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# Working hours and pay: Its discourse and justification

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## **Abstract**

The Chinese society has experienced great changes after the establishment of PRC in 1949, and especially after the economic reform in 1978. Its achievement has been an amazing success and quite unanticipated in many respects. However, inequality problems, such as the income gap between the rich and poor, rural and urban areas, eastern and western regions, are also coming up and becoming significant in the society.

Most sociological analysis of the different ways of justification, in the meanwhile, is rooted in the western values, and needs to be developed into the Chinese context.

Based on newspaper articles collected from seven Chinese newspapers over 12 years, the justification framework was studied in a Chinese context. The analysis of justification of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) was explored through the dispute of working hours and pay in China. In this study, it was found that justifications in the Chinese society was influenced by its own culture and socialist attributes, and variations are recognised in the Chinese mode of justification compared with the Boltanski and Thévenot original work. A new logic of justification also emerged from the unique Chinese context. In the dispute, it also found that the justifications are changing over the years, and the preference of the logics varies between different actors. Moreover, this study also found a dialectical relationship between the discourse and practice of justification in the Chinese society.

The study contributes to the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) by expanding it to a new context, and by identifying a new logic of justification of significance in the Chinese context.

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This thesis is dedicated to them.

## Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name:  Mengyi Dong

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

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background in the Chinese society

### 1.1.1 Social change and increasing inequality

The People's Republic of China has been one of the fastest growing economies in the world in recent times, and has been experienced great changes after its establishment in 1949. Its achievement has been an amazing success and quite unanticipated in many respects.

From 1949-1960s, the Chinese Communist Party came to national power and aimed to reduce the social strife and to achieve improvements in health and living standards. During this period, the government developed several approaches and policies to build a central planning of all aspects of the economy, and put the main focus on the country's industrialization and improvement in urban living standards. From 1960s to 1976, the government placed more emphasis on central planning, and launched the Great Cultural Revolution in 1966, focusing on the class struggle in the country.

From late 1970s to mid-1980s, great changes happened in the society as a result of the economic reform. In 1978, the "Open Door" reform was initiated by Deng Xiaoping, the policy shifted from class struggle to economic growth, and the Chinese economy has expanded by leaps and bounds. Moreover, people's living standards rose greatly, and industrial production grew with a rapid speed. From the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, the government turned the focus of the economic reform to the restructure of the urban industrial sector, and the role of central planning was reduced. The operational mechanism of the state-owned enterprises was changed into the modern enterprise system.

In the beginning of the 21st century, China joined the WTO, and has been engaging more with the global economy, and the changes also happened to employees' remuneration system. Besides a base wage, the remuneration also included performance-linked rewards and non-cash benefits and allowances. In the meanwhile, in response to the growing inequality during this period, the policies aiming at a harmonious society and people-centred development were introduced, including investing in infrastructure and removing the agricultural tax. The income inequality reached a relatively high level in 2008, and with the influence of the financial crisis, the discussion of income inequality in the society was

triggered, and people began to question whether it is reasonable and just for some people to get the extremely high pay.

Through the changes and development in the Chinese society, it can be seen that the economy has experienced a rapid growth, however, inequality problems also came up and are becoming significant in the society.

Firstly, the income gap has been increasing since the 1980s and has become a significant issue in the society. Statistically, the Gini coefficient in China has rapidly increased, which indicates that the income gap has been relatively large in recent years, which has seriously affected the development of social justice. Specifically, there is a significant salary difference between high-skill and low-skill workers, between directors compensation and the minimum wage, as well as between industrial sectors.

Excessive gaps between the rich and the poor can easily lead to class solidification. As a result of the lack of necessary resources, low-income groups cannot obtain the same rights as high-income groups in education, medical care, employment, etc., which can lead to decline in social status (Tang, 2020). Moreover, besides reducing people's sense of justice, a large income gap between the rich and the poor can also lead to the emergence of social injustice.

Secondly, the development between different regions in the Chinese society was unbalanced, which was caused by regional geographical differences and the differences in policy. From the perspective of economic development, the eastern area has incomparable advantages over the central and western areas in relation to geographical position, human resources and technology. Based on the advantages, the eastern area attaches importance to non-resource-based industries, which led to the rapid development over the years.

Thirdly, there is also significant inequality between the rural and urban areas in the Chinese society. At present, the rural areas of in China are still dominated by the primary industry, while most of the urban areas are dominated by the secondary and tertiary industries. Compared with the secondary and tertiary industries, the primary industry is more constrained by natural conditions, which made the economic development of the village has a higher level of instability.

