Phillips 2013). In November 2013, Xi urged China’s citizens to use *zheng nengliang* to help implement reforms aimed at achieving the CPC goal of a “moderately well-off society” (*xiaokang shehui* 小康社會) (“Xi Jinping”). In February 2014, he expressed his desire to “make cyberspace become clear and bright” (*rang wangluo kongjian qinglangqilai* 讓網絡空間晴朗起來), and in October of the same year he

7. The *Zheng Nengliang* Filling Station website address is: <http://www.upsbus.com>.

8. The LGBT organization is Tongzhi Yi Fanren 同志亦凡人 (Queer Comrades). The video “10 Great Chinese Mainland Gay Films” (*Shibu dalu nan nan tongzhi dianying* 十部大陸男男同志電影) is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ux5zpOp0rpg>.

called on online authors across China to use more *zheng nengliang* in their writing (“Wangluo kongjian”). According to a flurry of microblog posts, but without official confirmation, on September 3, 2015, Xi associated *zheng nengliang* with the Buddhist-inflected notion of right mindfulness in his speech at the military parade marking the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Japanese occupation of China (“Jinri dianji”).⁹

Xi’s interventions come in the context of state media campaigns that have linked the expansion of *zheng nengliang* in society to citizenship values such as “patriotism” (*aiguo* 愛國), “dedication to one’s work” (*jingye* 敬業), “honesty” (*chengxin* 誠信), and “friendliness” (*youshan* 友善), the cultivation of which are said to be the basis of the “strength” (*qiangda* 強大) and “happiness” (*xingfu* 幸福) of the nation and its citizens (“Hexin jiazhiguan”). The myriad ongoing appropriations and promotion (and occasional derision) of *zheng nengliang* highlight its circulation and exchange among multiple spheres of life in contemporary China.

Zheng Nengliang in Public Service Advertising

I came face to face with vivid depictions of *zheng nengliang* during a research visit to Beijing in June 2013. While traveling round Beijing, I observed the term *zheng nengliang* prominently displayed on three handgrip designs on subway line ten and on a large bus stop poster near Renmin University (see also Puppini in this volume on the promotion of happiness in public service advertising in China). While my choice of these four manifestations of *zheng nengliang* promotion as objects of study reflects my personal itinerary in Beijing, huge numbers of local commuters and pedestrians were also exposed to them on a daily basis. However, I have not yet gathered data on the reception of *zheng nengliang* campaigns. To analyze these adverts, I draw from Roland Barthes’s semiotic approach to text and image in advertising.

Barthes’s now classic reading of a Panzani advertisement shows how texts and images work in tandem to convey both literal and connoted messages. Barthes chose to analyze advertising for three reasons: its signification is intentional and emphatic; its signifieds, which must be presented clearly, are determined by attributes of the product; and the signs in the image, which refer back to the signifieds, are fully formed for an optimum reading (Barthes 2004, 152–53). These conditions are also present in public service advertising, despite the intangibility of the “product.” Barthes identifies three key messages in the Panzani advert: the “linguistic message” of the text, which includes a literal denoted aspect and a nonexplicit connoted aspect; the coded, connoted “symbolic message” of the signs in the image; and the noncoded, denoted “literal message” of the identifiable objects in the image, which is the support for the symbolic message (*ibid.*, 153–54). He also introduces the

9. Xi reportedly said: “The future China will be a realm of people with right knowledge, right mindfulness and *zheng nengliang*” (Weilai de Zhongguo, shi yiqun zhengzhi, zhengnian, zheng nengliang ren de tianxia 未來中國，是一群正知，正念，正能量人的天下).

concept of “anchorage,” which refers to how the text guides the reader to preselected signifieds of the image while avoiding others, and “relay,” a possible function of the linguistic message that occurs when the text provides additional information not found in the image (ibid., 156–57). Although relay most commonly occurs in films and comic strips to advance the plot, it is also used to convey the details of an intended message when readers may not have time to take in the connotations of an image.

