

# Meanings of Leisure in the Everyday Lives of Chinese University Students

by

Xuefei Tu

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

While meanings of leisure have been widely studied from Western perspectives, to date, few researchers have explored the meanings of leisure in non-Western cultural contexts. However, in an era of globalization, it is particularly significant to explore leisure experiences of people from non-Western cultures. This study is then designed to investigate the role leisure plays in a Chinese culture context. Specifically, Chinese university students' leisure experience and the values they ascribe to leisure in relation to their lives as a whole is examined. Their ideology of work and its impact on leisure participation is addressed in particular.

In a Chinese university, criterion sampling method was first applied to recruit Chinese students who could provide information-rich stories about their leisure participation. Snowball sampling method was also used to find more information-rich cases for this exploratory study. 11 participants were engaged in this study. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted to discover leisure experience of these students. Data analysis was guided by a constructivist grounded theory approach to understand the participants' perceptions and meanings of their leisure experience.

The data analysis resulted in three major themes. The first theme "Valuations of Work" addressed that the students placed high valuation on work and their life was ruled by work. The second theme "Two Spheres of Leisure" illustrated the students' ideology of leisure and its impact on their leisure experience. The last theme "Causes for the Subordinate Role of Leisure" revealed two underlying causes that shaped the subservient role of leisure in the students' daily lives.

The emerged themes reflected that the students' lives were centered around work; and they gave little consideration to their leisure participation. Holding such work-leisure ideology, the students' leisure participation cannot always contribute to their well being. Therefore, this study advocates the implementation of leisure education in China, which may facilitate the Chinese people to build a balanced and healthy life style.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Problem Statement

Western thinking is dominant in leisure studies. Important as that contribution is, in a global conceptualization of leisure phenomena, voices of non-Western people should also be heard and acknowledged (Valentine, Allison, & Schneider, 1999; Iwasaki, 2008). As Chick (1998) stated, conducting leisure research in a non-Western culture can help researchers to answer fundamental questions, such as “Is leisure universal?”. Leisure studies of ethnic and racial minorities provide a rare opportunity to expand theory applicable to human leisure experience in general (Stodolska, 2000). Such studies enable researchers to investigate the validity of mainstream leisure theories developed from Western culture as well as detect relationships that would otherwise escape attention (Stodolska, 2000). To reverse the Western domination in leisure studies, a number of researchers have called for more studies of non-Western ideas of leisure. Among non-Western countries, China has the world’s largest population, however, little is known about leisure in China. This study is designed to investigate the meanings of leisure in Chinese culture. It is noteworthy that the word *meaning* itself has multiple definitions; however, exploring all types of *meaning* is beyond the scope of this paper. The present paper focuses on the role leisure plays in people’s daily life and the values ascribed to it.

Recently, awareness of the important role leisure plays in people’s lives has been growing in China. The term *leisure economy* is used to emphasize the more central role that all forms of leisure, not just tourism, play in the emerging Chinese economy. Conferences have been held discussing leisure-related topics, such as the leisure economy, leisure and the family, the development of leisure cities, and sport popularization. Particularly, the government has given increasing attention to the benefits leisure brings. On one hand, the government’s involvement and investment in leisure reflects a concern with the effects of rapid economic, social, and cultural changes in China. As Wei (2005), a National Tourism Administration official, stated,

“China has entered into the affluent society where the demand for leisure is increasing rapidly. Even though the social environment to meet this demand is rapidly improving, leisure as a social phenomena and a concept, is still new to us. (p.2)” On the other hand, the government also recognizes that the right to leisure is a significant part of citizens’ rights; ensuring it will leads to wider social benefits. At a government conference, Wei (2005) noted that “leisure should be a new lifestyle for citizens in China. Ensuring people’s right to leisure is crucial to enhancing their life quality. The government has the responsibility to create a healthy social environment and encourage citizens to develop this new and healthy lifestyle” ( p. 32).

One crucial effort the government made to ensure Chinese people’s leisure is to increase their leisure time. In 1995, the government carried out the two-day weekend policy, which shortened Chinese people’s workdays. In 1999, it increased the total number of public holidays from eight to ten days, and added another one in 2007. Nowadays, the number of legal non-working days for Chinese citizens has reached 115 annually.

Besides increasing the amount of leisure time, the Chinese government has also initiated other leisure policies to protect citizens’ leisure. For example, the National Tourism Administration of the People’s Republic of China has been developing a public policy called the “National Citizen Travel & Leisure Plan” since the beginning of 2009, which is currently being testing in provinces such as Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Shandong. This plan is intended to ensure citizens’ right to participate in leisure activities, reduce their leisure constraints, and further promote healthy lifestyles.

Under such circumstances, the exploration of the meanings of leisure in the daily lives of Chinese people is relevant in at least two ways. First, as leisure occupies an increasingly substantial part of Chinese people’s lives, understanding how they spend their leisure time, more importantly, how they understand their leisure experiences and what values they ascribe to leisure, allows us to explore the relationships among leisure and other important social constructs (e.g., health, happiness, and well-being). Questions such as “Does leisure contribute to Chinese people’s life quality? If so, how?



If not, why?” can be asked.

Secondly, understanding meanings of leisure from the perspective of Chinese citizens can assist the government to better engage in its leisure involvement and provision. Godbey and Shim (2008) suggest that China’s industrial revolution is unique, owing to factors as diverse as a high population density, the continuing influence of Confucian thinking and Taoism in everyday life, and the dialectic thinking of Chinese. This uniqueness can lead to distinct features in Chinese people’s leisure. Wei (2005) also noted that “In order to develop leisure industry in China, we need to first learn from developed countries’ experiences. Then we need to take China’s distinct characteristics into consideration and develop a leisure industry that is suitable for Chinese people. (p.2)” Examining leisure experiences and the meanings of Chinese people’s leisure can assist leisure practitioners to have a better understanding of the status quo of leisure in China, initiate Leisure policies that are deep rooted in Chinese history and culture, and provide leisure-related services that are in the best interests of Chinese people. Unfortunately, rarely has any empirical study been conducted with respect to this issue. This study attempts to address this gap.

## **1.2 Study Purpose**

The participants of this study were selected from Chinese university students. This choice was made in response to two considerations. First, just one year ago, I graduated from a Chinese university; thus, it was convenient for me to approach the participants and establish a sense of trust with the students. In addition, university students are relatively well educated in China; they are more likely to express themselves smoothly which may be an important consideration in a society that has not stressed leisure over much of its recent history. This study examines the role leisure plays in Chinese university students’ daily life. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to explore the leisure experiences of Chinese university students and the meanings they ascribe to leisure in relation to their lives as a whole.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The central question that guides this study is: How do Chinese university students come to understand leisure in their everyday lives? With the central research question as an overarching guide, sub-questions included:

1. What experiences do Chinese university students associate with leisure? What distinguishes these experiences from other experiences (e.g., work)?
2. What role does leisure play in Chinese university students' lives?
  - a. What benefits or costs do they attribute to their participation in leisure activities?
  - b. How do they describe the relationships among leisure and other aspects of their daily lives (e.g., work, and study)?
  - c. How relevant are their leisure experiences to them in terms of life quality and life satisfaction?

Literature related to this study is reviewed in Chapter 2, which includes three parts: 1) the meanings of leisure in Western culture, 2) the importance of using culture as a variable in leisure research, and 3) previous leisure studies about Chinese people.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Leisure Meanings in Western Culture**

This section reviews four research approaches that have been used to explore and measure the meanings of leisure in Western culture. They are: 1) identifying leisure meanings by defining the characteristics of leisure; 2) relating leisure meanings to individuals' socio-demographic characteristics or personal and social contexts; 3) associating leisure meanings with leisure satisfaction and individuals' peak experiences; and 4) exploring leisure meanings by utilizing the phenomenology methodology. Both the findings of these studies and methods applied will be examined in this chapter.

First, a number of researchers have applied the approach of identifying characteristics that individuals use to define the concept of leisure (Schulz & Watkins, 2007). For example, leisure and non-leisure phenomena have been compared to pinpoint the unique properties of leisure. Iso-Ahola (1979) described eight activity scenarios based on determinants of work and leisure drawn from theoretical models and had participants rate which of the scenarios meant leisure to them. The core components of leisure identified in this study were perceived freedom, intrinsic motivation, and low work orientation. Shaw (1984) asked participants to keep diaries of daily activities as well as define activities as leisure and non-leisure using perceptual dimensions derived from literature sources and participants interviews. Her study uncovered five dimensions of leisure which includes enjoyment, physical, emotional and mental relaxation, freedom of choice, intrinsic motivation, and a lack of self or others' evaluation. Esteve, Martin, and Lopez (1999) developed a self-report measurement tool based on determinants of leisure identified in previous studies to assess people's feelings when involved in a leisure activity. Three underlying aspects were revealed by the multidimensional scale. They were effort level, social interaction, and purpose.

Some other researchers conceptualized leisure by comparing leisure with related

phenomena. Mobily (1989) examined the linguistic meanings of leisure and recreation by dividing high school students into two groups and asking the first group to write down different words associated with the stimulus words (“leisure” and “recreation”) in 60 seconds, while the other group was given 60 seconds to think before writing seven words that best defined the stimulus words. The term leisure was found to be closely related to hedonistic responses (e.g., fun, pleasure, and enjoyment) and passive activities (e.g., sleep, relaxation, and reading). Recreation, however, was often associated with active activities (e.g., football, swimming).

Godbey (1985), moreover, critically examined definitions that conceptualized leisure as free time, state of mind, state of being and activities, and then further proposed his own definition of leisure:

Leisure is living in relative freedom from the external compulsive forces of one’s culture and physical environment so as to be able to act from internally compelling love in ways which are personally pleasing, intuitively worthwhile, and provide a basis for faith (p. 9).

Furthermore, Mannell and Kleiber (1997) suggested that leisure can be conceptualized and operationalized as an objective or subjective phenomenon. In terms of the former, leisure was understood as certain types of activities, settings, or time periods, and is typically measured through time-budgets or activity inventories. In terms of a subjective phenomenon, leisure was defined as certain types of meanings, experiences, or needs satisfied. Samdahl (1991), on the other hand, quantitatively explored whether leisure should be measured as a categorical phenomenon or a phenomenon in incremental degrees. She utilized an experience sampling method (ESM) by randomly paging participants and asked them to evaluate situations they were in (“I would call this leisure”), using a seven-point Likert scale. Samdahl found that the participants’ responses were distributed evenly throughout the mid-range of the scale, while a large number of the responses were recorded at the extreme endpoints. She concluded that while using a categorical assessment format could offer a global measure of leisure, assessing leisure in incremental degrees could better capture the true nature of most daily experiences.

Secondly, a group of researchers studied different leisure meanings by relating

differences to socio-demographic characteristics or personal and social contexts. For instance, Henderson (1996) reviewed literature about women's leisure and suggested that "a 'meaning' of women's leisure was emerging (i.e., women share a common world in their inequality in leisure when compared to male privilege, social interactions represent a common focus of women's leisure, women tend to use the home and unstructured activities as the main place and means for leisure expression, much of women's leisure is fragmented)" (p. 140). In a study that examined (Lee, Dattilo, & Howard, 1994) the meaning of leisure for middle-aged women and men, leisure was described as an experience of change in which there was perceived relative choice. Leisure generated feelings of enjoyment, relaxation, and rejuvenation. Meanwhile, it was experienced by both female and male respondents in affiliative and agentic practices. In addition, the study indicated that, while perceived choice was important to all, the range of choice was perceived differently by gender. Women's leisure was largely shaped by their relationships with others while men's was not. Wearing (1990) studied the meaning of leisure for mothers of first babies from a feminist perspective, after conducting interviews, the researcher stated that the idea that mothers are people and all people have a right to have time and space for themselves was valued by all the respondents. Her study also found that 65% of the respondents defined leisure as "[a] free choice to do something or nothing for your own enjoyment" (p. 46).

Besides using gender as a variable to understand the meanings of leisure, other personal and social contexts have been taken consideration as well. Dupuis and Smale (2000) examined the meanings of leisure in the institution-based caring giving context. Their study adopted in-depth, active interviews in conjunction with personal logs to study how the meaning of leisure for care givers might be affected over an extended period. The study suggested that adult daughters manifested five caregiving roles: active monitors, regular visitors, indirect supporters, unaccepting relinquishers, and accepting relinquishers. Dupuis and Smale noted, "As care givers' perceptions of their role changed over their institution-based caregiving careers, so did the meaning of leisure in their lives" (p. 329). Three dominant leisure manifestations in this context

were also identified: leisure constriction in the early phases of the caring giving journey, leisure moments in the mid-phases, and leisure reclamation in the later phases. Parr and Lashua (2004) explored leisure service practitioners' perceptions of meaning of leisure as well as those of non-practitioners. The results of their study showed that both groups supported traditional views of leisure (e.g., free time, activity). Both groups also agreed that the notion of leisure was a multidimensional and complex concept. Meanwhile, practitioners saw themselves in terms of the programmatic roles they played in the field.

The third approach researchers have adopted to measure or understand the meanings of leisure is associating leisure meanings with leisure satisfaction and measure individuals' peak or memorable experiences of leisure. Lee *et al.* (1994) explored the multi-dimensional nature of "extraordinary" leisure experience by using in-depth interviews and self-initiated-tape-recording method (SIRM). The analysis of interview data indicated three salient defining elements of leisure, including enjoyment/fun, relaxation, and the condition of freedom of choice. The results of SIRM data suggested that leisure experience was complex and transitory. It was not only pleasurable, but also stressful and often associated with tension.

Walker and Deng explained, "One way to determine the quality of a leisure experience is to examine how involving it is" (2003/2004, p. 247). Studies suggested that flow states might occur during highly involving leisure experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). The flow state was characterized by nine defining dimensions: challenge-skill balance, action-awareness merging, clear goals, unambiguous feedback, autotelic experience, a sense of control, loss of self-consciousness, transformation of time, and concentration on the task at hand (Jackson & Marsh, 1996). Flow states generally take place when skill and challenge, its two most theoretically important dimensions, are at high and approximately equal level, therefore, they occur more in active leisure than in passive leisure (Walker & Deng, 2003/2004). It is noteworthy that while flow can occur during participation in leisure activity, it is not unique to leisure experiences. Flow states also happen frequently during work and other types of activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) include

physical activities (Decloe, Kaczynski, & Havitz, 2009).

Lastly, Watkins and Bond (2007) first applied the phenomenology approach to explore the meanings of leisure. The study allowed university student respondents to explore their leisure experiences through open ended questions. Four qualitatively different experiences were revealed. Respectively, they were labeled as: Passing Time, Exercising Choices, Escaping Pressure, and Achieving Fulfillment. After comparing and interpreting the four experiences, the researchers proposed that different leisure experiences were associated with increasing levels of complexity in how leisure was understood. From the least to the most complex understandings of leisure, the order of the four experiences as Passing Time, Exercising Choices, Escaping Pressure and Achieving Fulfillment. Based on the results of the phenomenological study, Schulz and Watkins (2007) developed a 27-item Leisure Meaning Inventory as a scale for measuring different ways of experiencing leisure. The scale was tested using a sample of residents from an Australian state capital city. The analysis of the data confirmed that the four experiences emerged from this phenomenological study were useful when presented in the form of a psychometric scale. Meanwhile, Passing Time and Escaping Pressure were found to be the strongest experience rated by the participants.

In summary, researchers have explored leisure meanings from Western perspectives by distinguishing leisure from non-leisure phenomena and leisure-related phenomena. They have also described different meanings of leisure by relating differences to socio-demographic, personal, and social contexts. In addition, phenomenology approach has been applied to understand how meanings of leisure were understood.

## **2.2 Culture as a Variable**

Chick (1998) has argued that few leisure researchers have used anthropological data or anthropological perspective in their research, therefore the contribution of anthropology to the studies of leisure has been minimal. In leisure studies, however, ethnic/racial leisure research has contributed to uncover the importance of using

culture as a variable in leisure research. Research on the leisure behavior of ethnic/racial minorities has become an important sub-field of leisure studies (Shinew, Floyd, & Parry, 2006). Researchers have attempted to understand different ethnic patterns of leisure participation and sought to make sense of the ethnic/racial dynamic in leisure settings (Floyd, 1998). The role of culture has been given increasing attention in this field primarily because culture has been perceived as a key component of the construct of ethnicity. For example, Nagel (1994) stated that:

Ethnicity is socially constructed out of the material of language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry or regionality. The location and meaning of particular ethnic boundaries are continuously negotiated, revised, and revitalized, both by ethnic group members themselves as well as by outside observers (p. 152-154).

Barth (1969) indicated that an ethnic group is 1) “largely biologically self-perpetuating,” 2) sharing “fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms,” 3) made up of “a field of communication and interaction,” and 4) having “a membership which identifies itself”, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same type” (p. 10-11). Van den Berghe (1976) constructed ethnicity in terms of national origin, religion, language, and culture. Similarly, Freysinger and Kelly (2004) defined ethnicity as “some combination of country of origin, physical traits, language, religion, food, holidays, and other customs” (p. 224). According to the definitions listed above, culture has been perceived as a crucial element in defining ethnicity despite that ethnicity has been conceptualized in multiple ways. Since “Culture provides the content and meaning of ethnicity” (Nagel, 1994, p. 162), a primary reason for the differences of leisure found among ethnic groups is due to different cultural contexts. Culture plays an important role in shaping individuals’ leisure behavior and influencing their understanding of leisure meanings. Different cultural contexts lead to different leisure patterns. According to Freysinger and Kelly (2004), the forms of leisure are products of the culture. “Leisure is not some transcendent state of being; it is thoroughly embedded in particular cultures and subcultures” (Freysinger & Kelly, 2004, p.116). Heimingway (1998) also contended that the true human richness of



leisure is more likely to be uncovered by examining the multiple cultural and historical forms leisure takes, their meanings to participants and analysts alike, and the replication of or challenge to existing institutions and practices. Therefore, to better understand the leisure phenomenon, it is essential to use culture as a variable in leisure studies.