Fourthly, the social inequality in China also lies in the inequality in opportunities, such as the access to certain financial services and basic governmental services (e.g. health care coverage and unemployment benefits).

Fifthly, the inequality in education remains. Jain-Chandra et al. (2018) argued that the education resources were distributed unequally among regions and rural-urban areas, especially for the higher education.

In response to the inequalities, the views and rhetoric of equality and equity are also changing, and the income distribution system kept improving over the years. In the 1950s, influenced by the long Chinese cultural tradition and the socialist ideas, the idea of egalitarianism was quite popular and favoured by the Chinese people. As Confucius articulated in his Analects, “he is not concerned lest his people should be poor, but only lest what they have should be ill-apportioned”, the income distribution policy during that time also followed the idea of egalitarianism, aiming to achieve the equality between all groups of people.

In the 1980s, to improve efficiency and boost productivity, the economic reform encouraged people to increase their income, and the policy of “efficiency in priority and fairness in consideration” was proposed. Also, during that time, it was suggested by the government that it is reasonable to let some people get rich first, and then those who get rich first drive other people to get rich later. The policy was regarded as the most efficient and optimal way for social development during that time (Li, 2021).

Since the 21st century, as the inequality in the society has significantly rose, the policy shifted to “paying more attention to equity”, and in terms of the income distribution system, President Hu suggested that although redistribution was used as a method to make up for the inequalities of the primary distribution, it still needs to pay attention to the efficiency and fairness, and take the combination of efficiency and fairness into account (Li, 2021).

In the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the distribution according to contribution was stressed, meaning that each person should get the remuneration he deserves according to his pay out and contribution, that is, the distribution should be made reasonably and appropriately according to the amount of his contribution (Liu, 2017). In the process of income distribution, President Xi argued that both efficiency and fairness

should be taken into account, and more emphasis should be placed on fairness in redistribution. The income distribution system pays more attention to the income of laborers, strengthens the role of tax adjustment, especially the adjustment of direct tax, and further narrows the income gap. Moreover, in the third distribution, the role of charity and other public welfare programmes was valued, which helps to promote a more reasonable and orderly income distribution system, and so that all the people can benefit from the development results.

### **1.1.2 An emerging dispute**

The Internet first appeared in China in 1994, and in the late 1990s, influenced by the US Internet industry, the Chinese Internet industry also became a thriving business. The rapid growth of the World Wide Web in the United States encouraged the growth of Internet companies, many of which took advantage of initiating initial public offerings (IPOs) to get venture capital investment. The boom of the US Internet industry inspired the IPO dreams of many early entrepreneurs in China, and the first generation of China's Internet companies, including Sina, Sohu, and NetEase, which are now known as the "Old Big Three", successfully listed IPOs at the NASDAQ in 2000, and turned their founders into tech millionaires.

However, when the Internet bubble bursted in the early 2000s, many of the internet companies failed, and the "fast-track IPO dream" vanished in both China and other countries in the world. The "Old Big Three" suffered a lot from the burst, and when they are busy surviving, the Chinese industry changed dramatically. The bursting of the bubble illustrated that a profitable business model, rather than just pure technology, is needed to sustain a new business venture (Li, 2019). Thereafter, Internet entrepreneurship has been struggling to balance the tension between technological innovation and business innovation.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the "New Big Three", that is BAT, i.e., Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent, came up and experienced a rapid growth. It was argued that their success depended not simply on the latest advances in information technology, but more importantly, on innovative business models (Li, 2019). Their legendary beginnings served as proof that the Internet could truly create prosperity in business, and soon motivated tens of thousands of Internet entrepreneurs to pursue their "entrepreneurial dreams" in the Internet industry.



During this period, the Internet industry was dominated with an extremely optimism, and people hold the belief that the Internet has eliminated the threshold for entrepreneurship as long as one has “good business ideas”. This attitude reached its peak in 2011, when Lei Jun, who had just started Xiaomi, explained why he had entered the smartphone business, saying on his personal social media account, “Even a pig can fly if it can find a place in the eye of a storm”. Inspired by the optimism, large amounts of venture capital flowed into start-up Internet companies, creating millionaires while stimulating the overtime work culture in this very competitive industry.