Zheng Nengliang in the Subway

All three subway handgrip designs share one side in common (Figure 5.1), on which rests the slogan “*zheng nengliang* every day” (*meitian zheng nengliang* 每天正能量) in large, white, sans serif characters in strokes of equal thickness on a predominantly blue, sky-like background on which float wispy clouds. In the bottom right corner in a small gray speech bubble sits the telephone number for the subway advertising company and the words “subway handgrip investment hotline” (*ditie lashou zhaoshang rexian* 地鐵辣手招商熱線) in the same typeface as the main slogan but in smaller font size. Small yellow, green, and pink hearts appear to the left of the telephone number. The inclusion of the advertising company’s telephone number indicates a commercial motivation to attract advertising business (and expectation that decision-making professionals will read the ad) that is not a feature of “pure”

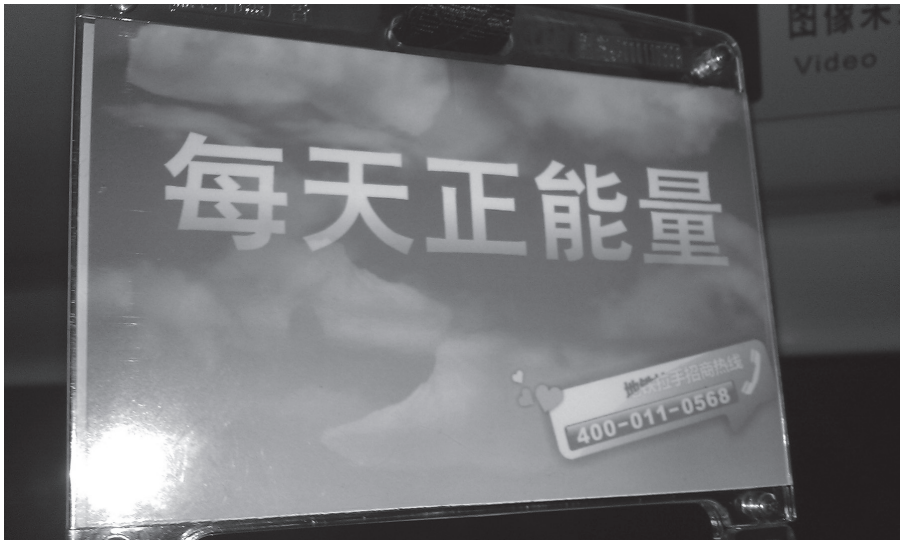


Figure 5.1

“*Zheng nengliang* every day” (*meitian zheng nengliang*). © Derek Hird

PSAs.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the handgrip images and texts solely seek to promote *zheng nengliang*, and as such it is the PSA function that I focus on here.

The principal linguistic message reads literally as “every day positive energy,” and all that is needed is knowledge of the Chinese language to understand this. For readers familiar with popular media culture, the term also connotes holistic self-help discursive practices such as those discussed above, which may include adopting a happy demeanor, and which draw from Western psychotherapeutic and Chinese cosmological traditions. The blue sky with its wispy clouds conjures up notions of calmness and clarity, timelessness, perhaps even hope, ambition, and creativity. Although the concept of “blue-sky thinking” is not commonly used in Chinese, transnationally oriented professionals with English-language and Western cultural knowledge may understand this as signified in this instance. The hearts, suggestive of love and empathy, link the agency phone number with the sky and the main linguistic message. The large, strong, bold strokes of the characters in the phrase “*zheng nengliang* every day” connote strength of mind, and the phrase itself directs the reader to the beautiful blue sky’s abiding presence, and in doing so anchors this very positive, eternal image with the notion of *zheng nengliang*.

On the other side of the first handgrip design (Figure 5.2) there is a blue-sky background with a shining sun, a few clouds, and a paragraph of text on a white, cloud-shaped background. Small blue, pink, and yellow hearts dot the cloud shape. The title of the text, “Live a bit more gracefully” (*huode youyaxie* 活的優雅些), is presented in large, sky blue, brush-style, semi-cursive characters. The main text, in sky blue, calligraphic regular script, reads as follows:

Perhaps your life is not at all prosperous; perhaps your work is far from good enough; perhaps right now you are in a difficult position . . . whatever the reason, when you walk out of your house please make sure you wear a smile on your face (*yiding yao rang ziji mian dai weixiao* 一定要讓自己面帶微笑), and face life with a calm and composed manner (*congrong ziruede miandui shenghuo* 從容自若地面對生活). As long as you genuinely keep this up (*zhengzheng chengqilai* 真正撐起來), no matter what, other people will not be able to wear you down (*yabukua ni* 壓不垮你).¹¹