Even though it is widely agreed that culture can significantly influence individuals' leisure behavior, only a limited number of studies have purposely examined the impact of culture on leisure participation. This is not surprising, given that "the culture concept has been of limited value to social scientists in explaining behavior because of how it has been defined" (Chick, 2009). Defining culture is a notoriously difficult task (Chick & Dong, 2005); researchers have tended to accept the concept of culture or subculture as given rather than concepts in need of definition and explanation (Floyd, 1998). However, the fact that defining culture has been regarded as an extremely difficult task should not prevent leisure researchers from trying. As Brumann (1999) proposed, "Confronted with this dilemma, I propose that we go on using the concept of culture, including the plural form, because of its practical advantages. We should do so in a responsible way, be attentive to the specific audience and also to the problem of communicative economy" (p. S7). Moreover, despite the continuous debate about the definition of culture, Chick (2009, p.307) noted that "the meaning of a word is determined simply by how it is used". He further stated that "rather than trying to arrive at the 'correct' definition, a better strategy may be to determine what can be done with culture as a construct" (p.307). In this study, culture is understood as "constituted by the meanings and practices of ordinary men and women" (Barker & Galasiński, 2001 p.3). In the leisure context, group members who share same cultural context will presumably share a distinct set of cultural values which leads to their different leisure behavior than members from another cultural context (Li, Chick, Zinn, Absher, & Graefe, 2007).

Furthermore, culture is regarded as centrally concerned with questions of shared meanings (Barker & Galasiński, 2001).

To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the

world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus, culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and “making sense” of the world, in broadly similar ways. (Hall, 1997:2)

In this sense, to understand culture is to explore how meaning is produced symbolically through the signifying practices of language within material and institutional contexts (Barker & Galasiński, 2001). Therefore, by examining Chinese university students’ leisure experiences, practices and meanings of leisure, this study can also enhance an understanding of culture within this social group.

Besides the challenge of defining culture, another reason for the lack of cultural research in leisure studies is that very limited leisure studies of any kind have been undertaken in non-Western cultures. A gap on leisure studies between west and east continues to exist with most of them conducted in Western cultural context (Iwasaki, Nishino, Onda, & Bowling, 2007). However, there is a need to reverse the western domination in leisure research. As Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen (2002) stated “by recognizing the limits of our current knowledge...and by seeking to extend our data and theory through the inclusion of other cultures...we can reduce the culture-bound nature of the discipline” (p.9). Fortunately, the body of cross-cultural comparative leisure studies is increasing. These studies have begun to introduce culture as a variable into leisure studies and provide empirical evidence to support the rarely-tested proposition that leisure behavior varies cross-culturally. Additionally, rather than simply describing differences in leisure perception and behavior of members from different cultural groups, these studies attempted to discover how cultural values influence the underlying social psychological processes of experiencing leisure (Mannell, 2005). However, acknowledging that in non-Western cultures leisure “may be called something else and conceptualized somewhat differently” (Chick, 1998 p.127), to understand the influence of culture on leisure more deeply, “Western leisure researchers should learn from nonwestern researchers, and, more importantly, should learn from nonwestern people living in nonwestern cultural contexts” (Iwasaki *et al.*, 2007 p.6), rather than simply imposing leisure ideals

or ideas onto non-westerners.

Focusing on the impact of culture on leisure meanings does not mean to imply that culture is the only factor related to leisure meanings or leisure is experienced in the same way across individuals from a same culture. Rather, it is an attempt to make explicit the contexts of leisure experiences so as to better understand meanings of leisure.

### **2.3 Leisure Studies about Chinese People**

The word Leisure is usually translated into Chinese as Xiu Xian. (休闲 in Mandarin). Even though making language translation of the term leisure at a 100% success rate is nearly impossible (Dimanche, 1994; Iwasaki *et al.*, 2007), the history of Chinese language indicates that the ideas and ideals of Xiu Xian have been playing significant roles in Chinese culture for 5,000 years (Liu, Yeh, Chick, & Zinn, 2008). “Like leisure, Xiu Xian can mean ‘free time’ or ‘idleness,’ or it can suggest a comfortable social status, a spiritual or aesthetic condition, or even a state of being” (Liu *et al.* 2008, p. 485). Therefore, the Chinese term Xiu Xian is comparable with leisure. Moreover, knowing the etymological origin of Xiu Xian may provide some insight into Chinese culture and its influence on leisure. Chinese writing is composed of characters known as pictographs and ideographs: Pictographs began as drawings of the objects they represent; while ideographs began as representations of abstract ideas such as numbers or directions (Liu *et al.*, 2008). After being used as long as 5,000 years, however, most pictographs and ideographs have become highly stylized (Liu *et al.*, 2008). The character 休 (Xiu) combines 人 (Ren, an image of a person), and 木 (Mu, an image of a tree). When combined they form a graphic representation of a person leaning against a tree for rest (Liu *et al.*, 2008; Walker & Deng, 2009). The second character 闲 (Xian) combines 门 (Men, the image for door) and 木 (Mu, the image for tree). This character symbolizes a log barring a door and represents a protected, undisturbed space (Liu *et al.* 2008). Hence, the etymological origin of Xiu Xian reflects Chinese leisure’s reposefulness.

Previous leisure studies about Chinese people have also indicated that leisure in Chinese culture exhibits a passive nature to a greater extent than in Western culture. Several researchers have concluded that leisure in traditional Chinese society has exhibited following characteristics: 1) Chinese people prefer quiet, more passive activities rather than strenuous physical exertion, while leisure is more active and action-oriented in Western culture; 2) Chinese people tend to be spectators rather than participants engaged in active leisure activities, such as sports. 3) Instead of participating in outdoor leisure activities, Chinese people prefer indoor leisure activities, such as reading, listening to music, and talking with friends. 4) Compared to Westerners, Chinese are more work-oriented; 5) Fewer Chinese leisure activities involve teamwork or play by a large group of people compared to Western leisure pursuits, instead, many Chinese leisure activities are individualistic; 6) The idea of leisure is less organized in China, with many being unable to identify leisure much in the way of Western people do in their lives (Wang & Stringer, 2000).

The passive nature of Chinese people's leisure has also been supported by a number of empirical studies. For example, Yu and Berryman (1996) found that Chinese immigrant high school students who were newly arrived in United States participated most frequently in home/indoor activities and least frequently in sports and other outdoor activities. The five most popular indoor activities were reported as watching Chinese programs on TV or radio, listening to Chinese music/songs, talking on the telephone, reading Chinese newspapers, magazines, and reading Chinese books. The researchers concluded that the activities these students involved in were less organized, less expensive, less physically active, less skill oriented, and more easily accessible than many other types of activities. According to Yin (2005), watching TV, reading books or newspapers, listening to the radio, playing Majiang (a Chinese game, similar to some Western-style card games), and chatting with family members were the most popular leisure activities Chinese do at home. Outside the home, going to parks, playing Majiang, going to movies were found to be the most common leisure activities. Moreover, the researcher also indicated that many households in China spent a significant amount of time watching sports on TV rather than participating

themselves. Su, Shen, and Wei's (2006) study about differences in the leisure life between rural and urban elderly residents in China suggested that compared to other leisure activities, outdoor exercises was less often selected as a favorite leisure activity by both rural and urban respondents. Meanwhile, taking care of children and chatting with friends and relatives were reported as favorite leisure activities by rural respondents with travelling most commonly selected by urban respondents. The study also found that 10.6% rural respondents and 5.6% urban counterparts reported idling or doing nothing in their non-work time. In Li and Stodolska's (2006) qualitative study of Chinese graduate students in United States, even though some interpreted leisure as an opportunity for learning, the participants generally perceived leisure as a feeling of relaxation. Similarly, Walker and Wang's (2009) ESM study revealed that Chinese/Canadian students primarily engaged in passive leisure activities with lesser effort. They also found that participants differentiated leisure and non-leisure activities mainly in terms of high intrinsic motivation, low effort, and low introjected reward motivation (e.g., enhancing pride).

Given the unique characteristics of Chinese people's leisure, some researchers have proposed that traditional Chinese culture has played a significant role in shaping Chinese people's leisure. They especially emphasized the impact of two major schools of thoughts in China: Taoism and Confucianism (Liu *et al.*, 2008). For example, Wang and Stringer (2000) contended that Taoism has a strong influence on Chinese leisure. Taoism suggests that contemplation of nature leads to individual peace, tranquility, and an understanding of the meaning of life. Hence, it encourages people to retreat to nature and attain a harmonious state between people and nature. Moreover, another central tenet of Taoism is Wu Wei, which means one should "discern and follow the natural forces – to follow and shape the flow of events" (p.35) and "master circumstances by understanding their nature and principle, then shape one's actions in accordance with these" (p.35). Therefore, under Taoism's influence, Chinese people prefer the quiet, solitary appreciation of the natural beauty, while Americans are more likely to enjoy outdoor activities for the challenge, thrill, and excitement they offer (Wang & Stringer, 2000). Similarly, Liu *et al.* (2008) pointed out that Taoism

influences Chinese people's ideas and ideals of leisure by emphasizing "the value of a natural unoccupied spirit and living a leisurely lifestyle" (p.486).

Furthermore, the researchers also indicated that not only Taoism but also Confucianism has impacted Chinese leisure. Confucians "advocates a relatively free and leisurely mind or state while at the same time caring for the people and the country" (p.487). Tsai (2006), however, examined the influence of Confucianism on Chinese people's leisure from another perspective. The researcher argued that the influence of Confucian on Taiwan culture significantly constrained Taiwan women's leisure participation. The values of Confucianism are hierarchical within generations, within families, between ruler and the ruled. Accordingly, women have been regarded as being ignorant, limited, and inferior. After conducting in-depth interviews with 49 female employees in a Taiwan textile company, the author concluded four types of leisure constraints of participations are influenced by traditional Confucianism ideology. They are economic constraints, domestic constraints, social constraints, and cultural constraints.

Another group of researchers have compared individuals' social psychological characteristics within different cultural contexts to explain the uniqueness of Chinese people's leisure. For example, in order to understand the relationship between culture and leisure motivation. Walker, Deng, and Dieser (2001) examined the motivations of outdoor recreationists who identified themselves as being Chinese and compared their motivations with Euro-North Americans. The study was conducted by using Markus and Kitayama's (1991) construct of self-construal as an intervening variable between ethnicity, acculturation, and motivations for outdoor recreation. Their study suggested that ethnicity directly affected types of self-construal. Individuals from North America and West Europe were more likely to have independent self-construals which led to their preferences for being unique, expressing themselves, and promoting their own goals. Meanwhile, Chinese participants were prone to hold interdependent self-construals and valued belonging, fitting in, and promoting others' goals. Followed by this empirical study, Walker, Deng, and Dieser (2005) proposed that members of different cultural groups have different self constructs and processes. For instance,

people from North America and West Europe are likely to have independent self-construals, while people from Asia, Africa, and Southern Europe tend to have interdependent self-construals. Different types of self-construals will affect individuals' cognitions, emotions, and even their intrinsic motivations. The researchers further argued that while satisfying the need for autonomy (i.e., "the desire to self-organized experience and behavior and to have activity be concordant with one's integrated sense of self") (p. 83) can foster intrinsic motivation, it may do so mainly for individuals with independent self-construals. On the other hand, satisfying the need for relatedness (i.e., "the desire to feel connected to others-to love and care, and be loved and cared for") (p. 83) is more likely to generate intrinsic motivation for interdependent selves. Based on these arguments, they suggested that while the statements that the primary criterion of leisure is perceived freedom and competence might be applicable in cultures where independent selves are valued, for cultures dominated by interdependent self-construals, the main determinant for leisure may be relatedness.

Furthermore, an ESM study (Walker, 2008) was conducted to examine Chinese/Canadians' motivations for everyday activities. The study found that 1) for Chinese/Canadians, leisure was more intrinsically motivated than work-related and self-care activities, 2) work-related, and self-care activities were more extrinsically driven than leisure; 3) watching television and other active leisure were more intrinsically driven than socializing; 4) socializing was significantly more extrinsically driven than watching TV and other leisure activities.

Walker and Wang (2008) conducted another cross-cultural study that measured Canadian and mainland Chinese university students' leisure motivations and compared whether their leisure motivations differed from each other. The study applied a modified version of Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory. The findings suggested that compared to Chinese students, Canadian students had higher identified motivation (i.e., valuing a goal as being personally important"), introjected reward motivation (i.e., enhancing pride), and introjected punishment motivation (i.e., avoiding punishment).

The leisure attitudes of Chinese people and members from other cultural groups have also been compared. Using Ragheb and Beard's (1982) leisure attitude scale, Deng, Walker, and Swinnerton (2006) revealed that Chinese respondents were significantly different from Anglo-Canadians by being less positive in their affective leisure attitudes. Similarly, a follow-up study (Walker, Deng, & Chapman, 2007) suggested that Canadians and mainland Chinese were significantly different in terms of their cognitive, affective, and behavioral/preference leisure attitudes, with the former group being higher in each instance.

In order to investigate the dynamics between culture and leisure constraints, Walker, Jackson, and Deng (2007) developed a theory-based inventory of intrapersonal leisure constraints and used it to compare how perceptions of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints influenced starting a new leisure activity among university students in Canada and mainland China. Their data indicated that nine of ten intrapersonal items differed significantly between two cultural groups with Chinese students more constrained than Canadian students. Furthermore, Chinese students were found to be more interpersonally constrained, whereas Canadian students were more structurally constrained of leisure participation.

Building on Samdahl's (1991) earlier study, Walker and Wang (2009) explored how culture affected the meaning of leisure for Chinese/Canadians. They conducted an ESM study by asking participants to complete a diary seven times a day for 12 days when a randomly scheduled watch alarm rang. Participants were asked to identify what activity they were engaging in, whether it was work, leisure, both, or neither, as well as their motivation and needs fulfilled by the activity. The researchers found that participants primarily engaged in passive leisure activities; participants and researchers always defined leisure and non-leisure activities differently. Additionally, participants distinguished leisure from non-leisure activities mainly in terms of high intrinsic motivation, low effort, and low introjected reward motivation. The researchers also found that in contrast with most Western leisure research, perceived freedom was not identified by participants as an important factor to determine leisure.

Leisure as a subjective experience was also investigated in Chinese culture. For



instance, in a qualitative and quantitative study, Walker and Wang (2003/2004) explored a subjective leisure experience in Chinese culture that was comparable with the Western concept of leisure as a subjective experience. Their study showed that the experience of Rumi in Chinese culture shared a lot of similarities with both flow experience and absorbing experience. The Rumi experience, therefore, was identified as comparable with Western concept of leisure as a subjective experience. Interestingly, the study also revealed that Chinese participants reported feelings of guilt with some Rumi experiences afterward. The researchers argued that this finding might be due to certain Chinese cultural values, such as Chinese people's strong work ethic. In another ESM study (Moneta, 2004), cultural differences in the flow model was tested. For Hong Kong Chinese college students, the flow model suggested that the highest level of state intrinsic motivation tended to be experienced in the boredom/relaxation (low-challenge/high-skill) conditions rather than in flow conducive (high-challenge/high-skill) conditions. Moneta (2004) believed that his finding reflected the profound influence of Taoism on Chinese people. Chinese people are more oriented toward the Tao state which emphasizes prudence, interconnectedness, and emotional moderation rather than flow state.

In sum, previous studies have revealed the characteristics of Chinese people's leisure which differ from those in Western culture, related the uniqueness of Chinese people's leisure with traditional Chinese cultural values, as well as applied social psychological theories to explain Chinese people's leisure behaviors. However, there are still some limitations of these studies. First, although a variety of methods have been used, quantitative approaches dominated in these studies. Quantitative research allows for generalization of the results, and standardization of methods and measures, whereas, qualitative inquiries are crucial in providing voice from alternative cultural values. According to Floyd (2008), utilizing qualitative approaches can yield benefits such as enhancement of theory, delivery of new concepts and developing knowledge about leisure behavior from an "insiders" perspective. Secondly, most of these studies were conducted in North America by using leisure theories developed in Western culture. As mentioned before, to get a deeper understanding about the experiences and

meanings of leisure in the Chinese cultural context, it is crucial to carry out the study with Chinese people who reside in China. Lastly, the only study that attempted to understand the meanings of leisure in Chinese culture is Walker and Wang's (2009) EMS study, which defined the meaning of leisure by asking the respondents to distinguish leisure from non-leisure phenomena.

## **Chapter 3 Methods**

### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

This study is built on a social constructivist perspective. Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and develop subjective meanings for their experience (Creswell, 2009). They emphasize the making of knowledge or meanings by communities of individuals rather than by individuals (Watkins, 2000). Knowledge or meanings are viewed as collaborative intersubjective constructions embedded in participatory forms of social practice and formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives. (Creswell, 2009; Watkins, 2000) Differences in meanings are held to represent variations in social practice and reflect different normative beliefs held by different groups. Changes in meanings are subsequently associated with evolving social practices and indicate individuals' increasing enculturation in the related practices. Therefore, for social constructivist researchers, understanding the historical and cultural settings of the participants is highly important. Furthermore, researchers also recognize that their own backgrounds and personal, cultural, and historical experiences shape the way they conduct research and interpret data (Creswell, 2009).