The BAT soon grew up into the “New Big Three” in this period and became the new monopolies of the industry, trying to pursue a dominant position in every new frontier. And soon workers in the Chinese Internet industry realised that comparing with their own entrepreneurial dreams, jobs in “big firms”, such as the “New Big Three”, were probably more optimal choices, as they could provide stability, decent salaries and work environment, as well as prospective career paths. The employees “volunteered” to work on a 996 schedule or “flexibly”, in exchange for potential salary raises and steps up the career ladder.

Form 2018, the Internet economy experienced a slowdown in China, and the once-booming tech sector has come back down to earth, experiencing a so-called “capital winter”, financing was becoming increasingly difficult for tech companies. Since then, the Internet industry, including the big influential Internet firms such as Smartisan, Qunar, and Meituan-Dianping, began to be affected by a wave of layoffs. In late 2018, for example, several teams at Zhihu, a Quora-like question-and-answer website, were dismissed; and at Mobike, the dominant bike-sharing company in China, 30 percent of employees were let go (Li, 2019). The downsizing was mostly carried out in the name of “optimising business and staffing structure”, claiming that it has to be done in order to pursue sustainable growth with competitiveness and efficiency. Furthermore, several larger firms joined the mass layoffs in 2019, Tencent demote 10 percent of its middle managers, with more than 200 individuals to be affected, while Didi let go 15 percent of its workforce, with about 2,000 people were laid off. Moreover, previous workplace benefits, such as gym membership, cab fare, and office snacks, are also disappearing.

In this circumstance, the overall recruiting in tech firms is either slowing down or frozen, which has made the labour market even more increasingly competitive. As it is stated by Marx, the capital has a natural interest to intensify the labour process inside the firm on

one hand, and downsize the labour force to create a larger reserve army in order to enhance its bargaining power in the labour market on the other. The Internet companies, speaking on behalf of the interest of capital, are asking employees to invest more of themselves (effort, commitment, new aspects of labour power such as emotions) at work, while at the same time retreating from investment in human capital, a retreat manifested in declining security, career ladders, pensions and the like.

## **1.2 Accountability and justification**

The notion of accountability is regularly drawn upon in both the financial and management accounting literature. For example, in financial accounting, the focus is on accounts that are disclosed to external shareholders and the public. This can take various forms, such as profit and loss statements, earnings announcements, or press statements by the CEO. As for the accountability in financial accounting, Messner (2009) suggests that it is probably more appropriate to talk about public accountability rather than financial accountability, since the important characteristic of these accounts is not their financial nature, but the fact that their addressees are located outside the organization. On the other hand, in management accounting, the exchange of accounts takes place within the organization or between the organization and some of its contractual stakeholders (e.g., customers and suppliers), often in the form of reporting and control routines in which costs, profits, returns or other management-related information are communicated (Messner, 2009). This is the domain of managerial accountability.

The domain of financial accountability and managerial accountability shows that there are various discipline-specific uses of the notion of accountability, and therefore the generic sociological meaning of accountability seems to provide a common ground for most of them. Sociologically speaking, accountability is associated with the process of “to account to some authority for one’s actions” (Mulgan, 2000), and denotes the exchange of reasons for conduct. To give an account means to provide reasons for one’s behaviour, to explain and justify what one did or did not do. Such accounts are provided in order to make behaviour intelligible and to prevent conflicts from arising by verbally bridging the gap between action and expectation (Messner, 2009).

Furthermore, Mulgan (2000) argued that such accountability has several features. Firstly, it is external, in that the account is given to some other person or body outside the person or body being held accountable. Secondly, it involves social interaction and exchange. On the

one hand, it means calling for the account, seeking answers and rectification, while on the other hand, it means being held accountable, responding and accepting sanctions. Thirdly, it implies rights of authority, in that those calling for an account are asserting rights of superior authority over those who are accountable, including the rights to demand answers and to impose sanctions.

On the other hand, the work of Boltanski and Thévenot, is an important example of taking the stance of the programme of a sociology of critical practices. Based on the extensive fieldworks, their book (2006) developed a theoretical model of the sense of justice in society, and outlines the cognitive resources and normative tools implemented by people to generate criticisms and justifications. Also, it stressed the plurality of the principles of evaluation and criticisms. It not only achieved a better description of the argumentation, but also tried to describe the procedures people use to support their claims.