Self-help pop psychology mingles with a slight tone of moral injunction in this text, which acknowledges that the reader is likely to be in an unpleasant work or financial situation, and prescribes both bodily (“wear a smile”) and psychological (“calm and composed manner”) strategies for dealing with it. The goal of such “fake happiness” practices is couched in terms of individual benefit—one is not “worn down” in the face of hostility from others. The connoted message is that if you are unhappy, it is through your own failure to perform happiness and maintain a sense

10. I thank Giovanna Puppini for pointing out that noncommerciality is a common precondition when defining a PSA.

11. The texts of all three messages also appear, with slight variations, on innumerable websites, blogs, forums etc. without attribution.

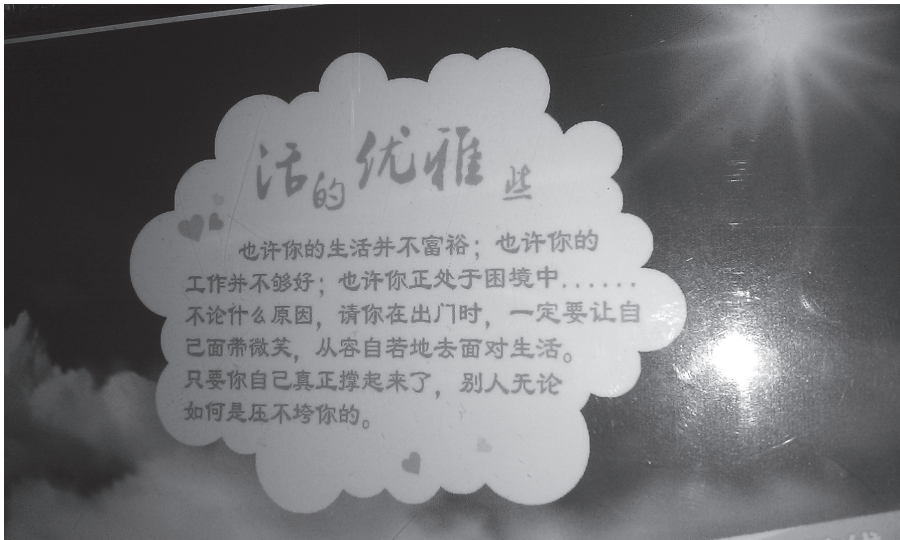


Figure 5.2

“Live a bit more gracefully” (*huode youyaxie*). © Derek Hird

of calm; or to put it another way, each individual is responsible for their own mental well-being, regardless of the circumstances they find themselves in. The combining of bodily and psychological strategies connotes holistic harmony. The symbolic imagery is almost identical to the other side of the handgrip and needs no further comment, save in one respect: lying behind the regular-style brushstrokes of the body of the text and the semi-cursive brushstrokes of the title is the notion of calligraphy as an art form practiced by self-cultivating Confucian gentlemen. In this tradition, well-formed and aesthetically pleasing brushstrokes express the composed and cultivated disposition of the calligrapher. What is more, the act of putting brush to paper is conceived in cosmological terms: *yin* and *yang* relationships are realized with each brushstroke, starting from the very first touch of black ink on blank paper—the latter representing the “undifferentiated oneness” of the pristine universe—until the work is completed and reconciled harmoniously with the *dao* (Fong 1992, 122). The calligraphic typefaces’ evocation of cosmological, philosophical, and aesthetic traditions reinforces the holism of the linguistic message through an affective and intellectual connectivity with a reader sensitive to these traditions.

The second handgrip image (Figure 5.3) consists of a green grassy hill, a large expanse of blue sky, some white fluffy clouds, a rainbow, a wind turbine, and a couple of colorful hot-air balloons. As with the first design, it delivers its linguistic message in sky blue text on a white, cloud-shaped background, dotted with little blue, pink, and yellow hearts. The title of the text, again in brush-style, semi-cursive characters, reads: “Optimism is an attitude” (*leguan shi yizhong taidu* 樂觀是一種態