This study, designed to explore the meanings of leisure in the everyday lives of Chinese university students, uses special considerations to firmly set leisure into a Chinese cultural context. Thus, social constructivism helps to clarify how and sometimes why the participants construct leisure meanings and actions in a specific context. I applied open-ended questioning, which allowed participants to construct the meanings of leisure in their life settings. Meanwhile, I examined specific contexts in this study, including issues related to Chinese traditional culture and China's education and social evaluation of leisure. Moreover, as I myself, a Chinese and a former student of the study site, am close to the inside of participants' experience and very familiar with my participants' views of their leisure situations. Therefore, my

personal experience adds further depth to this study.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

Given that the research questions of this study are exploratory and the focus is on the subjective leisure experiences of Chinese university students, an inductive qualitative methodological approach was adopted. Specifically, a grounded theory approach was used to examine the data through systematic gathering and analyzing. Grounded theory is not really a specific method or technique, rather, it is a way of thinking about and conceptualizing data, a style of qualitative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Its methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves (Charmaz, 2006). A grounded theory approach “explains the studies process in new theoretical terms, explicates the properties of the theoretical categories, and often demonstrates the causes and conditions under which the process emerges and varies, and delineates its consequences” (Charmaz, 2006 p. 8).

Moreover, according to Charmaz (2006), the fundamental contribution of a grounded theory approach lies in its offering a guide to interpretive theoretical practice. She further contends that “constructivist grounded theory lies squarely in the interpretive tradition” (p.130). With its social constructivist perspective, this study was designed to clarify how Chinese university students construct meanings and actions of leisure in their everyday lives.

### **3.3 The Researcher’s Role**

My understanding of the role leisure plays in Chinese university students’ daily life and the leisure meanings in Chinese culture is shaped by my personal experiences. I was born in Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang province, which is located in Southeast China. I lived there with my family for 18 years. In 2004, I was enrolled in Ocean University of China as a student in the Public Administration program. The university is situated in Qingdao, a coastal city of Shandong province in the

Northeastern part of China. I spent four years studying there and completed my undergraduate education in June, 2008. After graduation, I enrolled in the Recreation and Leisure Studies program of University of Waterloo as a Masters student. My background has made me familiar with Chinese language and culture and with Chinese university students' daily life. On the one hand, my experiences provide me with an insider's perspective, which enables me to understand the study participants' lives. This understanding of the role and context enhance my awareness and knowledge of and sensitivity to many of the experiences described by Chinese university students and helped me to establish a sense of trust and empathetic understanding with study participants. In addition, my graduate education in Recreation and Leisure studies also facilitated my understanding their leisure experiences in-depth. On the other hand, I am also aware that my personal biases can influence the study process and shape the way I interpret the data. As a former undergraduate student of Ocean University of China I realize that leisure is mainly perceived as relaxation by Chinese university students. Although it is an important part of their lives, the students do not pay as much attention to leisure as they do to study or work. However, I gained all my knowledge about leisure studies in a North American context. I have learnt that leisure can hold richer connotations than mere relaxation, and my value orientation is in favor of this type of leisure. In addition, there was a possibility that my 22 years living experiences in China would lead to my insensitivity to some unique cultural phenomena that emerges from this study and my taking them for granted. Therefore, I was reflective of my views and biases throughout the study process.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

#### ***3.4.1 Sample and Site***

Participants for this study were selected from Ocean University of China where I did my undergraduate education. This university is a comprehensive university, with its strengths in Oceanography and Fisheries Sciences. It was founded in 1924 and has

86 years of history to date. It has over 24,400 registered students, including 5,115 graduate students, over 11,691 undergraduate students, and 1,200 international students (Ocean University of China, 2009). Currently, it has three campuses, with over 22 colleges and departments and 71 undergraduate programs. As most students come from China, participants selected from this university easily fit with the purpose of the study. Furthermore, this university is where I spent four years pursuing my undergraduate education; hence, choosing this research site made it relatively easy for me to approach potential study participants, find the most information-rich cases, and establish rapport with the participants.

To explore the meanings of leisure for university students in a Chinese cultural context, a criterion sampling method was first applied to build a pool of potential study participants: “The logic of criterion sampling is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance....The point of criterion sampling is to be sure to understand cases that are likely to be information rich” (Patton 2001, p.238). Students, including both undergraduates and graduates, who were born in China and had no overseas living experience were invited to participate in this study. Acknowledging that students would exhibit different leisure experiences and had different understandings of leisure meanings from each other, the current study was designed to explore common patterns that emerge from variation and values in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of leisure meanings embedded in Chinese culture.

Initially, I placed posters (Appendix A) on bulletin boards at various locations in the Fushan and Laoshan campuses of the university. The posters contained information about the study purpose, study methods, and participant roles. My contact information was also provided so that students who were interested in participating could obtain further details about the purpose and nature of the study. After one week's posting, only four students volunteered. As such a limited number of participants might not provide sufficient data for me to explore the leisure experience of Chinese university students in depth, a snowball sampling method was then applied. Snowball sampling is designed to identify cases of interest from people who know

what cases are information-rich (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I asked every interviewee whether he/she knew anybody who would be interested in engaging in this study. If so, participants were asked to inform those students. I then made phone calls (Appendix B) to the potential interviewees to make sure the potential participants were interested in participating in the study.

### **3.4.2 Interviews**

Consistent with the grounded theory approach guidelines, in-depth interviews were used as the primary research method in this study. All interviews were conducted face-to-face. All the interviews took place on campus; their dates and times were negotiated and determined both by the participant and me. All the participants were asked for consent to conduct the interview (Appendix C). Their personal information was kept confidential.

In this study, interviews were conducted in a semi-structured form. The interview guide (Appendix D) was used, including a number of open-ended, non-judgmental questions that allowed for further probing. The interview guide not only encourages unanticipated statements and stories to emerge (Charmaz, 2006), but also makes sure that the interviewer has carefully decided how best to use the limited time available in an interview situation (Patton, 2001). The interview guide in this study includes four sections.

The first set of questions focused on providing an understanding of daily experiences of Chinese university students. Participants were asked to describe a typical workday day and a typical day on the weekend. Their categorizations and perceptions of daily experiences/activities were further probed to determine what experiences the students associated with leisure and how they distinguished their leisure experiences from other experiences.

In addition, allowing the students to openly talk about their lives in their own words helped minimize two issues related to cultural insensitivity. On the one hand, imposing Western terminologies on Chinese university students could have forced

them to shift from their original and natural non-western thinking to western thinking (Iwasaki, *et al.*, 2007). Consequently, gaining perspectives grounded in Chinese contexts is difficult. Moreover, although leisure was generally translated into Chinese as Xiu Xian, no empirical study has yet been conducted to explore whether the definitional characteristics of Xiuxian in today's China are comparable with those of leisure, Chinese scholars have merely studied the ancient Chinese literature about Xiu Xian and suggested that the term is comparable with leisure in Western cultures. Therefore, directly introducing the term Xiu Xian in my research could also lead to insufficient understanding or misunderstanding of the meanings of leisure.

The second part of the interview investigated the role leisure plays in Chinese university students' lives. The questions were designed to measure the significance of leisure for participants as well as to explore the relationship between leisure and other aspects of their life, such as work or study.

The third section of the interview examined whether the students were satisfied with their leisure participation in their everyday lives. The participants' responses about their leisure satisfaction and leisure constraints provided more insights into the contexts of this study and their valuing towards leisure.

The bilingual technique and the committee approach were both used to translate the posters and the interview guide (Appendix D) from Chinese into English (Dimanche, 1994). More specifically, as a bilingual, I first translated them from English into Chinese by myself. Then another Chinese-English bilingual student of Ocean University of China examined my translation and offered suggestions.

All the interviews were conducted in Chinese for the convenience of the participants. With the participants' permission, I audio taped all the interviews. However, I did not take notes during the interviews to keep the natural flow of the conversation uninterrupted. At the end of the interview, I asked permission to contact the participants by Email for follow-up discussions to clarify or add any additional information they might think of. After each interview, a feedback letter (Appendix E) was given to the participant in appreciation of his or her participation. However, conducting the initial interviews was not the end of my data collection. I engaged in



theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006). Throughout my research, I moved back and forth between data collection and data analysis. Earlier categories emerged from my analysis, so did new gaps in the data. I returned to my participants and asked further questions multiple for times. Theoretical sampling helped to strengthen and refine emerging categories and clarify relationships between them.

### ***3.4.3 Research Journal***

After conducting each interview, I immediately wrote a research journal to assist in future interviews and data analysis. The journal was written in Chinese. Information about the interview time, date, and place was recorded in the journal. I also described my overall feelings about the interview, important themes that emerged from the interview, and any problems that came up during the interview. The journal was used as a tool to modify subsequent interviews and to ensure that I remained reflexive of my personal biases and opinions during the whole research process.

### ***3.4.4 Observations***

Observations made separately from interviews were applied to clarify the leisure experiences of Chinese university students. After the interviews, I visited certain leisure settings on campus (e.g., playgrounds and student dormitories) and their adjacent areas (e.g., gardens, parks, and coffee shops) to observe students' leisure activities. The observation settings were chosen based on my personal experience as a former student in Ocean University of China and the interview transcripts. The latter, especially, provided me with an insider's perspective to observe the students' leisure behavior and understand their leisure experiences in-depth. Both descriptive notes (portraits of the students, a description of the physical setting, activities) and reflective notes (my personal thoughts, such as feelings, ideas, hunches, and impressions) were recorded in Chinese (Creswell, 2006). The recorded observations enhanced my understanding of the study context and the students' leisure participation.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

All the taped interviews were transcribed verbatim. To increase the trustworthiness of the data, the interview transcripts were given back to the participants for their review, and they were invited to clarify the responses they had made if they wished to do so. Furthermore, as translation of the transcripts might have created confusion and distorted the actual meanings the data conveyed, not all transcripts were translated into English in the analysis process.

Initially, all the interview transcripts, research journals and field notes were read through, providing a general idea about the collected data. Then, in accordance with grounded theory, initial, axial, and selective coding was conducted to develop, define, and refine categories (Creswell, 2009). Meanwhile, the transcripts were subjected to ‘constant comparative methods’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

More specifically, as a first step, I conducted a line-by-line coding on every interview transcript. Line-by-line coding means naming each line of the written data (Charmaz, 2006). Line-by-line coding allows the researcher to be open to the data. (Charmaz, 2006). The entire transcripts were also carefully read to identify elements that might have been missed in the line-by-line coding process. In this phase, descriptive codes that reflected participants’ leisure experiences and meanings were built. Next, I did axial coding by relating categories to subcategories, specifying the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembling the data that had been fractured during initial coding (Charmaz, 2006). This coding phase allowed me to answer questions such as “when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 p.60). I started the process of clarifying concepts and developing higher-order categories in this process. I found that memos and diagrams were particularly helpful for organizing and building patterns within my data. Finally, selective coding was undertaken to explore the relationships between the existing codes, and to explicate major and broader themes from the interconnection of these codes (Charmaz, 2006; Herridge, Shaw, Mannell, 2003).

Constant comparisons between my interpretations, different segments of individual transcripts, and different participants’ transcripts were made throughout the

whole coding process. They enabled me to generate and refine codes, axial links, and ultimately, major themes.

Although not all the data were translated from Chinese into English during the analysis process due to potential for inaccurate translation, the coding was conducted in English. In other words, all the analysis of the emerged codes, my personal interpretations, and research memos were recorded in English. However, the participants' comments were not translated until the last stage of reporting the findings. For accuracy, the quotations were translated to better express the intentions of the participants rather than simply word by word. More specifically, I aimed to attain experiential equivalence and conceptual equivalence as much as possible in my translation (Dimanche, 1994). Experiential equivalence refers to the idea that to successfully translate from one culture to another, one must utilize terms referring to real things and real experiences that are familiar in both cultures, if not exactly so (Dimanche, 1994). Conceptual equivalence refers to the degree that two concepts are equivalent in the cultures being studied (Dimanche, 1994). Therefore, to appropriately present my findings, before translating, I decided whether the terms or concepts used by the participants exist in Western culture. If they were familiar in both cultures, word-by-word translation was made. However, if the term/concept used is absent in Western culture, I would clarify the meaning of the term/concept in Chinese culture. Moreover, according to Elsa and Yvonna (2006), in today's globalized world, studies undertaken now must serve the interests of not only Westerners but also the needs of nationals and locals. To reflect cultural sensitivity, the original mandarin quotations were included in the findings chapter.

### **3.6 Establishing Trustworthiness**

A few strategies were incorporated in this study to establish the trustworthiness of the research methods. To make sure that the data being used were reliable, I checked the interview transcripts to confirm that they did not contain obvious transcription mistakes. Moreover, data were compared with the codes constantly to ensure that

there was no drift in the definitions of codes during the process of data analysis (Charmaz, 2006). To ensure the credibility of this study, four strategies were applied. First, member checking was adopted by taking identified themes back to participants through emails and asking for feedback to determine whether the participants felt that they were accurate (Charmaz, 2006). Nine of the participants read the findings chapter and agreed with my results. In addition, I also used triangulation strategy by examining evidence from various data sources, including interview transcripts, field notes, and research journals to check the consistency of the research themes. Lastly, I increased the trustworthiness of this study by reflecting on and clarifying the biases I bring to the study honestly. In addition, I provided information about the contexts of the study.

## Chapter 4 Findings

### 4.1 Contextual Information

This study is the first exploratory study designed to explore the meanings of leisure in the everyday lives of university students in a Chinese cultural context. Thus, contextual information about mainland China's education system, the daily lives of the students in the study site: Ocean University of China (OUC), and the interviewees is included to clarify the students' comments and the paper's interpretation of the material.

#### *4.1.1 Mainland China's Education System*

In many ways, mainland China's higher education system is quite similar to that in North American countries. Basically, for undergraduate education, most of the students are required to study for at least four years to earn a degree; while for graduate studies, most students take two to three years to gain a degree. The students must take both required and selective courses. They are also encouraged to organize and participate in various student associations and activities according to their own interests. In recent years, higher education in mainland China, especially undergraduate education, has undergone massive expansion, shifting from an elite education to a mass education. This expansion aims to increase opportunities for Chinese people to enjoy higher education. However, it has also created certain social problems. For example, because most of the students choose to join the labor force after their undergraduate studies, China has experienced an upsurge in graduate unemployment in recent years. According to graduate unemployment statistics for China (Miaomiao & Ding, 2009), the anticipated graduate population for 2009 is 6.1 million. However, one million graduates from 2007 and another 1.5 million from 2008 still remain unemployed. Arguably, the most important cause triggering this issue is that the rising enrollment in universities leads to the number of new graduates increasing rapidly; however the Chinese labor market does not generate enough jobs

that are suitable for them. In other words, the rising enrollment has made graduate employment a serious challenge for China. It has become common knowledge in China that it is difficult to find a good job after graduation from university.

Consequently, an increasing number of students choose to pursue graduate education to further prepare themselves for the increasingly competitive labor market. To do so, they need to pass a centralized national examination: the Graduate School Entrance Examination. However, the acceptance rate is relatively low due to the limited spaces in graduate schools. For example, about two thirds of the examinees failed the exam in 2009 (Miaomiao & Ding, 2009). Moreover, to get a satisfactory job, more and more students have started to attend various exams to earn qualifications for certain jobs, among which, the Civil Servant Exam is the most popular one. The exam is a nationwide government recruitment exam designed to fill civil servant vacancies in the state government branches and Communist Party of China (CPC) offices (Xinhua, 2008). The exam, comprising tests of professional ability and language, is held in multiple cities throughout the country. However, the competition for the candidates is extremely intense. For instance, in 2008, on average, 77 applicants competed for each job. (Xinhua, 2008)

#### ***4.1.2 Student Life in OUC***

The Ocean University of China is located in a city in Shandong province: Qingdao, a coastal and hilly city where there are multiple beaches and mountains open to the public. The interviewees in this study came from two campuses of OUC: Fushan (浮山) and Laoshan (崂山), each campus situated at the foot of a mountain. However, Fushan campus is close to a beach, while the students from Laoshan campus need to take a bus for more than half an hour to reach one. There are two shopping centers in Qingdao frequented by students, namely, Taidong (台东) and Xianggangzhonglu (香港中路). The latter is commonly considered as the centre of Qingdao. Fushan campus is relatively close to the city centre; students from there normally bus about 15 minutes to reach Xianggangzhoulou and 40 minutes to reach

Taidong. Laoshan campus is located in a remote area of Qingdao. Students from there usually need to spend approximately 40 minutes to reach each shopping center by bus. However, Laoshan is newly built and much bigger; it has a better campus environment than Fushan. Within both campuses, there are multiple basketball courts and a soccer field, but Laoshan is equipped with newer and better sports facilities. In addition, Laoshan has tennis courts and more green space.

As a comprehensive and well-known university, OUC has students that come from all over the country; however, the proportion of students from Shandong is still relatively higher than those come from other provinces. Despite the similarities between Chinese and Western higher education systems, university life in OUC manifests some distinctive characteristics. All of its students are required to live in the dormitories on campus. Each undergraduate dormitory room holds four to six students, while each graduate dormitory room is shared by two students. To ensure that students keep regular hours, from Sunday to Thursday, the electricity supply for the undergraduate dormitories is cut off from 11:00pm to 6:00am; the dormitory doors are locked from 11:30pm to 6:00am. On Fridays and Saturdays, however, the power is cut off from 12:00pm to 6:00am; the dormitory doors are locked from 12:00pm to 6:00am. Since the residence does not provide cooking appliances, the students generally eat in canteens run by the university. Most of the canteens prepare a certain quantity of food beforehand and only open at meal times. Class schedules for the students are relatively fixed; all the classes take place in only five time slots: 8:00 to 9:50, 10:10 to 12:00, 1:30 to 3:20, 3:30 to 5:20, and 6:00 to 7:50. As in other Chinese universities, in OUC, there are two semesters within one year: fall and spring. Fall semester usually starts at the beginning of September and ends about two weeks before Chinese New Year, while the spring semester begins about two weeks after Chinese New Year and goes until the middle July.