The book *On Justification* argues that the social life is characterized by a “necessity of justification,” and human beings are motivated to behave in a manner that is justifiable in order to make their actions comprehensible to themselves as well as to social actors whom they interact and engage with. And to explain this necessity of justification, Boltanski and Thévenot suggest that people have the capacity to criticize. The authors noticed in their empirical work that when people involve in ordinary relationships, do things together and coordinate their actions, they will experience moments of discontent, during which people will realize something is wrong and needs to be changed. Therefore, to express discontent to the other persons, the one who criticizes other persons must produce justifications in order to support their criticisms, and the person who is the target of the criticism must justify his actions in order to defend his own cause. And this means that people need to behave in a manner that their actions can stand the test of justification.

Boltanski and Thévenot assumes that agents in their everyday practices are subject to certain demands to justify themselves, and that they try to satisfy these by drawing on general principles that are expressed in socially and culturally mediated forms of argumentation. In this case, the construction of meaning and order must rely on normative frameworks (“justificatory logics”) and is subject to their normative binding force. Thus, the focus of the sociology of critique is the everyday practices of the agents and their justification and critique.

Both focus on giving reasons for one's action, the work of justification by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) fits in the notion of accountability, and the authors further suggested that social actors tend to make reference to a limited number of broad-based sets of values and conceptions of the common good, and recognised six orders of worth in their study. An order of worth can be regarded as a model of a good society constructed on a singular basis of value that acts as the sole standard for determining what matters or what is worthy within that society, and it can provide a normative way of evaluation and classification within that particular world and thus can serve as the basis for the determination of people's states of worth and the justifiability of their actions.

The framework of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) suggests that people rely on different values when they make arguments or make judgements, and the agreements and discords in the society mainly rely on six "orders of worth", that is, the six "worlds". These worlds are the systematic higher principle that exist in and construct the social space, and each of them represents a different logic when people express themselves. The six worlds are: the civic world, which values the order of justice and rights, and the collective welfare is regarded as important in this world; the industrial world, which is based on technic and efficiency; the domestic world, where tradition and hierarchy are the standard of making judgements; the market world, which values the market performance and profit; the inspiration world, based on the creativity; and the world of fame, which regards public opinion as valuable.

### **1.3 Newspaper as discourse**

The mass media is playing an increasing role in the contemporary post-modern life, and the newspaper is also playing a particular role within the media. Suhr (2008) suggested that the newspaper is regarded as one of the most informative, reliable and responsible mass media, and as a powerful way to influence the public agenda and to deliver the depth of information, the newspaper has been regularly been used as a basis for linguistic studies such as discourse and content analysis. More specifically, the issue of pay in China involves economy, public participation, social justice and responsibility, as well as government policies and regulations, therefore covers a wide range of relevant information and different actors.

## 1.4 Research questions

Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot developed a theoretical framework that sheds new light on the nature of arguments. According to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), the order of worth framework aims at understanding how people express their disagreement in conflicting situations and how they reach and maintain a more or less stable and lasting agreements. Their work focused on common person's judgemental capacities and developed a theoretical model that identifies the common principles of justice to which people implicitly refer in their daily lives, usually in situations of dispute, situations in which they have to develop an acceptable argumentation to defend their position. More specifically, the model is a means to analyse the nature of arguments to which people refer to when asserting their rights and explain why some arguments are more convincing than others.

Based on the extensive fieldworks, the book developed a theoretical model of the sense of justice in the society, and outlines the cognitive resources and normative tools implemented by people to generate criticisms and justifications. Also, it stressed the plurality of the principles of evaluation and criticisms. It not only achieved a better description of the argumentation, but also tried to describe the procedures people use to support their claims.

In addition, it should be noticed that the work of Boltanski and Thévenot has limitations to some extent. On the one hand, it is argued by some researchers that the six worlds in the justification framework are not exhaustive, and the forms of justification are not limited to the six worlds presented in the book. On the other hand, it is also suggested that the overall framework of Boltanski and Thévenot is western-centred. The common good and the higher order principles articulated in the justification framework were based on the texts that were influenced and shaped by the modern capitalist society, and it mostly focused on the western modern societies and their specific understandings of the public good.

Moreover, in the Chinese society, overtime working is seriously damaging the employees' physical and mental health, and family life. According to the "National Time Use Survey Bulletin" released by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2018, the working time of people in urban areas is up to 46.2 hours a week, and the working hours increased by 22 % for both men and women employees in China over the past 10 years (Department of Population and Employment Statistics National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Also, Liu et al.

(2021) suggested that the statistics were just one aspect of the problem, and that Chinese employees also endured more serious hidden overtime working problems. The continuous connectivity and availability of mobile communication technology has invaded employees' home-work boundaries increasingly, and has thus resulted in employees having to spend more hour, energy and even money to complete work tasks during their breaks.