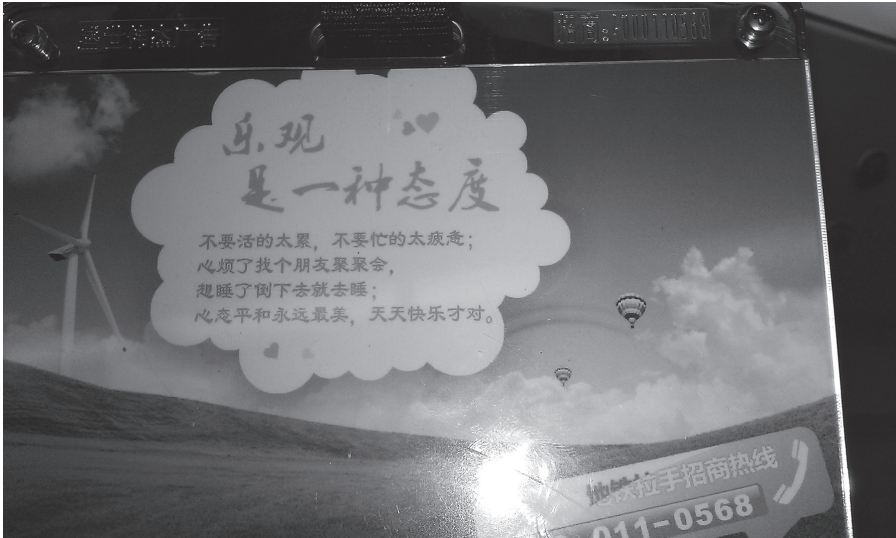


Figure 5.3
 “Optimism is an attitude” (*leguan shi yizhong taidu*). © Derek Hird

度). In brush-style regular script as before, the body of the text gives the following advice:

Don't tire yourself out, don't get so busy that you exhaust yourself; when you feel vexed find a friend and meet up, when you feel like sleeping just topple over (*daoxi-aqu* 倒下去) and go to sleep; a placid mind (*xintai pinghe* 心態平和) is always the most beautiful, one should be happy (*kuaile*) every day.

Although the title of this message advocates a positive psychological disposition, its actual solutions to vexation and tiredness are bodily: social interaction with a friend eases vexation, sleeping helps solve tiredness. No deep explorations of the psyche are required. The living-in-the-here-and-now dimension of going for a friendly chat and toppling into bed connotes a Daoist-like response to tiredness and vexation in its existential immediacy and alignment with natural rhythms. A “placid mind” state (*xintai pinghe*) is a long-established Daoist prerequisite in “life cultivation” (*yangsheng* 養生) practices such as qigong and taijiquan, and also lies at the core of Buddhist meditation and neo-Confucian self-cultivation techniques. The concluding phrase of the message suggests that happiness (*kuaile*) is both a normative feeling and the effect of bodily self-management practices. The injunction to be happy every day links the feeling of happiness with the opposite side's slogan “*zheng nengliang* every day”; in this way the reader is guided towards associating *zheng nengliang* with an ever-present feeling of happiness.

The green hill, blue sky, and wispy clouds are reminiscent of the famous Microsoft Windows XP desktop background image of the Napa Valley, an association easily