#### ***4.1.3 Interviewees' Profiles***

Eleven students were interviewed in this study. Among them, Participants A to

Participant E are residents of the Laoshan campus and the rest of them live in Fushan campus. Participants A, B, F, and K volunteered to participate in the study, while the other participants were recruited through a snowball sampling method. During the interviews, I collected information about four demographic variables of the participants: gender, age, university year, discipline, and hometown. Based on this information and the notes taken after the interviews on the participants' statements about their lives, the following profiles were developed. All the participants' names were coded to protect their privacy.

Participant A is a male undergraduate student currently in his third year of university studying Mining Exploration and Engineering. He is 21 years old and came from a middle sized city, Dongying, in Shandong province, which is rich in petroleum and natural gas resources. He is especially good at mathematics. In his spare time, he likes to read novels and sometimes play basketball. To accumulate social experience, he engaged in various part-time jobs in his first two years of university, including waiter and salesperson. Now, however, he has started to focus on his school work, because he thinks that compared to work experience, good academic performance will be more useful to his future. He is preparing for the Graduate School Entrance Examination in one and a half years, and wants to prove his capability by passing the exam.

Participant B is a second-year female Masters student of Public Administration. She is 24 years old and comes from a small city, Binzhou, in Shandong. She also did her undergraduate education in Ocean University of China and was recommended for admission into the graduate program. She is now the president of the Graduate Students Association of her department. She is planning to graduate within two years and become a civil servant. Besides doing heavy school work and performing obligations as a student leader, she is busy preparing for the approaching Civil Servant Examination. She likes shopping in her free time.

Participant C is a 23 years old male Masters student in his second year of Public Administration. His hometown is a middle-sized city also located in Shandong, namely, Linyi. He likes to read news from newspapers or online in his spare time. In



particular, he is interested in military news. He enjoys socializing and likes to spend his spare time with friends. Besides basic school work, he is also busy doing research with his professor now. In the future, he plans to participate in the Civil Servant Exam.

Participant D is also a male Masters student in his second year of Public Administration. He is 24 years old and comes from Linyi as well. He used to study computer engineering, then he changed his area after his undergraduate education. He is the monitor of the class and enjoys helping others. He likes to socialize with friends, but sometimes he also enjoys spending time by himself. His spare time activities include reading, thinking quietly, and chatting with friends; sports do not attract him as much. He plans to be a civil servant after graduation.

Participant E is Participants' C and D's roommate. He shares their grade and program. He is currently 24 and comes from Jining, a small city in Shandong. His spare time activities include watching movies, watching basketball games, and doing relatively uncompetitive sports, like playing billiards. He also plans to participate in the Civil Servant Exam in the near future.

Participant F is a 21 year old fourth-year undergraduate in the Business Administration program. He was brought up in a middle sized city, Shaoyang, in Hunan province. He likes sports and participated in sports activities frequently in his first two years of university, especially basketball and tennis. He is also interested in reading geographic magazines and photography, but in the third year of university, he shifted his focus to studying and engaged in his pastimes only occasionally. He is busy applying for opportunities to pursue further education in the USA after graduation.

Participant G is a female undergraduate student in her fourth-year in the department of Journalism and Communication. She is 22 and comes from the capital city of Hubei province, Wuhan. She is outgoing and likes doing sports, especially jogging. She once held part-time jobs. However, she is now preparing for the Graduate School Entrance Exam and studying 12 to 14 hours per day. Therefore, she rarely has any time to do sports or other extra-curriculum activities.

Participant H is a 22 years old fourth-year male student in Business Administration. He lived in Shaoguan, a big city in Guangdong, until he came to Ocean University of China. He used to be the president of the Volunteer Association of the department, but he quit this position in his third year, mainly because he wanted to concentrate on his schoolwork. He likes climbing mountains with friends in his spare time. He is preparing for the Graduate School Entrance Exam and hunting for jobs.

Participant I is a fourth-year female undergraduate student in Journalism and Communications. She is 23 and lived in Mianyang, a middle sized city in Sichuan province before university. She used to have a part-time job as a home tutor for a middle school student. For leisure pursuits, she likes watching Japanese cartoons and playing computer games in her dormitory. She has not decided what exactly to do after graduation, but she plans to try different things in her last year of university, such as taking the Civil Servant Exam, finding a part-time job, and applying for a full-time job.

Participant J is a friend of Participant I. They also share the program and grade. She is 22 and comes from Wulanhaote, a middle-sized city in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Similar to Participant I, she also likes to watch Japanese cartoons in her spare time. However, she is now busy preparing for the Civil Servant Exam and spending most of her time in the study room. She has few leisure activities.

Participant K is a third-year female undergraduate student majoring in French. She is 20-years old and from Shaoyang just like Participant F. She has done various part-time jobs in her spare time, such as home tutor and waitress and plans to keep doing so. She spend most of her daily time on studies and is one of the top students in her class. For her spare time, she likes reading essays. She has not decided what she wants to do after graduation, but her goal is to find a good job.

## **4.2 Themes**

The data analysis led to the emergence of three major themes that best reflected the meanings of leisure in the everyday lives of Chinese university students. The first theme “Valuations of Work” addressed that the students placed high valuation on work and their life was centered around work. The second theme “Two Spheres of Leisure” has two subthemes that illustrated the students’ ideology of leisure and its impact on their leisure experience. The last theme “Causes for the Subordinate Role of Leisure” revealed two underlying causes that shaped the subservient role of leisure in the students’ daily lives.

### ***4.2.1 High Valuation of Work***

Although the purpose of this study was to explore the meanings of leisure in the everyday lives of Chinese university students, when analyzing the transcribed interviews, I found that the values the students ascribed to work were closely related to valuation of leisure. In fact, as students placed a high valuation on work, work played a dominant role in their lives. Consequently, all of the students’ leisure was secondary to work and subjected to work conditions.

### ***Leisure and Work as Contrasting Ideas***

First of all, it should be noted that all of the participants in this study contrasted the concept of leisure to that of work. None of them perceived their work experience and leisure experience as intertwined or somewhat blended together. For example, when asked to define leisure, Participant B stated that

Unlike work, leisure is not something you have to do in order to survive or make a living. By doing leisure, however, I can relax and have a feeling of pleasure...Leisure is something that can make people relaxed and adjust the paces of their lives. This is my understanding of leisure.  
休闲不是你赖以生存，谋生的手段。通过休闲能够放松心情，得到一种愉悦的感觉。……也就是说休闲能让整个人放松下来，是生活中一种调节的状态，就是这样。

For Participant B, leisure was a contrasting concept to work mainly because the purposes for work and leisure were different. Work was something people had to do to

fulfill basic needs. While leisure, on the other hand, was something that people did not have to do. She also suggested that by participating in leisure activities, pressure could be relieved, relaxation could be experienced, and life could be balanced.

Some students commented that they experienced work and leisure differently. For example, Participant D noted

I don't think work can be leisure even though sometimes I may enjoy doing my work, because when I am doing work, even work that I like, I can still feel some pressure. I always need to meet certain rules and achieve certain goals in work, so I cannot completely relax myself and do what I like to do. That is why I don't think I can be in a leisure status when I am engaging in work. Anyway, leisure experience cannot be work experience to me.

我觉得休闲和工作不会一样。因为即使喜欢自己的工作，在做的时候也是有压力的，因为有一些条条框框或是规矩规定着你，不可以随意，所以我觉得那并不是完全放松的状态，或是一种休闲的状态。休闲不可能是工作，虽然工作中获得的乐趣和休闲中获得的乐趣在很多时候是相通的，但是休闲这个概念还是不能用在工作中，毕竟两者的前提条件不同。

Participant D commented on the differences between leisure and work from a different perspective. He believed that his experience of leisure and of work could not be the same. When he was involved in his work, he was constrained by rules and had to achieve some goals. He did not have enough freedom to choose whatever he wanted to do without being judged by others. However, leisure to him was a more relaxing state, where he was driven by his intrinsic motivation to do what he really wanted to do and did not have to worry about the results of his behavior.

The students all clearly separated their leisure and work. In this study, understanding the role of work is crucial to examining the meanings of leisure, not because the students' leisure experience and work experience are somewhat intertwined, but because their valuing of work and leisure is determined in contrast to each other. For these students, work is more valuable than leisure.

### ***A Future Orientation in the Understanding of Work***

Then, it is logical to raise the question: what does work mean to the students? Or against what standard(s) do the students identify their activities as work? This

question is important for this study because the identity of the participants as students may lead to their understanding of work being different from its conventional meanings. For instance, unlike employees, students usually do not perceive their work as an occupation to get monetary payment. In this study, work mainly refers to activities the students feel they are obligated to do in order to fulfill their basic needs, or more importantly, to lead a decent life after graduation. For example, Participant B commented on what study meant to her as follows:

I think most of the time, study is...in China's system...like making some preparations to achieve some goals for the future, or you can say [study is] preparing for my future life. A lot of times, it is not what I really want to do. But sometimes I can still find something that I like to learn. When I am doing research on things I am interested in, I feel fulfilled. But most of the time, I don't really like what I have to study.

学习吧，学习有一大部分就是属于……在中国这个体制……就是为了完成一个目标，或者是为了完成以后的什么什么东西我在做铺垫，可能很多时候并不是自己真的想要做那个。但是另一些呢，比如说有一些东西是我自己比较感兴趣的，我去研究或者我去调查的时候有一种充实的感觉。但是大多数时候，我对于学的东西并不真正感兴趣。

For Participant B, studying in university was preparing for her future life after graduation. It was what she felt obligated to do. Although she admitted that most of the time she did not enjoy studying, how she felt about study was not very important because study was what she had to do. In other words, she had to study whether she liked it or not. Interestingly, she particularly mentioned “in China's system,” which might imply that, in her eyes, the phenomenon that study was preparation for future was cultural specific and existed in China.

Similarly, Participant C also related the idea of work to future development: “I will put work before leisure because survival is the basis of life. ... Work can be beneficial for my future development. By working hard, I may achieve success in my career.” (当然我会工作优先，因为生存是第一条件……工作可以对我的未来发展有利。努力工作我就有可能取得事业的成功。) Here, Participant C not only mentioned that work allows him to live, but also suggested that working can lead to his success in career. It seems that “future development” mainly refers to career development for him.

Furthermore, in the interviews, the students explicitly or implicitly showed their concerns about their future because they believed that they would confront with intense competition after graduation. In order to be competitive, they were forced to work diligently.

Participant K explained why she spent a substantial amount of time on study every day:

I think I have spent too much time studying. I hope my life can be more balanced. ... I think that my life is not balanced because I am concerned about my future. My parents feel that only with an excellent academic performance, can I find a good job. I myself am also worried that if I don't study hard enough, I will not find a good job. That is why I have spent so much time on my studies.

我觉得我还是把过多的精力放在学习上面的。我希望我的生活能更平衡一点吧。……我觉得我的生活不够平衡是来源于对未来的担心。因为像我父母他们就觉得因为你学习好以后才会找到好工作，自己也会担心自己以后找不到好工作啊，不想让他们担心，所以就学习看的还是比较重。

Apparently, she was worried that without an impressive academic performance, it would be difficult for her to find a decent job and have a good life after graduation. Her statement implied that in China's job market academic performance was a critical criterion the employers used to judge their employee candidates. It also suggested that Participant K anticipated facing fierce competition in the labor market when she tries to find a job. Furthermore, parents' expectations and opinions also exerted influence on her work ethic. She believed in her parents' judgments and did not want to let them down.

Participant I noted that study could make her feel reassured because she believed that when she was studying she was actually arming herself to be more competitive than others. She noted that "The more I study, the more powerful I am to control my future. In other words, after spending two hours on study, I feel that I have learned two hours more than other people, and then I have a sense of accomplishment." (我觉得学习能让我感觉对未来更有把握，比如我学了两个小时的知识，感觉到比别人学了更多一点的知识会感到比较有成就感。)

As previously mentioned, the students understood work as something they had to do in order to survive or lead a good life after graduation. Moreover, they anticipated

that there would be heavy social pressure and intense competition after graduation. Under such circumstances, the students expressed a strong work ethic. Therefore, it is not surprising that their work content went beyond the coursework required by the university; it also contained tasks they assigned themselves to do in order to build a good future.

### ***An Expression of a Strong Work Ethic***

According to the transcribed interviews, the students' work included not only course requirements (such as attending required classes, passing course exams) and the duties they shouldered to fulfill other roles they play in university (like leader of the student union, or member of a student association), but also preparations they made for their lives after graduation (such as preparation for the Graduate School Entrance Examination or the Civil Servant Exam). For example, participant G categorized her daily activities as follows:

I think I will classify my daily life activities into three parts: study, social practice and recreation. Study refers to activities like attending classes and reading books related to my curriculum. Social practice means some part-time jobs I do in order to earn some social experience. Activities like sports and shopping are recreation to me, which I participate in in my spare time. ... Study and social practice are both work to me.

我会把我的日常生活中的活动分为三类：我觉得学习应该单独的算一类，上课和看书归为这一类，然后实践，就是我说的做了一些兼职算一类，然后可能对我而言运动也算是一种娱乐，运动和逛街之类的都属于闲暇时间的。……不过学习和社会实践都是属于工作的范畴。

Participant K's remarks below indicated the significance of study in her daily life:

I think study is the most important part of my life, and occupies nearly 70% of my time. Activities I do for my study include attending classes, finishing assignments, and reading books related to my major. The other 30% of the activities I do are to relieve pressure, like surfing the Internet, watching movies, and shopping.

我觉得第一个部分可能会占我生活 70%的比重，就是学习，包括上课、自习，还有看和专业有关的书；剩下的 30% 我会称它们为缓解压力的活动，像上网，逛街，看电影都是。

Similarly, participant B stated that

I consider that my life has two parts: work and leisure and recreation. Activities like attending classes, and going to library belong to study. Study

is the most important part of my work. My obligations as president of the Graduate Students Association of the department are also work. Other activities, like shopping, and watching movies belong to the second part of my life, recreation and leisure.

我觉得我的生活可以分为两部分：工作和休闲娱乐。像上课，去图书馆看书这些，不管是看什么书吧我觉得是属于学习类。我担任学院研究生主席也是我的工作。其他的，像逛街啊，看电影啊之类的就是属于休闲娱乐，第二类吧。

Moreover, the students tended to strive to excel at every type of work they were engaged in because they perceived university time as the preparation stage for future life. They believed that excellent academic performance, capabilities cultivated, and work experience accumulated in university could all contribute to increase their competitiveness in future lives.

Participant A's description of how he felt after failing one course at the end of his second year reflected how and why he valued his academic performance:

That failure was like a slap in my face...It was devastating and greatly influenced me. After that failure, I decided to study really hard. I changed my life style after that failure. Now when I look back at my first year and second year university life, I did spend a lot of time having fun. I was happy. But it was not worthwhile to spend my precious time on just having fun. I like my life now more even though it is somewhat boring, because it is meaningful. I am now making the effort for my future rather than wasting time on unnecessary things like playing computer games or going outside to drink.

这件事情对我打击非常非常大，我就决定从大二下学期开始好好学习，是受了刺激之后开始好好学习。那次打击改变了我的生活，在我上大一时的时候我确实经常出去玩，当时也确实玩的很开心，但是现在想想，觉得那段时间的生活比较颓废。所以现在回过头来想想觉得很不值得，把宝贵的青春浪费在那个上面。所以说我比较喜欢现在这种单调但是有意义的生活，我在为前途而奋斗，没有乱花时间在一些没有必要的事情上，比如说打游戏或者出去喝酒之类的。

To conclude, work played a dominant role in the students' lives. In fact, their lives were ruled by work. All of the students believed that work was the right thing to do and what they should do. They felt they were doing something meaningful and important for their future by engaging in work. In other words, they felt obligated to work primarily because they felt they were responsible to build a good life for themselves after graduation, and work was the way to achieve this goal.

As we will see, it is evident that the meanings of leisure in the students' lives



were closely related to their perceptions of work and the central role it played in their lives. Leisure was perceived as subordinated to work. According to the values they ascribed to it, there are two spheres of leisure in the students' daily lives: righteous leisure and non-righteous leisure.

#### ***4.2.2 Two Spheres of Leisure***

##### ***Righteous Leisure: Subordinate to Work***

###### *Ideology of Righteous Leisure*

As discussed in the previous section, the students' lives were centered around and ruled by work. Nevertheless, they still shared one acknowledgment: life without leisure is intolerable and unacceptable. However, unlike work, which is always believed to be worthwhile, leisure for the students was understood to be righteous or non-righteous as if there were certain moral standards attached to it. Why is that? The analysis of the transcribed interviews revealed that the students' ideology of work significantly influenced their understanding of leisure experience. Their perception that leisure was a necessary part of daily life arose primarily because they believed that working for too long might diminish their productivity. A typical comment was Participant D's statement, "It is unacceptable and impossible for me to give up my leisure for too long or live without leisure. I cannot live that kind of life because, without leisure, my work productivity and work enthusiasm will both diminish. This is not good for my long-term personal development." (让我完全放弃我的休闲或是放弃它很久是无法想象的, 是不可能的。自己也无法处于那样一种状态。如果没有娱乐休闲的话工作的效率, 还是学习的热情都会慢慢退减的, 而且这个也不利于长期的进步。) In addition, he said, "Recreation and leisure activities are like catalysts for my work. Having them, my work becomes more efficient, and I also have greater enthusiasm for work." (娱乐休闲是工作的催化剂, 有了它们我的工作更有热情更有效率。) In this sense, the students recognized leisure as an important and essential part of their lives because they believed that having some leisure could be beneficial for their work. In other words, rather than valuing leisure for its own

sake, to a large extent, the students valued leisure generally just as an extension of their high valuation of work.

Therefore, accordingly, leisure experience was understood as righteous if it was subordinated to work. To be more specific, leisure activities were justifiable for the students if they were conducted after work. Meanwhile, the amount of leisure time should also occupy an appropriate portion of their lives so that it would not weaken the dominant role of work.