Therefore, considering the gap in justification studies and the emerging dispute on working hours, this study aims to answer three research questions:

Research question 1: What are the main “orders of worth” in the Chinese context and how have they changed in the Chinese society?

---- What are the sources of justifications in the Chinese context?

---- How is Boltanski and Thévenot's work adopted in the Chinese context compared with the way in the western world?

Research question 2: How have different “logics of justification” been used in relation to the issue of working hours and pay?

---- What kind of justifications were used and how are they used in the discussion of working hours and pay?

---- How did the justifications change over time in the discussion of working hours and pay?

---- How did different groups use the different justifications in discussion about working hours and pay?

----How was the dispute resolved or closed by the actors?

Research question 3: How did the discourse and practice of justification influenced each other in the discussion of working hours and pay?

These questions focus on the study of justification, and research question 1 tries to explore the justification framework in a different context, that is, the Chinese context. Research question 2 focuses on how the justification logics are adopted in a real dispute, and tries to

find any new logics emerged from the empirical work. Research question 3 considers the relationship between the previous two questions.

## **1.5 Methodological consideration**

This study adopted critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis as the approach. The empirical data was collected from seven Chinese newspapers from a newspaper database. And the Chinese literature on views of justice and justification was also a part of the analysis.

## **1.6 Contribution**

The study begins with the work of justification, and aims to contribute to the justification framework. There is previous literature that commented on the limitations of the justification framework, and the intention of this study is to fill the gaps to some extent. By looking into a dispute in the Chinese society, this study aims to recognise any variations in the Chinese justification from the original framework, and identify any new logics that come up with the Chinese context.

The study also contributes to the literature on working hours, as it provides a different perspective by looking into the actual words of the involved actors. In the existing literature of working hours, most of the studies are relying on large scale of survey data and statistics to explore the impact and influencing factors of overtime working, while in this study, the everyday practice and the voices of the actors are explored through Boltanski and Thévenot's work, and thus contribute to the literature through the new perspective.

## **1.7 Outline of the thesis**

The thesis is divided into ten chapters.

Chapter 1 gives an introduction of the background, clarifies the research questions, and provides an outline of the thesis. Chapter 2 explored the literature of justification and discursive studies, and recognises the inequality issues in the Chinese society. Chapter 3 provides an exploration of the theoretical framework, that is, the justification framework proposed by Boltanski and Thévenot. And the limitations of the framework are noticed in this chapter. Chapter 4 gives an explanation of the methods used for this study. Chapter 5

focuses on the adoption of justification framework in the Chinese context. Through the exploration of Chinese literature, this chapter aims to give an answer to research question 1, and recognises sources of justification in Chinese society. Chapter 6 provides an answer to research question 2, focusing on the justification used in a dispute, and tries to provide a ground for justification. Chapter 7 is specifically focused on the resolution of the dispute, and through the study of two cases, the resolution of the dispute is explored. Chapter 8 has a special focus on company justifications, and explored how the justifications are adopted by a company. Chapter 9 is the discussion of the previous work, and explores the dialectical relationship between the discourse and practice of justification, and thus gives an answer to research question 3. Chapter 10 concludes the thesis with answers to the research questions and the contributions of the thesis.



## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Justification**

#### **2.1.1 Culture of justification**

To begin with, Cohen-Eliya and Porat (2011) distinguished the culture of justification with the culture of authority. From the perspective of a government, the culture of authority is based on the authority of government to exercise power. Its action is legitimate and legal as long as the government is authorized to act. And public law, according to this conception, focuses on delimiting the borders of public action and on ensuring that decisions are made by those authorized actors (Cohen-Eliya and Porat, 2011). On the other hand, in the culture of justification, the question of authority serves only as a starting point for the constitutional analysis, and the existence of authorization to act is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for legitimacy and legality.

Cohen-Eliya and Porat (2011) further suggested that the two concepts are interrelated. When justifying a decision, people often justify it not only with its substantive reasons, but also provide reasons of why we, rather than someone else, are authorized to make it. Moreover, the culture of authority provides justifications mainly at the stage of assigning authority, and once authority is assigned, the authorized body needs little substantive justification for its specific decisions. While for the culture of justification, justification is the main source of legitimacy, and sufficient substantive reasons are needed for every decision made by the authorized body even after the assignment of authority.