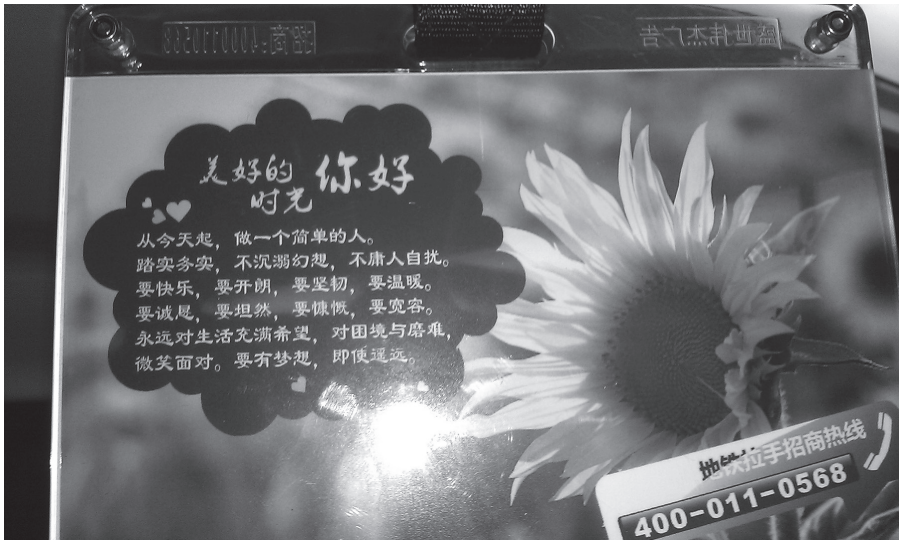


Figure 5.4

“Hello happy times” (*meihao de shiguang nihao*). © Derek Hird

made by the computer-savvy white-collar commuters on the subway. This lends the image an air of the good life in California, affluent, relaxed, and hi-tech. The rainbow reinforces the beauty of the scene, the hot-air balloons convey a sense of freedom and escape from earthly woes, and the wind turbine signifies an aspiration for the clear skies and clean air that Beijingers can currently only dream of. The text does not anchor particular signs in the image, although the reference to the beauty of the placid mind perhaps evokes the beauty of the image, but in Barthes’s sense of relay it adds information to the image, giving the reader clearer instructions to achieving *zheng nengliang* than the image alone is able to do.

The imagery and coloring of the third handgrip message (Figure 5.4) differs somewhat from the first two. The visual focus, on the right-hand side, is the golden brown and yellow head of a sunflower, half of its petals bathed in sunlight, with a fuzzy background of sunflowers in the same warm colors. The linguistic message sits to the left in the familiar cloud-like shape, although this time the cloud is brown. As before, a few little blue, pink, and yellow hearts dot the cloud shape. The overall effect is one of warmth and coziness. The title, in the familiar semi-cursive calligraphy, this time colored yellow, reads “Hello happy times” (*meihao de shiguang nihao* 美好的时光你好),¹² below which sits the text, colored white, and in calligraphic regular script as before:

12. Dictionary entries translate *meihao* variously as happy, lovely, fine, and glorious. Because the handgrip messages prescribe practical steps to feeling good about oneself, “happy” seems as appropriate a translation as any here.

From today onwards, be a simple person (*zuo yige jiandan de ren* 做一個簡單的人). Be practical and pragmatic (*tashi wushi* 踏實務實), don't indulge in fantasies (*bu chenni huanxiang* 不沈溺幻想), and don't worry about imaginary troubles (*bu yongren zirao* 不庸人自擾). You should be happy, cheerful, tenacious, and warm (*yao kuaile, yao kailang, yao jianren, yao wennuan* 要快樂, 要開朗, 要堅韌, 要溫暖). You should be sincere, calm, generous, and broad-minded (*yao chengken, yao tanran, yao kangkai, yao kuanrong* 要誠懇, 要坦然, 要看開, 要寬容). Always be full of hope about life, and face difficult situations and hardships with a smile (*dui kunjing yu monan, weixiao miandui* 對困境與磨難, 微笑面對). You should have dreams (*mengxiang* 夢想), even if distant ones.

This handgrip's linguistic message advocates a large set of positive dispositions and the body-centered practice of smiling as the recipe for "happy times." Complex psychological introspection is played down in favor of being "simple," "happy," and dismissing one's troubles as "imaginary." The dispositions often include an embodied factor: for example, the phrase *tashi wushi* ("practical and pragmatic") emphasizes the concrete over the abstract, *kailang* (cheerful) suggests a happy expression and an upbeat manner of speech, *jianren* ("tenacious") a physical hardiness, *wennuan* ("warm") an air of geniality, *tanran* ("calm") a state of stillness, and *kangkai* ("generous") the act of giving. The final sentence lifts the reader out of the present and into his or her future dreams, a sign of the linkage of dreams and happiness in contemporary discourse (for more on this see Inwood's chapter in this volume). Reading between the lines, the message is that worrying, complaining, protesting, and feeling upset are negative emotions and behaviors that should be dispelled. As with the previous handgrips' texts, this text prescribes an embodied, holistic formula for happiness that places responsibility and effort squarely on the shoulders of the individual reader. The sunflower connotes actively seeking out warmth and brightness in one's life, just as growing sunflowers turn towards the sun. The text implies that the reader can emulate this natural tendency of sunflowers by being a "simple person" without a care in the world, simply smiling warmly and nurturing dreams (but not fantasies!) of better things to come. In this way, text and image convey the meaning of *zheng nengliang*.