First, appropriate timing mattered with regard to the idea of righteous leisure. All of the students believed that leisure should be conducted after work is finished, or at least after a long period of working. Placing leisure prior to work was inappropriate for it was perceived as a representation of laziness and an indulgence of pleasure. For example, participant J stated that “I need to have recreation, but the prerequisite is that I have already finished my work. Placing leisure before work is wrong because we need to know what is more important.” (我觉得人需要有娱乐，但是应该先做工作。把休闲放在工作之前是不对的因为我们应该分清主次，知道什么更重要。) Participant K also noted “I feel work and study is more important than leisure and recreation; therefore, it should come before leisure and recreation. I will feel comfortable if I do leisure after I have worked for a very long time. When you mention leisure, I feel you are talking about hedonism. However, my education from school and traditional ideas make me believe that I should place pleasure after work.” (我觉得学业是比休闲娱乐更重要的，应该放在前面。当我学习或工作了很长一段时间之后再休闲会觉得舒服一些。因为你一提到休闲娱乐这四个字，我就有享乐这样的感觉。我小时候受到的教育和传统的观念都让我觉得享乐应该是排在工作包括学习之后的。) According to her remarks, Participant K was suggesting that the connotation of leisure was pure pleasure to her. However, being educated with traditional Chinese ideas about work and leisure (such as “bitterness first, sweetness after (先苦后甜)”), she could not justify the behavior of having pleasure before arduous work.

Moreover, when confronted with major work tasks like examinations or term papers, some of the students stated that they could and should give up some or even

all of their leisure time in order to finish their work. Participant E stated that

I think I can live life without leisure for a period of time for the sake of work. Some of my classmates are now preparing for the China Judicial Exam now. They are basically living without any leisure time. If I were one of them, I believe I could live life without leisure as well. However, this kind of life cannot last for very long because if I work for too long, I will burn out.

我觉得我能为了工作过一段时间没有休闲的日子。现在看旁边的同学，也有很多是这样的，现在有很多考司法考试的同学就过着基本上没有休闲的生活。但是这样的生活只能是暂时的，不能是长久的，不然我会受不了的。

Participant D also noted,

Study obligations, such as attending classes and study tasks I assign to myself, are very important to me. Besides, my work obligations as monitor are also very important. Those are things that are significant and serious. However, leisure is not that important. I place my leisure at a less important position in my life. If my workload is heavy, then I can reduce my leisure time, or even entirely give it up. Even though I cannot live life without leisure for long, living without leisure for a short period of time, like one month, is acceptable to me.

我觉得学习，上课，给自己定的学习目标啦，这个月的目标啦，你要完成的规划，都是我认为非常重要，我所谓的正事。然后还有班级工作也都是非常重要的，也是正事。但是自己的娱乐休闲可以放在比较次要的位置，如果说我的学习工作任务比较重的话我完全可以把娱乐休闲活动压缩，甚至可以不要。虽然不能长期吧，但是可以过一段时间，我觉得可以一个月左右是可以被接受的。

Thus, the students could only justify their leisure participation if it came after work, mainly because they perceived work as more meaningful, serious, and important than leisure.

Second, the amount of leisure time also matters in terms of the students' ideology of righteous leisure. Although a certain level of leisure-work balance was considered as necessary, leisure was perceived as righteous and appropriate only if it occupied a small amount of time in the students' everyday lives, while most of their time was spent on work. Under such circumstances, the students believed that leisure could enhance their work productivity by providing relaxation. Relaxation helped them to relieve pressure from work, adjust their lives, and ultimately promote their work efficiency. Participant B discussed the relationship between work and leisure:

I think there is a relationship between leisure and work. Leisure helps me

to work better because it makes me feel relaxed and relieves my stress and tiredness from work. Thus, leisure enables me to be more involved in my work. But now I am facing graduation, so I put my emphasis on my work and study, and make more effort to find a good job... Too much leisure is not beneficial for my future development.

我认为休闲和工作之间有联系。休闲协助，辅助工作，让我能更好的工作。平时可能学习生活有些累，有压力，那么通过这些娱乐能够暂时忘掉这些压力，调节一下心情，比较轻松，能让我更好的投入到工作当中去。因为现在马上就要毕业了，所以有就业的压力，希望现在能多多学习，能多多努力的为自己以后找工作做些准备吧，这时候过多的休闲可能不利于以后的发展。

Her remark clearly reflected that she valued leisure because she valued work. It also implied that, in her mind, only to a certain degree, could leisure participation help to promote productivity. If her leisure participation was too little, she would suffer physical and psychological weariness, which may lead to reduced productivity. Too much leisure, however, would result in work being superseded by leisure, which could harm her future personal development.

It is noteworthy that even though all of the students believed having some leisure was necessary, none of them seemed to perceive that too little leisure would be non-righteous. Only too much leisure participation was viewed as potentially harmful to productivity. In other words, too much leisure participation was viewed as inappropriate because more leisure means less work. Reducing the students' work time consequently would lead to decreasing their work productivity. For example, Participant I said,

Absolutely, study is more important than recreation and leisure. However, it should not be the only important thing for me as a fourth year student. I don't have a lot of course work now; I think I should actively plan my future career -- try to find a part-time job, for instance. I can also collect information about job hunting. For example, I can attend some companies' university tours. I also want to attend the Civil Servant Exam. ... I have all these ideas in mind but have not got a specific plan for carrying them out. Nowadays, I spend too much time on playing, which makes me feel guilty. Actually, most of my time is spent on playing. This reflects my laziness, but I can change.

肯定学业比娱乐休闲更重要。也不只是学业，因为我现在大四了，课也挺少的，我觉得应该自己主动一点去做关于自己以后人生规划的事情，比如说找兼职，应该多收集关于这方面的信息，找工作要多参加一些讲座什么的。我有一点想考公务员，也可以去上自习，但是我现

在都还没有个自己一个确切的计划，没有开始执行。就整天在那玩就觉得挺愧疚的。我觉得这是我的惰性，但是我觉得我应该还是可以调整的。

For Participant I, the fact that she had too much time free from work made her uncomfortable because not working means laziness to her. She felt obligated to do more work even though finishing the required coursework was easy and not time consuming for her. It seemed that when work played a secondary role to leisure, she felt uneasy.

In summary, the students' had an ideology of what was righteous leisure according to their valuation of work. In their views, righteous leisure was subordinated to work. It should be conducted after work is finished or at least after sufficiently long participation in work. Especially with major tasks to be finished, students felt they should reduce their average amount of leisure time in order to work. Moreover, the amount of time being spent on leisure should be far less than work time, because spending more time on leisure means spending less time on work, which can cause the diminution of work productivity. However, despite its relative insignificance, leisure should not be completely eliminated from one's life, mainly because without the rest and recuperation provided by leisure, work efficiency will be negatively influenced. Therefore, the students' valuation of leisure, interestingly, was an expression of their valuation of work from another perspective. To them, leisure represented the subtraction of work and was subjected to work conditions. As a consequence, it seemed that the connotation of leisure was not work in the eyes of the students.

#### *Characteristics of Leisure Participation*

Consistent with the ideology of righteous leisure, the students' leisure participation exhibited certain characteristics. They treated leisure as the subtraction of work in their daily lives. Specifically, leisure time was treated as time that was left over after work; leisure pursuits, therefore, were treated as ways to kill residual time after work. In other words, even though the students recognized that leisure was part

of their lives, it was rarely planned to be so, especially on workdays. The students rarely planned their leisure participation, including when to have leisure, what to do for leisure, and how long to participate in leisure. For example, Participant J said she seldom made plans for her leisure time: “I don’t have specific requirements for recreation. I don’t spend time thinking about what I want to do for leisure. If other people suggest ‘we should play this or that’, I don’t object to it, but I won’t spend time planning my leisure.” (我没有对娱乐有特别的要求，不是天天想着怎么玩，但是如果有人提议去玩一个什么的话我也不排斥，但是我自己不会成天想着怎么玩。) Furthermore, Participant F’s description of a typical workday also implied that leisure was residue of work to him:

The schedule for my weekday is not fixed but rather flexible. If I have class at 8:00 in the morning, I get up early to go to class, usually at 7:00. If I don’t have class at 8:00, I get up a little bit late, at 7:30 or even 8:00. If I don’t have class, I go to a study room to read and learn by myself. Often, I eat lunch around 12:00. After that, I take a nap, usually for half to an hour. Then, if I have class in the afternoon, I go to class; if not, I go to the study room to continue studying. ... After supper, sometimes I still have to attend more classes. Otherwise, I go to the study room. I usually go back to the dormitory between 9:30 to 10:00. Occasionally, I go out jogging with my classmates after I’ve returned to my room. But most of the time, I stay in the dormitory resting for a while. I may browse the news on the Internet and chat with my roommates. I usually go to bed at about 11:00. This is my typical workday.

我每天的工作日的时间安排不会太一样，是有弹性的。如果是一二节的课的话会起的稍微早一点，就是七点起。如果一二节没课三四节有课的话就会起的晚一点，七点半或是八点都有可能。如果一二节没课的话就会去读一会书，或是去自习室看一会书，然后就去上课。一二节有课三四节没课的话，三四节就会去看一会书然后吃完饭回宿舍。中午我一般都有午睡的习惯，会睡半个小时到一个小时，下午有课的话会去上课，没课的话会去看书。……晚上有上网看会新闻的习惯，有时候晚上也会有课，如果有课的话就上课了，没课的话多半也会去看书，会去自习室看书。晚上回到宿舍的话也就是九点半，十点了，偶尔会和宿舍同学一块出去跑跑步，如果不跑步的话就在宿舍里休息一下然后十一点多睡觉，工作日差不多就是这个样子。

According to his remarks, the leisure activities being mentioned, such as jogging, browsing news on the Internet, and chatting with roommates, were not intentionally planned as part of his daily life. He just did what came naturally. His engagement in these activities only occurred when he did not have to do work. He did not seem to

care much about how he spent his time after work. To him, leisure pursuits were merely activities he did to fill up his spare time.

Moreover, being treated as subtraction of work, most of the students' leisure activities were also simple. Their leisure activities usually did not require any particular skills, training, and environment. The majority of the students identified playing on the computer as their most frequent leisure activity. By "playing," they usually referred to activities like chatting with friends online, browsing the news, watching movies, listening to music, and playing computer games. Participant D stated, "When I don't have classes and don't have other work to do, mostly, I stay at my dormitory and surf the Internet. I browse news on some websites, listen to music, and watch movies on line." (上完课以后没别的工作的时候, 自己的时间通常都是耗在宿舍里边在宿舍通常会上网, 上网占的是最主要的一个部分, 会听音乐看电影。) Likewise, Participant J noted, "After I come back from the study room every night round 9:30, I play on my computer. I do things like watching movies and cartoons, checking and replying messages on Xiaonei (a Chinese website, similar to Facebook); browsing websites; and chatting with my friends. I randomly do what I want to do [on line]— don't have any plan for it." (我通常自习晚上会上到9点半, 然后回到宿舍玩会电脑。我会看看电影, 看看动画片, 上上网站什么的, 比如校内网, 聊聊天。反正想起来干嘛就随时干嘛, 没什么特别安排。) Reading was the second common leisure activity reported by most of the students. Their reading materials included novels, magazines, newspapers, and books they enjoyed reading but which did not relate to their courses. For instance, Participant B stated, "When I am in the library, I do homework and read books related to my area first. But when I have some spare time, I read some newspapers, and novels." (我经常去图书馆看看书, 如果有做什么课题就看看专业方面的书, 平时如果没有的话就会去看看报纸, 翻一下小说之类的。) Participant E also went to the library to work and read: "When I am not busy in the afternoon, I go to the library to read [course-related] books and also some newspapers and magazines that I am interested in." (不忙的时候, 下午有时候我会去图书馆看专业书, 还有一些自己感兴趣的报刊杂志之类的。) In this sense, the students' leisure activities showed passive and adaptable natures.

They could easily be conducted on campus and individually.

In addition, further analysis revealed that the students' leisure activities shared a lot of similarities instead of showing differences among different variables, such as gender, age, program, and grades. This homogeneity could also reflect that the students did not purposefully organize their leisure time. Instead, they chose to participate in activities that were easy and convenient to fill up their spare time.

On weekends, when the students did not have to attend classes, more than half of them still reported that they would spend a certain amount of time on work.

Participant A stated that

On Saturdays and Sundays I sleep a little longer [compared to workdays] and allow myself to wake up naturally. I spend some time in the dormitory reading novels and playing on the computer, but I still study. I am now a third-year student, I cannot play anymore. Even though I am only taking three or four required courses now, and the exams will not be difficult, and I am not worried about them. ... My concern now is the Graduate School Entrance Exam in one-and-a-half years. I have already started preparing for that; the earlier I prepare the better.

周六周日一般会睡到自然醒。会在宿舍看一下小说玩一会电脑，还是会稍微学一下习。上大三了，不能再玩了。专业课现在有三四门，考试也比较简单不是太担心。……现在的问题是一年半以后的考研，我现在开始就准备考研了，早准备比较好。

Participant G, a fourth year undergraduate student who was also preparing for the Graduate School Entrance Exam, stated that her weekends were no different to her workdays, during which she spent 12 to 14 hours on studies.

However, when they did not have major work tasks, the students tended to have relatively longer spare time on weekends than on workdays, mainly because they usually had fewer obligatory or unavoidable tasks on weekends. Participating in leisure activities, thus, was less likely to affect their work. Besides, some students believed that weekends were time to relax; therefore, they allowed themselves to spend more time on leisure. Most of the students reported that sometimes they had a few organized leisure activities on weekends. Participant K stated, "If I go off campus to play, I usually go on weekends, because the word 'weekend' to me means relaxation. I don't have to attend any classes or meetings during that time. The weekend hours totally belong to me, so I have less pressure if I go outside at that



time.”(如果我出去玩的话通常都会在双休日，我觉得周末在我心目中可以算是放松的同义词了，因为不需要上课或者开会什么的，是完全属于自己支配的时间，所以这时候出去也不会有什么压力。) Participant C mentioned that the idea of “weekend” contained cultural meanings to him: “I usually go outside on weekends because I think weekends are holidays in Chinese traditional ideas; there is usually no class or work obligation on weekends. ... therefore, people feel that only on weekends can they completely relax themselves.” (我经常在周末出去是因为在咱们国人传统意识里，周末才是假日，没有课业也没有工作，这种意识潜移默化，让大家觉得只有假日才能出去大肆放松休闲。)

The students’ organized leisure activities were more active than their unorganized ones and were usually conducted off campus and in the company of friends. They still exhibited simplicity, however. Common organized activities included shopping, doing sports, going to beaches, and climbing hills. Participant C noted, “I usually spend one day of a weekend going off campus. My friends and I go to Taidong or Xianggangzhonglu. Sometimes, I am not going for shopping. I may just accompany my friends when they are shopping. We also go to the beaches once in a while. Going off [campus] relieves my boredom and weariness.”(一般是一周周末当中的有一天是一定会出去的。会去台东或是香港路上。出去的话就是逛街，不一定是买东西，也有可能是陪同学买东西，出去散散心，放松放松心情。要么就去海边看一看也有可能。) Participant E also had similar organized leisure pursuits: “Every two or three weekends, I go shopping or go to beaches with my roommates or other friends.” (大概两三周一次，我会和舍友或朋友一起去海边或是去购物) Similar to their unorganized leisure participation, the students’ organized leisure pursuits shared a lot of similarities as well. Moreover, the students did not engage in active leisure activities often. Only three of them reported having active leisure activities once a week, while others’ frequency of participating in organized leisure activities varied from once in two weeks to once in five weeks.

Furthermore, besides the characteristics of their leisure participation, sometimes the students’ feelings about leisure also reflected their ideology of righteous leisure. Some of the students reported that they could only completely enjoy their leisure

activities after they finished major tasks at the end of a semester, particularly final examinations. The completion of major tasks always represented that they had finished their work for a certain phase. Moreover, the students usually gave up their leisure for a period of time to finish those work obligations. Under such circumstances, often, the students felt that they had earned the opportunity to have leisure after diligent work. In this sense, leisure was no longer perceived as subtraction of work but as a reward the students gave to themselves. When leisure was perceived as a reward, it was valued not because it could help to promote work, but because of its own significance. In other words, after living with little leisure for a certain period of time, the students became aware that leisure was important to their lives because leisure itself was important. However, even when leisure was regarded as a reward, the students still could justify their leisure participation only after they finished their work. Under such circumstances, the need to have leisure became a motivation and drove the students to work even harder. Therefore, leisure experience was considered as most relaxing and enjoyable when there was no more work to be done. For example, Participant B stated

Sometimes when I have an important task to finish, I am busy every day and have no time for leisure. Under such circumstances, having leisure is like a motivation for me. It is like a reward I can give myself after finishing my job. ... If I think of leisure as a reward, I don't have any sense of guilt when I am participating in it. However, if I have tasks waiting to be done and I still go off [campus] to play, I have a strong sense of guilt.

有时候比如说我这段时间有一个工作要完成，每天都要忙，没有时间休闲，然后在这之后的休闲呢就是把它当成一个目标，就是我完成工作以后的给自己的一个奖励。……我把休闲当成是我自己的一种奖励的时候那就没有，但是如果说我有任务在身，时间比较紧，但是我还在这段时间还出去玩了，就会有一种负罪感。

Participant F also noted that

Every time after I finish my final exams, I play very hard for a period of time. Because I am finally freed from my work, I feel more relaxed when I am doing leisure activities; and have no sense of guilt. But after I indulge myself in playing for a period of time, I will start to feel that I have played too much and need to reduce my leisure time and start to work hard again.