The historical and ideological background for the adoption of the culture of justification lied mainly in the traumatic effects of World War II as well as the European culture (Cohen-Eliya and Porat, 2011). After World War II, two major lessons were left in terms of its political culture. “First, suspicion toward popular democracy as a result of the disintegration of the young democracies of the early twentieth century and their transformation into totalitarian regimes with broad popular support. Second, a deep realization of the dangers of nationalism” (Rubinfeld, 2004, p.1985). Also, in post-war Europe, the background of the anti-national sentiment was also influencing the culture of justification, in which the particular text of constitutions is of lesser importance (Cohen-Eliya and Porat, 2011).

Another source of influence of the culture of justification was the traditional European appeal to “rationality” and its viewing of law as “science” (Cohen-Eliya and Porat, 2011). Rationality and objectivity serve as important features that give the culture of justification its special character, which lead to a need for justification.

### **2.1.2 System justification**

Proposed by Jost and Banaji (1994), theory of system justification aims to study the ego-justifying and group-justifying tendencies to defend and rationalize the interests of the self and the group, and also to defend and rationalize existing social, economic, and political arrangements.

At first, system justification theory focused specifically on stereotyping, prejudice, and ingroup favouritism (Jost, 2001), and then a wider range of issues was looked into through the system justification. For example, there are discussions about fairness, justice, and legitimacy (Brandt and Reyna, 2013; O’Brien, Major, and Gilbert, 2012), about attributions and explanations for poverty and inequality (Godfrey and Wolf, 2016), and about attitudes and opinions about social, economic, and political issues (Tan, Liu, Huang, & Zheng, 2017) etc.

There are quite a lot of motivations for system justification, and it is argued that the motivation varies according to situational and dispositional factors (Jost, 2019). In the study of social psychology, different contextual or situational moderators, that is, the trigger of system justification processes, are recognised. One of the most important one, is the exposure to system criticism, challenge, and threat. Jost (2019) showed some examples of the system criticisms: backlash against feminists and women who defy gender stereotypes; preferences for domestic over foreign consumer products; and tolerance for civilian casualties during war and decreased support for hate crimes policies among chronically high system-justifiers. And it was further argued that the critiques of the system are useful and effective in the long term as they help to delegitimise the way things are and thus bring about a desire for social change (Jost, 2019).

Another motivation of system justification is related to time and history. For example, Blanchard and Eidelman (2013) studied the system justifications in different countries and how supportive people felt about their system, and it was found that longevity was influencing the system justifications. People were more supportive of the caste system in

India and the capitalist system in the United States and the United Kingdom when they were made to feel that these systems were traditional and longstanding, rather than fairly recent in history.

Moreover, some studies also indicated that people are also more likely to justify social, economic, and political systems to the extent that they feel especially powerlessness or dependent on those systems. For example, in a study that focused on the sense of powerless, van der Toorn et al. (2015) found that the more people think about their feelings of powerlessness, the more often they legitimize racial disparities in criminal sentencing, the unequal distribution of wealth in society, and the gender wage gap.

### **2.1.3 Order of worth**

Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) developed a framework to study people's justification, that is, the sociology of worth. The authors focused on people's social practice and the centre of their study is people's operation and their very acts of qualification. In this framework, the authors began with their own empirical work, and it was found that there are different forms of justice when people generalizing their ideas. Then the political philosophy, whose goal is to construct a common humanity, was introduced. The different theories in political philosophy proposed different principles of social order, that is, different forms of worth as well as justice, and these principles provide a guidance for people to justify how things should be done and to determine right or wrong. And by adopting the guidance to the study of people's social actions, the concept of justification comes up.

The framework of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) suggests that people rely on different values when they make arguments or make judgements, and the agreements and discords in the society mainly rely on six "orders of worth", that is, the six "worlds". These worlds are the systematic higher principle that exist in and construct the social space, and each of them represents a different logic when people express themselves. The six worlds are: the civic world, which values the order of justice and rights, and the collective welfare is regarded as important in this world; the industrial world, which is based on technic and efficiency; the domestic world, where tradition and hierarchy are the standard of making judgements; the market world, which values the market performance and profit; the inspiration world, based on the creativity; and the world of fame, which regards public opinion as valuable.