To summarize the three handgrips: the blue skies convey a sense of timeless calm, relaxation, freedom from worries, and clarity of thought; the hearts connote love and tenderness; the calligraphy and emphasis on nature draw the reader towards enduring cosmologies and self-cultivation practices that emphasize holistic harmony between person and environment. Underlying all of the above is the message that the individual is responsible for and capable of managing her emotions; and since happiness is a normative emotional state she should nurture her happiness through bodily and psychological self-management. Structural conditions—political, economic, social, environmental, and so on—are not acknowledged as the cause of unhappiness, as is the case with Seligman's positive psychology

and the CPC's fake happiness practices; rather, it is the individual alone who has the power to smile herself happy.

Zheng Nengliang at a Bus Stop

I encountered a rather different rendering of *zheng nengliang* in an advert (Figure 5.5) across the back of a large bus stop shelter in the northwest corner of Beijing's third ring road. This always busy bus stop is near a large supermarket, cinema, and several streets of restaurants and small shops. On the left-hand side of this wide advert sits a large pink heart, streaked through with white; on the right-hand side two large red figures with pink crosses for hearts leap in the air amid numerous small red and pink hearts. The background is white. Across the pink heart in tall black characters a slogan reads: "Offer compassion [literally 'loving heart']; transmit *zheng nengliang*" (*fengxian aixin chuandi zheng nengliang* 奉獻愛心 傳遞正能量). The characters are in a sans serif typeface, and are machine-made looking with thin, angular strokes of equal width, yet are softened considerably in the first half of the slogan by little hearts and curved linking lines. Stylized electric pulses, as if on an electrocardiographic heart *monitor*, connect yet also form a boundary between the slogan's two parts, and reappear in red in the character "能," and a red cross is highlighted within the character "量." A secondary slogan underneath in smaller, yet bolder, black, sans serif, regular script characters, with no stylizations, reads: "Being



Figure 5.5

"Offer compassion; transmit *zheng nengliang*" (*fengxian aixin; chuandi zheng nengliang*).

© Derek Hird

respectful and courteous makes our city happier” (*zunzhong, lirang, rang women de chengshi geng meihao* 尊重 · 禮讓 · 讓我們的城市更美好).

Terms like respect and courtesy are frequently used in state-sponsored civility campaigns together with *wenming* 文明 (“civilized”) in phrases such as “be a civilized and courteous Chinese person” (*zuo wenming youli de Zhongguo ren* 做文明有禮的中國人).¹³ This kind of language is pervasive on the national civility website and its counterparts at province, city, and district levels.¹⁴ In this interpretation of *zheng nengliang*, offering a “loving heart” is defined as being courteous and respectful; it calls upon the reader to modify the way in which she interacts with others, so that the city can be a happier place for all. Concisely stated moral injunctions aimed at society’s happiness in the bus shelter advert replace the subway handgrip messages’ kindly, empathetic guides to individual corporeal and psychological strategies for individual happiness amid the myriad stresses of life. The bus shelter message does not acknowledge that the reader herself may be stressed or indeed may wish for personal happiness; rather, it implies that the reader is the cause of unhappiness in others.

The electric pulse signs, cross symbol, and heart crosses of the jumping figures likely allude to the positive energy charges associated with the term *zheng nengliang* in the study of magnetic energy fields in physics. The leaping human figures evoke vitality and a happiness achieved together with others. The hearts, as in the subway adverts, link this erstwhile scientific term with compassionate, empathetic relations between humans, and reinforce the term *aixin* in the linguistic message, which itself acts as anchorage to the heart images in that it directs the reader’s attention towards them. The secondary slogan acts as a form of relay in that it provides additional information not found in the image—be courteous and respectful—and thus delivers a blunt, unambiguous message for the benefit of the reader with little time to decode the image, unclear about its symbolism, or unsure of the meaning of *zheng nengliang*.

Reading the subway and bus shelter messages together, one is tempted to surmise that one of the stresses the emotionally self-governing subjects of the subway messages have to stoically bear as they go about their business in the city is the uncouth public behavior of the subject in the bus shelter message. The subway handgrip subject emerges as a self-regulating and thoughtful model individual with feelings; the bus shelter poster subject as thoughtless, unruly, and in need of firm, top-down moral directives. Whereas the subway messages help the reader find ways to stay sane and serviceable as a professional employee; the bus shelter message endeavors to effect a society-wide improvement in civility between citizens.