在一般大考试结束之后，我总是有一段时间的放纵。因为我会觉得

我终于从工作中解放出来了，这时候做休闲活动就更放松了，没有负罪感。但是在我放纵一段时间以后，就会觉得自己有点过，然后就会自己慢慢收。

In sum, the students understood their leisure experience primarily as righteous or non-righteous based on their valuation of work. Righteous leisure comes after work, does not substitute for their dominant preoccupation, work, and promotes work productivity. Mostly, the students' leisure participation in their daily lives was consistent with their ideology of righteous leisure. The majority of their leisure participation was unorganized, passive, and simple to conduct. Organized leisure pursuits, however, also showed simplicity and were participated in infrequently. Sometimes, the students' feelings about their leisure experience also manifested their ideology of righteous leisure. Particularly, only when they did not have any more work, some students could completely enjoy leisure pursuits; acknowledge the significance of leisure itself; and perceive leisure as a reward to themselves.

#### ***Non-righteous Leisure: Not Subordinate to Work***

The students' leisure participation was not always righteous, however. In other words, there were circumstances when they considered that their leisure could not promote work or even substitute for work. Under such circumstances, a sense of boredom or guilt was generally experienced by the students. Further analysis suggested that one of the dominant reasons for the occurrence of non-righteous leisure was that leisure participation usually provided the students with positive feelings that could not be experienced through work, and so they could not always resist the temptation of leisure.

#### ***Positive Feelings Provided by Leisure Participation***

According to the transcripts, when the students were participating in leisure activities, the most salient feeling they experienced was relaxation, especially mental and emotional relaxation. This feeling probably occurred because most of their leisure

participation was unorganized and was mainly used to kill time after work; thus, their feelings about most leisure participation were mainly feelings of “free from work.” The students reported that they experienced mental relaxation because they did not have to apply their minds and focus on work; for example, by understanding and memorizing knowledge, or solving problems. Participant G explained why she felt relaxed by leisure: “Study is goal-oriented; it requires hard work. If I study for a long time, I feel tired. But recreation and leisure is relaxing; it doesn’t require me to concentrate on what I am doing because I don’t need to care about the results of my leisure.” (我觉得读书而言的话, 绝对有目的性的, 我觉得是比较辛苦的东西。学习时间长的话, 我会觉得比较累。但是运动娱乐的话我觉得是比较轻松的, 不需要我集中注意力因为我不用太在意我做的休闲的结果。) For her, leisure was relaxing because leisure has a property of being not goal-directed. Hence, no specific effort was required to solve problems or make some contribution during leisure participation.

Emotional relaxation, on the other hand, referred to as a state when there are no worries about anything, and no one suffers from pressure. Both types of relaxation were correlated and inseparable. According to Participant E,

Having leisure to me is returning to human nature. Human nature is free from any constraints. As students, when we study there are always certain school rules that we need to follow. As employees, we will also have to take a company’s regulations into account when we work. We cannot always do what we like. However, when I am doing leisure activities, I feel I can forget all the constraints. For example, when I am playing basketball, all I need to think is how to shoot; my full attention is fixed on the ball and the hoop. I don’t have to worry about anything else.

休闲就是回归人的天性。人的天性是不受拘束。学生会有学校的规章制度, 工作会有公司的规章制度, 不能完全由自己。在休闲的时候可以把这些通通都抛掉。比如说在打球的时候就不用管别的事情, 只需要管那个球能不能进。

Similarly, participant D stated:

Sometimes, I like to contemplate by myself quietly. It is also a type of leisure to me, as it makes me relaxed. When contemplating-or daydreaming, I open my heart completely and think about questions that I may not have answers to or just let my thoughts drift or my mind go empty. But I don’t care about the results of what I think; I just like the

state of being in the moment in my head.

有时候我比较喜欢一个人独处静静的思考，一个人想问题。我觉得这也是属于我娱乐休闲的一个方面，属于对自己的放松。心扉完全敞开，也许会思考一些没有答案或是比较飘渺的事情，但是自己不会太在意，该怎么想就怎么想，也就是天马行空。

Both of the participants emphasized that they felt relaxed by engaging in leisure activities because they were free of judgments from others or themselves, and therefore did not feel obligated to achieve certain goals or meet any requirements.

Moreover, some students found leisure relaxing because sometimes it helped them to escape from the pressure of life temporarily. For example, in participant F's words,

People may encounter all sorts of things in their lives. Unavoidably, they feel upset and depressed. For me, I find that when I am playing basketball or playing tennis, I can forget those bad feelings. I have found that [doing sports] is a good way for me to cast aside my worries.

因为人在生活中都会遇到各种各样的事情。不可避免的会觉得压抑，烦躁，但是我在打篮球或是打网球的时候那些东西我可以抛开它或是忘记它。我觉得这是很好的抛开烦恼的方式。

Besides relaxation, a sense of enjoyment or pleasure was also experienced by the students. Some of them enjoyed leisure because, unlike work, it allowed them to freely choose whatever they like to do. Participant C contrasted leisure with work by stressing that leisure provided him with more perceived freedom than work did:

Rather than doing what I truly want to do, working is more like doing things forced on me by external pressure. However, leisure is doing something that I really want to do from the bottom of my heart. It is a force from the inside. ... When I am doing leisure I feel relaxed and happy, but work makes me feel stressed.

工作感觉更多的是一种来自外部的压力，不是自己想做的事情；而消遣感觉是自己内心主观意愿想去做的事情，它是一种内力的作用，得到的是一种身心的放松，而工作感觉到的是一种压迫感。

Furthermore, when comparing the experiences of organized and unorganized leisure participation, some of the students reported that they enjoyed organized leisure activities more than unorganized ones. On one hand, they enjoyed engaging in leisure activities off campus because the world outside of campus offered a more dynamic environment where they had more choices of leisure activities. Another possible explanation was that they were more actively seeking for enjoyment during off

campus leisure participation. Participant K described her feelings of having leisure opportunities off campus as follows:

There are more activities I can participate outside of campus [than what I can do on campus]. Out there I am interacting with the whole society and there are more things I can do. I feel the world outside can provide me with more leisure activities than the university can. Also, when I am on campus, I feel everything I do here is part of my school life; while I am outside, I feel I can relax more.

出去的活动更丰富一些。因为毕竟是和整个社会在打交道，而且外面的世界可以提供更多的东西。可是只要在校园里就觉得是学习生活的一部分，而出去的话感觉就是彻底的休闲了。

Participant C believed that a changing environment could bring enjoyment:

Most leisure activities I engage in on campus are just relaxation activities after I work all day. However, the feeling of relaxation brought about by leisure activities outside of campus is more profound. Spending too much time in the same environment makes one feel bored; so playing in a changed environment makes me feel refreshed and excited.

在校园的休闲大部分是在“工作日”内进行的，充其量算是学习工作整天后的局部舒缓；外出的休闲则更多是在假日进行，可能一整天都耗在上面，放松的程度更加彻底，能够不刻意的去想工作日的事情。如果一个人重复的机械的做同样的工作，必定会有感到厌倦和无趣，在同一个环境呆久了亦是如此。因此如果总是在校内休闲的话，会有一些厌烦，外出休闲在这里恰恰起到了调节剂的作用，较之在熟悉的不能再熟悉的校园活动，让人感到眼前一亮。

On the other hand, the students preferred having leisure accompaniment to spending leisure time alone. They gained a level of satisfying intimacy and interaction through engaging in leisure activities with others. For instance, Participant E said, “I always go off campus to play with my roommates, we have a very good relationship. Where we go and what we do off campus does not really matter to me. As long as we hang out together, I am happy. (我一般都和我的室友一起出去，我们都比较熟关系比较好。出去干什么不是主要的，地方也不是主要的，只要是和他们一块出去我就挺开心。)” Participant B also reported that she enjoyed interaction with friends when shopping: “I enjoy more when shopping with friends....I even think shopping without friends is not leisure to me. Sometimes, my friends can provide me suggestions [about what I want to buy]. Also, if I go shopping alone, I feel not as interesting as I go with friends. (我喜欢和朋友一起去购物。……我甚至觉得自己一

个人购物对我来说不是休闲。有时候，我的朋友们可以给我要买的东西提提建议。而且，如果我一个人去购物，我会觉得没有和朋友在一起那么有意思。)”

The students sometimes faced a dilemma during leisure participation. On one hand, they mostly treated leisure as subtraction of work and did not value it for its own sake. On the other hand, they experienced positive feelings during leisure participation. As a consequence, sometimes the students' leisure participation contrasted with their ideology of righteous leisure. This kind of leisure participation was considered as non-righteous. The representation of non-righteous leisure was opposite to that of righteous leisure. Specifically, leisure was non-righteous when it was conducted before work, conducted at times when students were supposed to work, or conducted for too long. Two types of feelings were reported by the students when they perceived their leisure participation as not righteous: boredom and guilt.

#### *A Feeling of Boredom*

Some of the students reported that they would experience senses of boredom and emptiness when they participated in leisure activities for too long, particularly in unorganized leisure activities. They suggested that the pleasure gained from leisure activities faded as the length of leisure time increased. Therefore, if participating in (unorganized) leisure activities for too long, the pleasure will gradually disappear; instead, a feeling of emptiness and boredom emerges. Participant D reported, “Leisure is very relaxing and happy. However, if I spend too much time on leisure, say a couple of days, I have a feeling of emptiness, like I have nothing to do. It feels like I did nothing except play; then I feel as though I spent my time in vain for those days.” (从事休闲活动会让我觉得非常放松，非常快乐。但是这种活动时间连续在一起或是持续的时间比较长的话，自己会有一种空虚感，觉得无所事事那种状态。) Participant I also stated, “Sometimes, when I was in the dormitory playing computer for too long, whether I was playing computer games or watching movies, I would start to feel bored.” (但是有的时候我在宿舍玩电脑玩的太久了，不管是玩电脑游戏还是看电影吧，就会觉得无聊，心情也不太舒服。)

With organized leisure pursuits, however, negative feelings like boredom and emptiness did not seem to arise, with these activities, probably because the students did not participate in organized leisure activities as often as they did unorganized ones.

### *A Feeling of Guilt*

A feeling of guilt, nevertheless, could occur in both organized and unorganized non-righteous leisure participation. All of the students reported that guilt was a salient negative feeling after non-righteous leisure participation occurred. It was a feeling that resulted when the students' true positive feelings about leisure came into conflict with their strong work ethic. On one hand, they found leisure relaxing and enjoyable; thus, they sometimes could not prevent themselves from engaging in or continuing their leisure participation. On the other hand, they perceived that leisure was not as valuable as work. Therefore, they could not morally justify their "indulgence" in the leisure participation and guilt occurred.

For example, if the students felt that they spent too much time on leisure or relaxed at times when they should work, a sense of guilt usually emerged because they believed that leisure negatively influenced their work. This situation contrasted with the ideology of righteous leisure. Participant H described her experience of being guilty thus: "Sometimes I feel guilty after I participate in leisure activities. For example, at the end of one day, when I was looking back at what I had done for that day I found that most of the time I was having fun, while I only spent a little time on studying or thinking. Then I felt guilty. But when I was playing, I did not feel it." (有的时候休闲玩了以后我会觉得内疚。比如有时候玩了一天回来之后可能会想自己今天又玩了一天，没有学习也没有思考什么，会有一点愧疚。但是玩的时候可能会忘记了) Likewise, participant E noted that

Leisure brings me a sense of guilt sometimes. For example, I just came back to school after summer vacation. Now looking back, I found that I wasted a lot of time this summer. Because I did not spend enough time studying; I need to push myself into school mode again. If I had a chance to choose again, I would lead a more productive life in the vacation.



休闲有的时候会带给我一种负罪感。比如，暑假刚过回来之后就会觉得荒废了很多，假期里没有那么多时间学习，感觉又像回到了从前，又无从下手那种感觉，不像以前那样井井有条的生活秩序。但在假期里就觉得不愿意去学习。如果让我重新选择的话会选择一种比较规律的生活。

The sense of guilt always took place after the students' leisure participation. It seemed that although there was a fixed value or criterion in the students' mind about how much leisure was righteous before a level was reached that would impinge on the dominant role of work in their lives; they could not be clearly defined that criterion, however. For example, according to the previous remarks, neither participant had a quantified standard about how much daily leisure time was justifiable. A sense of guilt was experienced after they compared their leisure participation with work participation and found that the latter did not occupy an absolutely dominant place in their lives.

Moreover, some students suggested that it was impossible for them not to carry out non-righteous leisure even though they really wanted to. As a result, guilt was an unavoidable feeling. For example, participant A stated that

Sometimes I feel guilty for having leisure, especially when I need to finish a heavy workload. For example, during the exam week, I would blame myself for reading novels for one or two hours. However, the problem is that I could not control myself and did not read because I really liked it. But after reading, I felt guilty.

有的时候做休闲的事情会觉得内疚，特别是想到自己的学业，尤其是学业比较紧张的时候。比如说期末考试的时候，就会因为看了一两个小时的小说而感到自责。问题是有的时候觉得忍不住不去看小说，但是看完了以后却会觉得自责。

Participant K also said that she could not help relaxing when she was supposed to work:

I think when I have great pressure to finish something, I should not relax. Instead, I should completely dedicate myself to the work until I finish it. If I do recreation and leisure at that time, it feels like escaping from my responsibility. However, even though I wish to, in real life I was never able to work with no down time.

因为我一直觉得在我压力很大，负担很大的时候是不应该有休闲娱乐的，这个时候应该全身心的投入去完成一项工作，但是如果一旦休闲娱乐或是很长时间的玩的话会感觉实在逃避。但是尽管我在有重大任务的时候期望自己能够做到这点，在生活中还是做不到。

To conclude, all of the students perceived that a part of their leisure participation was not righteous. Boredom and guilt usually accompanied non-righteous leisure participation. Some students reported that when they participated in some unorganized leisure activities for a long time, they experienced a sense of boredom. Guilt, often arose after the students participated in leisure activities for too long or at an inappropriate time. However, the students could not help participating in non-righteous leisure because, at the beginning or during their leisure participation, they usually experienced positive feelings, such as relaxation and pleasure.

#### ***4.2.3 Causes for the Subordinate Role of Leisure***

##### ***An Absence of Spiritual Essence of Leisure***

Why were the students' lives ruled by work, while leisure could only occupy a subordinate position? What was the underlying reason that caused the students to judge their leisure participation as righteous or non-righteous only depending on work conditions? Further analysis of the transcripts revealed that at least two reasons contribute to the relative insignificance of leisure. First, although the students reported that leisure offered them positive experiences like relaxation, pleasure, and regeneration, these activities were largely only immediately rewarding and provided only short-lived pure pleasure. It was evident that most students did not understand leisure as something with a spiritual essence; instead, they believed that their leisure activities were neither fulfilling nor enriching and so could not boost personal growth.

For example, participant H stated that

If I achieve something with my study, for example, if I score high on an exam I will feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. But leisure merely provides me with simple pleasure. I may feel happy for a while by doing leisure and then nothing. But the sense of accomplishment from work can last for a long time. The pleasure gained from leisure goes quickly.

我觉得学业比如说一门课考了比较好的成绩我觉得那是成就感，满足感。学到了知识取得了一定的成绩，我觉得这是成就感，但是娱乐方面我觉得主要的是娱乐性质的，就是单纯的高兴吧。可能一阵高兴过

后就没有什么了，只是时间问题。像学业的话学到的可能是永久的或是终身的满足感。这样我觉得学业更重要一些。因为娱乐的快乐只是一时的。

Participant B also noted that unlike work, leisure could not enhance her personal development:

Sometimes, I enjoy working because it makes me feel that I have learned something, became more mature and accumulated some experiences for my life. Or you can say, I can get a sense of accomplishment from work. But till now, leisure doesn't give me any of these kinds of feelings. I just feel relaxed and have fun when I am doing it. Even the sense of satisfaction I gain by shopping cannot compare to the sense of accomplishment work gives me. ... I think a life dominated by leisure is meaningless.

有时候工作的过程也是一种享受，工作当中的享受是觉得完成了这件事以后自己有了一方面的提高，有变成熟或者是积累了一些经验等等。可以说是有一定的成就感。但是好像娱乐我到目前为止还没有发现这样的感觉，好像只是放松，觉得很开心。即使是买到好东西的成就感和工作中获得的成就感不能相提并论，不是一种感觉。但是如果一个人的生活是以休闲娱乐为主那我觉得也没有什么意思。

Apparently, the students' leisure participation did not allow most of them to generate optimal feelings about themselves, like a sense of accomplishment, self-esteem, and personal growth. In this sense, leisure holds connotations of superficiality and frivolousness. Work, on the other hand, not only has the potential to bring utilitarian values to the students, such as stable monetary payment, but it sometimes also provides them with more profound enjoyment: good feelings about themselves. Thus, it is not surprising that the students placed leisure in a subordinate position to work. However, what lies beneath this logical-sounding ideology is that the students rarely actively sought personal growth from their leisure participation. In other words, leisure could not provide the value of personal growth for them probably because the students rarely perceived leisure as a way to gain personal growth, but not because the nature of leisure is not enriching. Therefore, an absence of spiritual essence in the students' understanding of leisure contributes to explain their relatively low valuation of leisure as well as the secondary role of leisure in their daily lives.

Although the ideology –work is primary; leisure is subject to work conditions—remains predominant throughout the analysis, a small part of the students' remarks

suggested that they held somewhat conflicting attitudes towards leisure. These inconsistent opinions may suggest that some students found certain leisure experience somewhat meaningful; however, these positive results were obtained unintentionally or were somewhat vague. For example, Participant K showed her contradictory opinions towards leisure throughout the interview. She noted,

I am proud of reading so many books [that do not relate to my coursework]. Even though I myself am good at studying, I still consider people who spend all of their time on schoolwork not open minded enough. I feel participating in leisure activities like reading makes me unique and different than others. I think leisure makes me a person, not just a study machine; therefore, I value my leisure.