### 2.1.3.1 Boltanski and Thévenot's work in social studies

Focusing on how people make judgements, the sociology of worth is a good way to see how people understand certain things. Firstly, for the studies that try to explore the social life, Boltanski and Thévenot's work helps to show how people construct and use categories to justify their own arguments and social behaviours. Take the gender studies as an example, Nielsen (2014) investigated how gender equality was justified in the policy statements of six Scandinavian universities. By combining the work of Norman Fairclough (critical discourse analysis) and Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (framework of justification), the author did a text-oriented discourse analysis and focused on the official documents that were related to gender equality from the six universities. It was stated in this study that each of the principles of justification, that is, each common world, could be considered as discourses, and they are expressed differently in the universities' justifications. For example, if a university justifies itself with an ambition to create a more creative and innovative research environment, it could be interpreted as the inspirational world, which values creativity and originality. And if a university refers to its organizational values and principles in justifying gender equality activities, it will be recognised as the domestic world, which values the tradition and hierarchy.

The result of this study was showed quite clear through the framework of justification, and similarities as well as differences between the universities in Denmark, Norway and Sweden were recognised. It was found that the inspiration world, the industrial world and the world of fame are used by all of the six universities, and are expressed in similar ways by referring to the creative environment, quality and the international reputation of the organization. While the civic world was displayed in different ways as a result of the political background in Denmark: the Danish statements mainly focused on the social obligation and national welfare in the civic world, on the other hand the Norwegian and Swedish statements tend to extend this to discrimination, justice and equal rights.

Furthermore, in another study about gender equality, it was also found that when social actors argue and justify their positions, their actions and judgements are influenced by the broader schemes that impact cognitive abilities. For example, Skarpenes and Nilsen (2015) tried to find out how male and female understand and justify their roles in work and family life in a southern region of Norway. Different from other studies about this region, which mainly focused on the statistical differences comparing with the whole country and showed that this region has the largest statistical gender differences (e.g. lower employment rate

for women, greater income differences, and higher proportion of women working part-time) and the most traditional gender role pattern in Norway, Skarpenes and Nilsen (2015) drew on the work of justification developed by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot and cared more about the people with different educational levels and work affiliation in this region and how people themselves understand and justify in the discussion about gender, work and family life.

It was found through the analysis that the informants tend to address different ways of justification according to what they are discussing in the interviews. On the one hand, in the discussion about the working life and gender, which is outside the household, the industrial (efficiency) world and the civic world (collective welfare and civil rights) are the two main ways of justification. The informants tend to regard the family as a unit to be managed as efficient as possible and usually explain their choices of full-time and part-time work by talking about the harmony of their family economy. On the other hand, in the discussion about the task and roles within the family, the domestic world (traditions) and the industrial world were used. It was argued that the division of labour, that is, women usually do more housework, was influenced by the experience of their own upbringing, as well as the history and tradition duty of women in this region. And to explain these differences in justification, the authors suggested that the differences lay in the reality of this region: the liberal feminist position encouraged by the overall national equality policy of the country as well as the local culture and tradition both influenced the way people justify gender issues.

### **2.1.3.2 Boltanski and Thévenot's work in organizational studies**

In organizational studies, the work of Boltanski and Thévenot is often related to the issue of institutional maintenance and legitimacy. For example, Patriotta et al. (2011) analysed the discussion after a nuclear accident and the ways that different stakeholders engage with the discourse by looking at the newspaper reports as well as official documents and communications during the debate. Building on the framework of justification by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) and their further dictionary work, the authors developed a list to recognise the different ways of justification in the selected articles. And it was found that according to the interests they pursue, the organizations or groups referred to several different schemes of worth at once or move from one order of worth to another. More specifically, the political organizations relied on the civic and domestic world in justifying, and the media used the world of fame more frequently, while the justification of the power

company shifted from the industrial world to a mix of the ways as time went by. The different forms of justification were also analysed in different period of time. In the first phase, the discussion focused on the nuclear accident and tried to figure out what had happened and whether it is a reliable technology, and the justification was mainly framed in the industrial world. The second phase turned to ask questions about why the accident happened in a particular country and the justification framed around the domestic world, which values the tradition and local. In the third phase, the usefulness and safety of the nuclear power was questioned, and the justifications were framed in the civic world.

Similarly, Nyberg and Wright (2012) also related Boltanski and Thévenot's work to legitimacy strategies. Focusing on the climate change and the company responses, it was found that companies justify themselves by referring to the market and industrial world. Moreover, through the study of discursive strategies of legitimation (combining, collapsing, coupling and connecting), it was argued that the companies engage discursively and strategically with the different orders of worth in different situations to justify their position and achieve legitimacy. The combining strategy means to justify one practice with two worlds, which is often showed as a "win-win" outcome, while the collapsing strategy means to justify the practice with one world, even though there are two ways of seeing it. This strategy turns out to be risky because the claim could be criticised by other orders of worth. Coupling justifications happens when two justifications are tightly bond in time and space within two practices, and they are dependent with each other. And the connecting strategy is the situation where the independent practices and justifications are connected, such as the justifications in the sustainability reporting.