Although both the subway and the bus shelter adverts speak to aspects of China’s socioeconomic development project and its disciplinary ambitions, they

13. See, for example, http://archive.wenming.cn/lyxx/2010-08/16/content_20629476.htm.

14. The national civility website is at <http://www.wenming.cn>; the Beijing equivalent can be accessed at <http://www.bjwmb.gov.cn>.

aim at the distinctive “needs” of differently imagined types of subject: on the one hand self-development, and on the other hand a civilizing process. The subway adverts assume the civility of the reader, but the bus shelter advert assumes the need for the reader to be civilized. Premised on the assumption of a linear civilizing process, the subjects that the adverts call forth are imagined to be at different stages of development: the bus shelter advert assumes a not-yet-modern-enough citizen in need of the appropriate manners for a developed society; the subway adverts speak to a postmodern subject, capable of drawing from eclectic traditions of diverse origins to better manage her emotions.

Zheng Nengliang and Middle-Class Emotional Habitus

Subway advertising in Beijing is mainly seen by young, educated, middle-class, urban residents, and evokes different scales of community belonging, from the local to the transnational (Lewis 2003, 262–65). Commercial adverts in particular “appeal to the idea of a transnational citizen: a transnational consumer citizen” (Lewis 2012, 778). Whereas the bus shelter *zheng nengliang* advert aligns with the many public service adverts in China that “make overt appeals to local government development interests and issues” (Lewis 2003, 263), the subtle cosmopolitanism of the subway *zheng nengliang* adverts has an affinity with the commercial adverts that evoke a transnational community of urbane but stressed-out white-collar professionals seeking strategies to remain physically and mentally healthy enough to climb the corporate ladder. Compared to the bus shelter advert, the subway adverts are more sophisticated in their tenor and more radical in their implicit abrogation of government and business responsibility for the well-being of citizens and employees. The class undertone of the adverts highlights the role of public service advertising in the discursive production of national and global classed identities.

Contemporary sociocultural stratification processes involve the construction of distinctive emotional selves, posits Eva Illouz: “There are now new hierarchies of emotional well-being, understood as the capacity to achieve socially and historically situated forms of happiness and well-being” (2007, 73). Due to the circumstances of their jobs, Illouz suggests, today’s middle classes develop an “emotional habitus” and “emotional intelligence” that privilege them in the economic marketplace, and better equip them to achieve what is considered to represent well-being and happiness:

Emotional intelligence reflects particularly well the emotional style and dispositions of the new middle classes which are located in intermediary positions, that is, which both control and are controlled, whose professions demand a careful management of the self, who are tightly dependent on collaborative work, and who must use their self in a both a creative and a productive way. (ibid., 66)

Emotional intelligence can be viewed as a kind of social capital, since it helps build the relationship networks that help people make more money, gain promotion, and so on; yet it also acts as cultural capital because it facilitates relatively highly valued styles of behavior (*ibid.*, 66–67). The self-cultivation and controlled display of emotions advocated in the subway *zheng nengliang* adverts are attainable and relevant for aspiring white-collar workers, whose emotional intelligence is already honed and receptive.

From the perspective of the construction of class, moreover, the subway adverts should not just be seen as a response to the needs of pressed-upon corporate employees, but also as part of a panoply of discursive materials that train—or “psychologize”—a middle-class habitus or subjectivity to manifest well-mannered compliance with government and business requirements. In the words of Michel Foucault, “one of the prime effects of power [is] that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals” (1980, 98). In similar vein, Jie Yang argues that psychologization is “a process through which psychology as an array of practical modes of understanding and acting penetrates people’s social imagination of who they are or what they might be” (2013, 301). In this sense, the psychologization of the middle classes involves its own distinctive “fake happiness” practices, which aim not only to encourage individualized responses to setbacks and neutralize potentially damaging ones, but also help to effect a model of successful middle-class emotional subjectivity that combines grace, sensitivity, warmth, and placidity of mind. Such coaxing to cultivate a personalized *zheng nengliang* reflects and instills a mode of emotional self-governance that distinguishes the aspiring middle classes from other social groups.¹⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the influence of multiple traditions in the evolution of *zheng nengliang*, including Martin Seligman’s positive psychology revolution, CPC-promulgated “psychologization” and “fake happiness” practices, the magnetic energy fields of physics, William James–inspired action-centered happiness therapy, the circulation of *qi*, and the notion of the body as a microcosm of the universe. This assemblage of elements mixes together the idea of the self-governing neoliberal self with an embodied and holistic worldview that does not focus exclusively on the psyche. In religion, popular culture, civil society, the media, the business world and government policy, *zheng nengliang* is held out as a pathway to happiness, harmony, and stability.