我看那么多书我以此为自豪。我的学习算是很好的了，但是我会觉得一个人如果只是学习的话，我会觉得他学的很窄，思维很僵。我在学习之外从事的像上网看书之类的活动能使我这个人不同于其他人。我还是挺珍惜那一块。

However, later in the interview, she added:

But if I spend too much time on surfing the Internet, I feel bored and don't want to do it anymore. Sometimes, I also feel guilty doing leisure activities.... My opinions [towards leisure] are contradictory, but if I choose, I still think work should be placed above to leisure.

但是如果我上网的时候花的时间太多了，我也会觉得听没意思的，到后来就完全不想上了。有的时候做休闲活动也会觉得很愧疚。……我对于休闲的想法是挺矛盾的，但是真的让我选，我还是觉得学业应该更为重要，放在休闲娱乐之前。

Her statements revealed that she not only experienced her leisure activities as relaxing and pure pleasure, but also acknowledged that some of her leisure pursuits like reading make her different from others. She cherished the uniqueness brought by leisure and considered it as superiority. Therefore, by participating in certain leisure activities, Participant K obtained some optimal feelings about herself. Even though she still experienced negative feelings associated with leisure, her statement at least suggested the possibility for Chinese university students to obtain more satisfying feelings from their leisure participation.

Moreover, a few, but not many, students' reflected on their leisure participation during university time and expressed a willingness to engage in more meaningful leisure activities. For example, Participant G stated that

During these three years of university, I did not plan my time very well. This

is a regret of mine. My leisure is not good enough, but it could have been better. For example, I could have learned something really useful during my leisure time, but I did not. I feel that I have spent some time on leisure, but I did not gain anything from it. I think good leisure is not random and aimless. For example, I could have practiced playing basketball—lost some weight, built up health, and learned a skill. But for me, most of the time, I was just playing; I did not actually gain something from my leisure.

这也是我三年以来的一个遗憾吧，大学里时间没有规划的很好。休闲也没有很精彩，完全可以让休闲更精彩一些，比如学到很多东西，我觉得我时间也花了，但也没有太大的收获的感觉。我所谓的精彩是说不是漫无目的，很随意的。比如说我可以学一些，有些女生篮球打的不错啊，或是通过运动达到瘦身的效果，增强体质，或是学到某项技能，对我而言这方面的效果很小，大部分时间感觉自己都在玩。

Participant G realized that leisure could be more than just casual playing, instead, leisure activities are constructed by people. By actively seeking values from leisure pursuits, more profound benefits can be gained.

### ***Unemployment Pressure***

Great employment pressure also significantly influenced the students' ideology of leisure. As Participant C said, "survival is the basis of life." The students were confronted with such intense employment pressure that they were concerned about their future. Today, in Chinese society, people are evaluated by their work achievements. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that the students gave little consideration to their leisure participation. Participant G mentioned that although she used to find some level of personal development through jogging, facing fierce competition, she had to give up her leisure participation:

I used to like jogging in the first two years of university when I had more free time. Often, I jogged for a very long time, like one hour. I liked it because it gave me more ability to persevere than before. I found that after I had been jogging for one and half a year, I became more determined and patient not only in sports, but also in other things. ... Now I am preparing for the Graduate School Entrance Examination, I do not jog anymore because I don't have time. I need to study all the time and every day. I have no choice.

在大大二我有更多空闲时间的时候，我喜欢很慢的长跑。很慢很慢的跑，可能跑上一个小时，我觉得很锻炼一个人的毅力。我发现大概有一年的时间，在我坚持每天跑每天跑之后，不仅是在运动中，在做其他事情时的耐力也提高了。……现在我在准备考研，基本上娱乐时间都被剥夺了，没时间慢跑。每天基本上都是在学习，但是这也挺无奈的，没

办法。

Moreover, under employment pressure, some students expressed a delayed gratification towards their leisure participation. They expected that after they earned a good life through work, they would be able to have better leisure participation. For example, in Participant B's words, "Because I am facing graduation, I am satisfied with my leisure participation now. But after I have a stable job and family, I hope I can participate in more forms of leisure activities. (因为我现在面临毕业,所以对现在的休闲也满意了。我想以后工作然后家庭等等各方面稳定了以后希望有更多的方式来休闲。)" She placed work and family over leisure and accepted the fact that she did not have sufficient leisure time with graduation approaching. However, she expected to participate in more diversified leisure activities in the future. Participant K, similarly, expected that she could earn a more leisured life through working after graduation:

If it is possible, I hope to have more leisure time and more diverse leisure pursuits....But in order to do so, I need to have a lot of time, have time to enjoy. I hope I can do that after I get a job. I think if I want that kind of leisure, first I need money. But now, I have to prepare for finding a good job or for pursuing further education after graduation, so I have to put leisure in a lower position in my life.

如果可能的话我希望有更多时间休闲和更多样化的休闲方式……但是为了这样,我需要很多的时间,有时间去享受。我希望能够在工作后得到这样的一种状态。我觉得如果我要有那样的休闲那首先我要有金钱的保障。但是现在我要为我毕业以后找工作或是继续深造做准备,所以就会被休闲放在一个靠后的位置了。

To conclude, two factors emerged from the transcripts contributed to explain the relative insignificance of leisure in the students' daily lives. On one hand, there is a lack of spiritual quality in the students' leisure participation; they gave little consideration to the connotation leisure holds and merely treated it as non-work. Consequently, they rarely intentionally seek profound fulfillment or personal growth through leisure participation. On the other hand, great unemployment pressure constrained the students to develop their leisure pursuits. Facing intense competition, they had no choice but to work hard.

## Chapter 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Discussion of the Findings

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the interviewed students' understanding of leisure was closely related to their understanding of work. To them, work referred to activities they felt obligated to do to get a good job after graduation. All of them expressed a strong work ethic. Most of the time they did not enjoy working, but they believed that work was the right thing to do and what they should do. Their life was centered around work. Leisure, on the other hand, was given little consideration. The shared idea that leisure was a necessary part of their lives was mainly based on the consideration that work productivity would be negatively affected without leisure participation. Thus, the students valued leisure just as an extension of their high valuation of work.

According to the values the students ascribed to leisure, there were two spheres of leisure participation: righteous and non-righteous. Leisure was perceived as righteous when it was subordinated to work. Specifically, leisure activities were justifiable if they were conducted after work and occupied only a small amount of daily time. Consistent with this ideology, leisure time was generally treated as time left over after work; leisure pursuits were merely activities the students participated in to occupy spare time. However, the students could not always control their leisure behavior because leisure participation generally provided them with certain positive feelings that they could not experience from working. When they "lost control of themselves" and engaged in leisure activities at inappropriate times or for too long, they could often not justify their leisure participation and perceived it as non-righteous. Consequently, the students experienced negative feelings, such as boredom and guilt. Thus, the students' leisure experiences did not always relate to their well-being.

Further analysis indicated two explanations for the relative insignificance of leisure in the students' daily lives. On one hand, there is an absence of spiritual essence in their understanding of leisure. In other words, the students rarely actively

pursued personal growth through leisure participation. Thus, most of their leisure activities could provide them with only short-lived pure pleasure. Profound enjoyment, however, could not be obtained through leisure participation. On the other hand, the students were facing intense unemployment pressure after graduation. Hard work was perceived as the only way to get a good job. Thus, they felt that they had no choice but to work hard. Inevitably, leisure had to give way to work.

The characteristics of the students' leisure participation indeed support the notion that Chinese people's leisure participation exhibits a passive nature, which has been mentioned by previous researchers (Wang & Stringer, 2000; Yu & Berryman, 1996; Yin, 2005; Su *et al.* 2006; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Walker & Wang, 2009). However, unlike what have been assumed by some researchers (Liu *et al.*, 2008; Wang & Stringer, 2000), traditional Chinese philosophical thinking does not seem to play a dominant role in shaping the students' passive attitude to engaging in leisure.

As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, some researchers have proposed that Taoism and Confucianism, two major schools of thought in Chinese culture, highly valued leisure, and their ideas and ideals about leisure played a major role in shaping Chinese people's leisure (Liu *et al.*, 2008; Wang & Stringer, 2000). In particular, they have applied the philosophy of Taoism to explain the relative passivity of Chinese people's leisure. The key concept of Taoism is Tao:

(Tao) literally means a way, road or path, and signifies the way along which all must walk and represents the course of things, the principle of the one in the many, or the universal principle underlying the natural order of things. In the Chinese tradition, man (sic) is considered as a being that can never be separated from Nature and therefore must follow the principle or law (i.e., the Tao) of Nature in order to have a fulfilling living experience, i.e., being in one with Nature. In a sense, the law of nature is the law of the life. (Yeh, 1993, p. 29)

Taoism emphasizes the value of a natural unoccupied spirit and advocates that humans should live in a natural way so they can find the happiness of being completely leisured and unoccupied (Liu *et al.*, 2008). Yeh (1993) further argued that Taoism is the most fruitful source of understanding how the Chinese deal with leisure.

However, this empirical study suggests that instead of valuing a leisured and



unoccupied lifestyle, the students generally put a higher valuation on work than leisure and exhibited a strong work ethic. The findings of this study indicate that, rather than intentionally achieving an inactive or passive leisured state, the students had not deliberately adopted a passive attitude to leisure participation. In fact, they gave little consideration to the connotation of leisure, and much of their leisure participation was merely treated as activities to fill up non-work time. In addition, inconsistent with Wang and Stringer's (2000) argument, there was also no obvious evidence found in this study supporting their idea that the students sought through their leisure participation a harmonious state between themselves and nature, which would allow them to obtain individual peace, tranquility, and an understanding of the meaning of life. Apparently, leisure lacks richness and a spiritual or philosophical meaning in the students' everyday lives.

An absence of spiritual quality in the students' leisure, however, to some extent supported Ma's (2004a) comments on the status quo of leisure in contemporary China. She believes that leisure is devalued in today's China; people understand it as pure pleasure or even laziness. In ancient China, however, besides recuperation, people pursued more meaningful leisure activities by inventing, creating, and engaging in philosophical introspection, whereas contemporary Chinese people's leisure has lost its spiritual power. Rather than contemplating, creating, or engaging in civic affairs in their leisure time, people mainly occupy their spare time with sensory stimulation, such as eating and drinking (Ma, 2005).

Moreover, this study attempted to explore the meanings of leisure in Chinese university students' daily lives; unexpectedly, the findings revealed that the students exhibited a strong work ethic and their high valuation on work significantly influenced their understanding of leisure. The role of work and that of leisure were so closely related in the daily lives of the students that they were like two sides of a coin. The students' work centrality worldview consequently led to a lack of spiritual or philosophical essence in their ideology of leisure. Hunnicutt (2007) argues that leisure has been consistently identified in contrast with work through Western history; its multiform historical manifestations are inseparable from work and its various

representations. Although more studies are needed to investigate whether this argument also stands throughout the whole Chinese history, the findings of this study suggest that, at least in today's Chinese society, examining the formation of meanings of leisure cannot be separated from exploring people's beliefs about work.

Interestingly, the students' work-leisure ideology emerged from this study is similar to that in contemporary Western society. On one hand, work's centrality has also been regarded as a recurring theme for the Western scholars for much of the twentieth century (Hunnicut, 2007). Hunnicutt (2007) stated, "Work now sat squarely at the centre of the Modern age; the enduring economic imperative, social reality, cultural focus and political touchstone" (p.70). On the other hand, some researchers also believed that, today, leisure has lost its spiritual meaning in Western society (Fullagar, 2004; Hunnicutt, 2006; Juniu, 2009). For example, some Western researchers have argued that the (Western) historical sense of freedom in leisure has been lost. From a historical perspective, Juniu (2009) argued that the contemporary notions of leisure (in Western societies) have been shaped by the Puritan work ethic through the post-industrial revolution. The essence of freedom that leisure denotes and the time conceived for culture creating and for social interaction has been influenced by the materialistic view of quantifying happiness. Further, she stated that leisure has become a blank and meaningless time, time for everything and anything. It is subjected to work conditions, and it constitutes a potential source of consumption. The findings of this study, therefore, provide some empirical evidence supporting the idea that the work's central role and leisure's subordinate role now exist in both Western societies and in China.

In Western societies, it was believed that the reformation and the coming of Capitalism transformed work and leisure in values and priorities (Hunnicut, 2007). The transformation began in Christianity; therefore, contemporary Western work ideology has its religious origins. The Puritans placed primary importance on work and valued it as a spiritual end in itself. Meanwhile, they devalued leisure and gave it negative connotations like idleness and wasting time (Juniu, 2009). Under the influence of this Protestant work ethic, leisure began to assume a subservient role in

the modern world, becoming the means to support the higher purpose, work. According to Hunnicutt (2007), although there is little or no God-talk associated with the work ethic in today's industrial nations, the religious energy that Protestants imparted to work endured and influenced the modern world profoundly.

However, it is unlikely that Chinese society has been profoundly influenced by the Protestant work ethic. Why then do Chinese people work so hard and play so little? Only a very limited number of studies have explored this question. The only paper I encountered with respect to this issue was Harrell's (1985) paper, which observes that in both non-Chinese and Chinese people's perceptions, Chinese people work particularly hard. His study was designed to explore the underlying factors that formed this work ethic from an anthropological perspective. He has attempted to explain the diligence of Chinese people by proposing that Chinese people hold an ethic of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship was defined by him as "the investment of one's resources in a long-term quest to improve the material well-being and security of some group to which one belongs and with which one identifies" (p.216). He further explained that there are three crucial elements in this definition: future orientation, security, and group orientation. To some extent, in this study, the students' perceptions of work supported Harrell's proposed definition of entrepreneurship ethic. For example, all of the students believed that their work obligations during university were performed to build a good future; they aimed at establishing something secure and enduring. Moreover, some students suggested that civil servant is a decent job because it provides stability, good welfare, and relaxation. This finding may imply that the students value long-term security.

However, Harrell's (1985) paper is relatively old. Leisure as a contextual concept emerges from a social process, and the social system impacts how people think, experience, and enjoy leisure (Sousa, 2000). Similar to what has happened in Western societies, broader structural shifts have created a complex and sometimes confusing depiction of the current work environment (Hilbrecht, 2007) in China. Social and structural changes, such as shifts in workforce demographics, increasing globalization, and technology revolution have altered the dynamics of both Chinese people's work

and leisure lives (Hilbrecht, 2007; Juniu, 2009).

One significant transformation of Chinese society is the consumption revolution. China has undergone rapid commercialization of consumption, which has increased consumer choices and raised material living as well as provided more consumer freedom to Chinese citizens (Davis, 2000). As Cook (2006) contended, leisure pursuits can never be divorced entirely from economic pursuits; recreation and entertainment cannot exist apart from the economic system and social arrangements from which they have emerged. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize and accept that many leisure forms, contexts, practices, and cultural arenas have arisen in and as commercial activity from their inception (Cook, 2006) in contemporary Chinese society. However, acknowledging the economic influence on leisure does not mean leisure should be valued by its commodification. Cook (2006) argued that “the danger of commercialized leisure lies not so much in its commercial origins but in its socio-political trajectories—whether it will be merely reproductive, or decidedly transformative, of our social relations and our lives” (p.313). When a conflation of market value with social value occurs, goods and consumption have come to be understood as being the means by which the self can be found, experienced and expressed (Miller, Jackson, Thrift, Holbrook, & Rowlands, 1995; Twitchell, 1999). In such circumstances, people have begun to place primary importance on work and overlooked the richness of leisure. Arguably, over-valuing work, the consumption of material goods, and money is likely to have a negative effect on satisfaction and happiness (Lewis, Rapoport, & Gambles, 2003).

The argument here then is to propose a balanced lifestyle and leisure style. Considering this study was focusing on exploring Chinese people’s leisure experiences, a balanced leisure style will be explained in detail. On one hand, it is necessary to spend some leisure time recuperating, relaxing, and enjoying pure pleasure. On the other hand, it is also crucial to regain the spiritual essence of leisure and pursue more deeply fulfilling leisure activities. This argument echoes Stebbins’ (2008) notion of right leisure:

[T]he goal of building an optimal leisure lifestyle, [is] defined as pursuing

one or more deeply fulfilling serious leisure activities during free time, complemented by a judicious amount of casual or project-based leisure or both. If at all possible all people ... should have the opportunity to pursue self-fulfillment, a personal quality most profoundly achieved in serious leisure. Hence, the stress on this form. But people also need to relax as well as experience some of the other benefits available to them through casual and project-based leisure. (p.339)

Stebbins (1997) defined casual leisure as “immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no specific training to enjoy it” (p. 18). According to this definition, the majority of leisure activities the students participated in were casual leisure activities. Indeed, casual leisure participation brought a series of benefits, such as regeneration, edutainment (Stebbins’ term), and development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships (Stebbins, 2001). However, it also has costs. For example, according to the study, some students experienced boredom during their leisure participation. Boredom is “an unmistakable sign of momentary absence of well-being, or momentary presence of low quality of life” (p.307). In addition, none of them reported having a distinctive leisure identity. More importantly, few students suggested that leisure could provide them with good feelings about themselves. Thus, a profound level of happiness cannot be attained through their leisure participation, which negatively impacted their well-being and quality of life. However, some degree of participation in serious leisure (systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial and interesting that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a career centered on acquiring and expressing its special skills knowledge and experience (Stebbins, 1992 p.3).) may allow individuals to experience positive feelings, such as personal enrichment, self-actualization, self-image, self-gratification, and self-expression (Stebbins, 2006). Ma (2004b) also suggests that by better utilizing leisure time, individuals can gain more knowledge, skill and ability. It also allows individuals to lead a more fulfilling life and potentially avoid negative emotions like emptiness, loneliness, and helplessness.