The subway *zheng nengliang* adverts address weary white-collar commuters with soothing and appealing texts and images, and convey the message that personal happiness lies a few simple steps away, completely within the control of every

15. On this point, see also the discussion of *suzhi* in Wielander, this volume.

individual. Their wording acknowledges the pressures the reader faces, and guides her through the physical and psychological measures she needs to take to be happy, such as wearing a smile, staying calm, resting at will, cultivating a tranquil mind, being pragmatic, cheerful, warm, generous, hopeful, and nourishing a dream or two. The flowing calligraphic brushstrokes of the characters lull the eye. The underlying message of the texts assures the reader that she and only she can bring herself holistic happiness. Clean blue skies, fluffy white clouds, green grassy hills, colorful rainbows, soaring hot-air balloons, and yellow-brown sunflowers provide the idyllic images upon which the texts sit. The images reinforce this message of well-being with seductive pastoral scenes that signify timeless, joyful calm, and freedom. The self-help style of the texts echoes positive psychology's focus on individual responsibility, yet the frequent mention of bodily actions and the use of calligraphy suggest a coordinated mind-body solution that brings to mind historical Chinese self-cultivation practices. That this prescribed route to happiness is an individual one is left in no doubt; nowhere mentioned is the responsibility of government and businesses to address unhappiness-causing societal structural issues.

A stark contrast in text and imagery presents itself in the bus shelter *zheng nengliang* advert. An electric current seems to run through the main slogans and the leaping figures, "transmitting" *zheng nengliang* across the city. The secondary slogan's abrupt command to be respectful and courteous seems curiously old-fashioned compared to the subway messages' gentler tenor. No dreamy pastoral idyll backgrounds the text: there is no need for it, nor for a personal tone. The happiness of the imagined reader of the bus shelter advert is not at issue; but her public behavior is. She is a directed subject, not a self-governing one. She is told succinctly to be polite to others, not caressed by self-fashioning body-mind guidance. Her good manners will lead to a kind of communal happiness, the leaping figures seem to signify. Whereas the bus shelter advert's multiple hearts reinforce the main slogan's call to offer up a loving heart to others; the small number of hearts in the subway adverts would seem to signify self-love, as that is the focus of the texts they adorn. In contrast with the bus shelter advert, the subway adverts thus reflect and help fashion an emotionally self-governing middle-class subjectivity, transnationally oriented yet locally situated, a Chinese intervention in the hierarchies of well-being that Illouz has identified as core to neoliberal capitalism. *Zheng nengliang* here serves as a stratifying tool for the development of a class-specific emotional habitus.

Much research remains to be done on *zheng nengliang*, its manifestations in popular media and everyday life, and how it varies across gender, class, age, religious, regional, and other boundaries. One might ask: What individual and social costs does the practice of *zheng nengliang* entail? And more specifically: What is lost and what is gained through developing emotionally placid habitus? This paper's research could be extended by ethnographic investigation, on, for example, how notions of *suzhi* 素質 (personal "quality") might affect interpretations of the two contrasting styles of messages (Kipnis 2007). The reach and distinctive journeys

of *zheng nengliang* across China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Sinophone populations elsewhere require careful mapping, as the middle classes in different locales seek to avoid stress and find happiness in ways that may seem comparable, but upon closer inspection differ in certain respects. Critics of *zheng nengliang* should be taken seriously.¹⁶ At stake is nothing less than understanding how *zheng nengliang* and wider psychologization processes are used to manipulate how people think, act, and understand themselves.

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16. See for example the call for more *fu nengliang* 負能量 ("negative energy") at <http://www.douban.com/group/topic/42590177>.

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