How then can Chinese students or, speaking more broadly, Chinese people build a balanced leisure lifestyle? What are some of the public policy implications for leisure

practitioners? Most importantly, public initiatives may be directed at developing leisure education programs in China. Leisure education aims to foster the development of values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge relevant to leisure so as to enhance people's quality of life (Sivan, 2007). According to this study, it is apparent that there is a lack of leisure education in China. Schools in China are mostly concerned with roles related to work life. The students in large part had no knowledge of their leisure potential, nor were they educated with an array of valuable opportunities available in leisure time. However, "education should prepare students for all major life functions, including use of leisure time. Since leisure is central to one's life experience, it rightfully deserves increased educational attention" (Bender, Brannan, & Verhoven, 1984 p.3). In addition, schools have been considered as the major socializing agents for leisure (Sivan, 2007); thus, leisure education programs can be designed as part of the school curriculums in China. According to Caldwell, Baldwin, Walls, and Smith's (2004) empirical study, middle school students who had taken the TimeWise curriculum (a curriculum aimed to increase positive free time use and mitigate or prevent the initiation of substance use and abuse) reported being better able to reconstruct boring situations into something more interesting; having higher levels of decision making skills, initiative, community awareness; and participating in new interests, sports, and nature-based activities. Leisure education can promote an understanding of what makes people healthy and happy, allow Chinese students to learn how to manage free time in healthy ways, and engage actively and positively in life-enhancing leisure activities. Experiences associated with leisure participation that negatively impacted the students' life quality, such as boredom and guilt, can also be relieved through proper leisure education.

Again, considering leisure as a cultural concept, merely learning from Western countries' experience of developing leisure education is not sufficient. The development of leisure education program or curriculums in China should build on leisure studies that are embedded in Chinese culture.

Furthermore, the issue of graduate unemployment appeared to be an obstacle in Chinese society that has prevented the students from having a more balanced life

between work and leisure as well as developing more meaningful leisure pursuits. In the study, the majority of the students expressed their concerns about the approaching intense competition in the job market. They were fully aware that problems might lie ahead in the job market and were making efforts to reduce the problems through hard working. The potential employment competition was so fierce that many students sometimes believed that they had no choice but to give up leisure for work. This situation mirrors Chinese society's failure to provide students with a sense of job security. Having the potential danger of being unemployed and losing or having insufficient financial income after graduation, the students had no alternative but to work hard to be more competitive. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that they gave little consideration to leisure participation. This phenomenon indicates that to promote a healthy and balanced leisure lifestyle, it is critical for the Chinese government to take the initiative to ease graduate unemployment.

In addition, this study has avoided imposing Western terminologies related to leisure onto the students by encouraging them to describe and categorize daily experiences in their own words. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the word leisure is usually translated into Chinese as Xiu Xian (休闲). Throughout the study, all of the students have applied Xiu Xian to name or classify their leisure-like pursuits. Thus, this finding supports that the term Xiu Xian is comparable with leisure. However, it is noteworthy that Xiu Xian is not the only terminology that has been used. Other words, including Yu Le (娱乐), which is usually the translation of recreation in Chinese, and Xiao Qian (消遣), which is usually the translation of pastime in Chinese, together with Xiu Xian, were used interchangeably by the students. However, their opinions varied from one other in terms of whether the meanings of these terms are different; those who perceived differences between these terms found it hard to pinpoint the distinctions. Therefore, future research may investigate and identify more Chinese constructs that are comparable with leisure-related phenomena to derive a more Chinese grounded perspective of leisure.

## **5.2 Limitations of the Study**

There are some limitations of the current study. First, all the Chinese quotations included in the study were translated only by me. Because translation is a process of interpretation, the translated quotations may not precisely convey the participants' intentions. Other translation methods, such as back-translation and the committee approach, allow multiple translators correcting each other, which may contribute to enhance the quality of translation (Dimanche, 1994). However, I have included the original Chinese quotations for reference. Second, due to distance restrictions, subsequent data collection was conducted by corresponding with the participants via Email. Consequently, the subsequent data may be less rich than the initial data as Email correspondence is not conducive to observation and probing. Moreover, the response rate was relatively low, only about half of the participants responded for subsequent data collections. I clearly missed certain leisure experiences and insights of some participants. Thirdly, even though the findings of this study revealed that work was a substantial aspect for understanding the meanings of leisure, I failed to explore the students' work experience in depth. I focused on the students' non-work aspect of life during the interviews as the study was designed to capture the meanings of leisure. However, analysis suggests that the students' work valuation strongly influenced their understanding of leisure. Thus, I may have overlooked some dimensions of the students' work experience which otherwise could contribute to a better understanding of the meanings of leisure. Moreover, this study was limited to the leisure experiences of only 11 Chinese university students from OUC. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be sufficient to generalize about the meanings of leisure for most Chinese university students. However, a small sample pool allowed me to obtain a deep and clear understanding of my participants' leisure experiences.

## **5.3 Implications for future research**

This study was the first exploratory study examining the meanings of leisure in China; it was limited to the experiences of selected Chinese university students. Future researchers may want to explore leisure meanings and experiences of other



university students or other groups of people with different social or personal contexts in China. For example, similar studies can be conducted on people who are employed after graduation and compare their leisure experience with that of university students. It is likely that the graduate unemployment issue can only be used to explain the relative insignificance of leisure in university students' lives. It will be interesting then to study whether Chinese people have different perceptions about leisure when they do not have unemployment pressure. Such studies can enhance an understanding of broader social values towards work and leisure as well as address leisure constraints in Chinese society. Complicated as it will be, future exploration of Chinese people's work-leisure relationship from a variety of socially and culturally relevant perspectives will facilitate researchers to gain a broader understanding of the changing social, cultural, and economic environment (Hilbrecht, 2007). Further research may also relate leisure meanings with age. Questions, such as "Do different generations understand leisure differently?" can facilitate leisure researchers identify social constructs that have shaped Chinese people's understanding of leisure. Moreover, investigating and comparing leisure experiences between males and females, rural residents and urban residents in China may increase the awareness of broader issues, such as inequality.

As mentioned in the beginning, this study focused only on the role leisure plays in Chinese people's daily lives and the values ascribed to it in relation to their lives as a whole. Future research might explore other types of *meaning* in a Chinese cultural context, such as identifying characteristics being used to define leisure or connecting leisure meanings with their life satisfaction.

Future research might also conduct cross-culture studies that compare Chinese people's meanings of leisure with those of people from other cultures and ethnic backgrounds. For example, Stodolska (2000b) calls for integrating research on minorities into the broader field of leisure to build a theoretical framework that could be consistently applied to study the leisure experience of both the minorities and the mainstream. In addition, an exploration on the differences and similarities of leisure meanings would be interesting in terms of understanding various cultures.

Last but not least, there is a need to increase Chinese literature on leisure studies. Although the body of Chinese leisure studies literature is increasing, it is still relatively small. In addition, most research has focused only on the economic influences leisure brings; few qualitative empirical studies have been conducted to explore leisure-related phenomena in China. As leisure has become an increasingly important issue in Chinese society, it is essential to develop empirical research to seek a more solid and complete understanding of it and to further facilitate Chinese leisure practitioners to take initiatives to enhance people's experience of leisure and quality of life.

In sum, this study adds to the growing body of literature that examines the experiences and meanings of leisure in non-western cultures. In particular, it sheds light on the value orientations towards work and leisure in contemporary China. Furthermore, based on its findings, current study also proposed that to enhance Chinese people's life quality, it is necessary to build a balanced and healthy leisure style. Hopefully, further research will be pursued in the future to further explore Chinese people's experiences.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Poster**

**Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies**

**University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada**

## **Participants needed for research of understanding leisure meanings for Chinese university students**

We are looking for volunteers to participate in a study of exploring daily leisure experiences and leisure meanings for Chinese university students.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-to-one interview with the researcher.

Your participation would involve approximately 1 hour.

For more information about the study, or to volunteer for this study please contact:

*Xuefei, Tu*

*Masters' Degree Student in*

*Department of Recreation and Leisure studies*

at

(86)13616487901

Email: *xtu@ uwaterloo. ca*

**This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo.**

## Appendix A (Chinese Version)

娱乐休闲研究学院，滑铁卢大学，安大略省，加拿大

### 诚意邀请你来参加我们的研究 ——对中国大学生的“休闲”调查

我们正在招募志愿者参与一项旨在了解中国大学生日常休闲体验及其意义的调查研究活动。我们邀请出生于中国并没有任何海外生活经验的在校大学生报名协助我们的研究。此次调查将通过了解中国大学生的日常生活来探求“休闲”在中国文化中的涵义

如果您愿意参与我们的研究，您将会接受一次为时约一小时的一对一的访问

想了解更多信息或参与我们的研究，请联系：

*屠雪霏 (滑铁卢大学娱乐休闲研究学院的在读研究生)*

**手机：15865549764**

**Email: *xtu@uwaterloo.ahs.ca***

此项调查已经滑铁卢大学学术研究道德委员会批准

## Appendix B

### Phone Call Guide

P = Potential Participant; I = Interviewer

I- May I please speak to [name of potential participant]?

P – Hello, [Name of potential participant] speaking. How may I help you?

I – Hello, I received your contact information from [XXXX]. As part of my Masters’ work with the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo, I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Mark Havitz, on “The meanings of leisure for Chinese university students”. This research also has important personal meaning to me as I also was a undergraduate student in Ocean University of China. As part of my research, I am conducting interviews to explore Chinese university students’ daily leisure experiences and the role leisure plays in their lives. I would really like to meet with you and talk about some of your experiences and thoughts. Is this a convenient time to give you further information about the interviews?

P – No, could you call me back later (agree on a more convenient time to call person back.)

OR

P – Yes, could you provide me with some more information regarding the interviews you will be conducting?

I – Background information:

- ✓ I will be undertaking interviews starting in September.
- ✓ The interview would last approximately one hour, and would be arranged for a time convenient to your schedule.
- ✓ Involvement in this interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study.
- ✓ The questions are quite general (for example: What do you do on a typical day with work/study obligations? What do you do on a typical day without any work/study obligations?)
- ✓ You may decline to answer any of the interview questions you do not wish to answer and may terminate the interview at anytime.
- ✓ With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis.
- ✓ All information you provide will be considered confidential.
- ✓ The data collected will be kept in a secure location.
- ✓ This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the

Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo.

- ✓ After completion of the interview, I would contact you by telephone for a follow-up discussion, to verify my interpretations and to add or clarify any additional points you may have.

I would like to mail/e-mail you an information letter which has all of these details along with contact names and numbers on it to help assist you in making a decision about your participation in this study.

P – No, thank you.

OR

P – Sure (get contact information from potential participant i.e., mailing address/fax number/e-mail address).

I – Thank you very much for your time. May I call you in 2 days to see if you are interested in being interviewed? Once again, if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at my cell number (86)13616487901.

P – Good-bye.

I – Good-bye.

## Appendix C

### Information Letter

University of Waterloo

Date

Dear (*insert participant's name*):

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and leisure studies at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Mark Havitz. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

As free time increases in China due to shortened workweeks and added holidays, the issue of use of free time has become increasingly important. Therefore, the awareness of the important role of leisure in people's lives is growing significantly in China. The term *Leisure Economy* is used to emphasize the more central role that all forms of leisure play in the emerging Chinese economy. Conferences have been held discussing leisure related topics, such as the leisure economy, leisure and the family, and the development of *Leisure City*. Particularly, the government has given increasing attention to the benefits leisure brought about. For example, the National Tourism Administration of People's Republic of China has been developing a public policy called "National Citizen Travel & Leisure Plan" since the beginning of 2009. However, rarely any study has been conducted to explore the meanings of leisure in Chinese culture in-depth. Examining leisure experiences and leisure meanings of Chinese people can help leisure practitioners better understand the stat quo of leisure in China according to its culture and history as well as provide leisure-related services that for the best interests of Chinese citizens. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the role leisure plays in Chinese university students' lives and the meanings they ascribe to leisure in relation to their lives as a whole.

This study focuses on Chinese university students who were born in China and have no overseas living experience. Therefore, I would like to include you as one of several interviewees to be involved in my study. I believe that your descriptions of your leisure experiences and understandings of leisure meanings will provide me some insight into the meanings of leisure in Chinese culture context.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately one hour in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative

consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for three years in a locked office in my supervisor's office. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (86)13853190077 or by email at [xtu@ahs.uwaterloo.ca](mailto:xtu@ahs.uwaterloo.ca). You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Mark Havitz at 519-888-4567 ext.33013 or email [mhavitz@healthy.uwaterloo.ca](mailto:mhavitz@healthy.uwaterloo.ca).

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes of this office at 519-888-4567 Ext. 36005 or [ssykes@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ssykes@uwaterloo.ca).

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit the leisure practitioners in China, as well as to the broader research community. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Xuefei, Tu, MA Graduate Student  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo  
[xtu@ahs.uwaterloo.ca](mailto:xtu@ahs.uwaterloo.ca)



## Consent form

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Xuefei, Tu of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES       NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES       NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES       NO

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Interview guide

Ensure that a consent form has been signed and the purpose of this study has been explained to the participant. Gain permission from the participants to tape record the interview. The following will provide a guideline of questions to be asked. I am free to build conversation within each subject area and to explore topics specific to the participants' experiences. The participants can decline to answer any question and/or stop the interview at any time.

#### Part I: Daily Routine

I'd like to know what a typical day is like for you when you have to study or work. Could you describe it in detail, from the time you get up until you go to bed for the evening. For example, what did you do yesterday? [*pick a weekday*]

*Possible Probes:*

- a. How would you categorize your activities?(e. g. leisure, study, work) (use the participants' own terms)
- b. What are the differences between these activities?
- c. What do you usually do at your free time during work days? Why? With whom? How often? Where?

I'd like to know what a typical day is like for you when you do not have to study or work. Could you describe it in detail, from the time you get up until you go to bed for the evening. For example, what did you do last Saturday?

*Possible Probes:*

- a. What do you usually do? Why? With whom? How often? Where?
- b. How would you identify these different activities? What is the significance of these categories?

#### Part II: The Role of Leisure

What role does leisure (use the participants' own terms)play in your life?

*Possible Probes:*

- a. How do you feel when you are participating in leisure activities?
- b. What benefits do you feel you personally derived from leisure experience? Any uncomfortable or negative outcomes?
- c. What do you think your life will be without any leisure experience?
- d. What is the relationship between leisure and study/work in your life?

#### Part III: Leisure Satisfaction

What is your satisfaction about your current leisure participation?

*Possible Probes:*

- a. What is the most frustrating thing that keeps you from doing/fully enjoying doing\_\_\_(leisure activities mentioned by participants)?

b. If you can, would you like to change your current leisure participation?

[If “yes”] How would you like to change?

Do you want to have more leisure activities/time/companions? Or do you want to have less leisure activities/time/companions? Or some other changes?

[If “no”] Why? Are you satisfied with your leisure now? Or you don’t think leisure is important to you? Or some other reasons?

### **Part V: Others**

Is there anything else you want to add?

### End of Interview Notes

- 1) Thank them for their precious time and for sharing their stories.
- 2) Ask permission to be contacted by telephone to verify the interview transcripts, my study findings and to add or clarify any additional points they may think of.
- 3) Ask if they can suggest any other Chinese university students I can contact and with whom I could arrange a potential interview.

## Appendix D (Chinese Version)

### 访问问题框架

#### 第一部分：日常生活

我想请你为我描述一下你的一个典型的工作日。请具体一些，按从你早上起来到晚上休息的顺序来描述。比如说，你昨天是怎么度过的呢？（选择一个工作日）

可能的追问：

- a. 请问你会怎么分类你提到的这些日常活动呢？（比如：休闲，学习，工作）（用被访问者自己的语言）
- b. 在你看来，这几类活动有些什么区别和不同呢？
- c. 请问你在闲暇时间通常都做些什么呢？为什么？和谁一起做？做这些事的频率是什么？在哪里做？

我想请你为我描述一下你的一个典型的休息日。请具体一点，按从你早上起来到晚上休息的顺序来描述。比如说，你上周六是怎么度过的呢？

可能的追问：

- a. 你通常都会做些什么呢？为什么？和谁一起做？做这些活动的频率是什么？在哪里做？
- b. 你会怎么归类你的这些活动？它们分别对你来说有什么意义？

#### 第二部分：休闲的角色

休闲（用被访问者自己的命名）在你生活中扮演了一个怎么样的角色呢？

可能的追问：

- a. 在你从事这些活动时你的感觉是什么？
- b. 你觉得这些活动带给你了什么积极的影响呢？它们对你有任何不舒服的或是消极的作用吗？
- c. 想象一下如果你的生活没有休闲会变成怎么样呢？
- d. 你觉得休闲和学习、工作之间的关系是怎么样的？

#### 第三部分：休闲满意度

你对你现在的休闲生活满意吗？

可能的追问：

- a. 你觉得你在（更好地）从事休闲活动的过程中遇到了什么阻碍吗？
- b. 如果你可以，你会改变你现在的休闲生活吗？  
（肯定回答）你会怎么改变呢？

你会想要更多的休闲时间、活动、伙伴？或是你想要有更少的休闲时间、活动、伙伴？或是其他的改变呢？  
(否定回答)为什么呢？你觉得你的休闲已经让你满意了吗？还是因为你觉得休闲没有那么重要？还是别的原因呢？

第四部分：其他问题

请问你还有什么想要补充的吗？

## Appendix E

### Feedback Letter

University of Waterloo

Date

Dear (*Insert Name of Participant*),

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to explore the leisure experiences of Chinese university students, and the meanings they ascribe to leisure in relation to their lives as a whole.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at either the phone number or email address listed at the bottom of the page. If you would like a summary of the results, please let me know now by providing me with your email address. I am anticipating that the study will be completed by December 30th, 2009. At that time, I will send you a summary of the results if requested.

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes in the Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567, Ext., 36005.

I would like to once again thank you for assisting me with this research. It was a great pleasure to have met you, and shared some of your experiences.

All the best to you,

Xuefei, Tu, MA Graduate Student,  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo,  
(86)13616487901 or (519)8079159  
xtu@ahs.uwaterloo.ca