### **2.1.3.3 Boltanski and Thévenot's work in accounting studies**

In accounting studies, Boltanski and Thévenot's work is also widely used. Annisette and Richardson (2011) were among the first scholars to employ Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) sociology of worth in the accounting context. Focusing on a previous study by Ansari and Euske (1987), which examined the cost accounting system in the US military through new institutional theory and identified the multiple roles and rationalities of accounting information, Annisette and Richardson (2011) reinterpreted the study through Boltanski and Thévenot's work and suggested that the sociology of worth helps to provide a language and a conceptional tool-box to enhance the understanding of dynamic between multiple rationalities and institutionalized action. Moreover, it was also argued by the authors that the sociology of worth is not only consistent with the development of a

practice approach to accounting at a micro level with its emphasis on detailed observations of the actions of skilled actors, but it is consistent with institutional theory in accounting at a macro level with its openness to multiple rationalities as a basis for social order as well. And therefore it may provide a bridge between practice theory and institutional theory in the accounting literature and has a potential to frame the cases where a plurality of logics is central to the issue under study.

Inspired by the work of Annisette and Richardson (2011), the sociology of worth has been adopted to study different accounting practice. For example, van Bommel (2014) applied Boltanski and Thévenot's work to integrated reporting in Netherlands and tried to examine the different views on integrated reporting. Through the study of 64 semi-structured in-depth interviews with a wide range of relevant actors and documentary analysis, it was found that the discussion of integrated reporting lies mainly in the industrial, market, civic and green order of worth. Furthermore, to make integrated reporting progress successfully, it was argued that these justifications need to be reconciled in a compromise to make it acceptable to and legitimate for a broad audience. And such a compromise requires a common interest, avoidance of clarification and maintenance of ambiguity. Besides enhancing the understanding of integrated reporting and the ways of reconciling them, it was also suggested that the adoption of Boltanski and Thévenot's work made it possible for scholars to look closer at the accounting practices as well as the mechanisms to gain legitimacy in a pluralistic institutional environment.

Similarly, Cortese and Andrew (2020) studied the process of accounting regulation development through the work of Boltanski and Thévenot, and tried to examine the production of one attempt to regulate disclosures related to payments between multinational resource companies (MRCs) and the governments of nations with resource wealth: Section 1504 of the Dodd–Frank Act. The comment letters put forward by interested stakeholders were studied to show how different stakeholder groups produce justifications to promote their positions and how a regulatory body makes sense of the justifications in the production of the legislation. It was found that the different groups made use of different justifications to shape the definition of transparency and the disclosure practices: the corporations tend to argue from a market perspective, the NGOs express their view based on a civic order of worth, while the industry lobby groups have an overlap between the industrial world and the market world. And for the SEC who made the final ruling, it was suggested by the authors that it is the collective recognition of desirability of transparency that enabled the SEC to put the views of constituents together

to create a shared understanding of the role of the common good as it relates to transparency, and in this case, the common good is the way to draw the different justifications together in the context of regulation development.

## **2.2 The issue of pay**

### **2.2.1 Justification of pay**

Business organizations generate revenue, and some of this revenue is distributed to their employees in the form of pay. Since the demand for pay usually exceeds the supply, the question of how pay should be distributed is naturally analysed as a problem of justice. Researchers have been asking for years about what is a just pay and the study usually falls into different aspects: some employees are found to be paid a lot more than others, while during the same time some workers are paid too little, and it is also found that there is a difference between different groups of people, for example, the payment difference between male and female.

Among the study of pay, one of the focuses is the distribution of pay, especially in the study of executive pay and workers' living wage. Comparisons have been made between the payment of executives and other employees, followed by the discussion of business performance. Cowherd and Levine (1992) examined the relationship between product quality and payment inside companies. The pay difference between lower-level employees and upper-class managers was studied, and the authors argued that a smaller interclass payment difference not only leads to perceptions of fairness, but also helps to increase product quality. It was suggested in this study that a firm's performance is affected by the executive pay not only because it is a motivation of the executives, but also because it affects the motivation of lower level employees (Cowherd and Levine, 1992). Similarly, Wilhelm (1993) also did an ethical analysis of executive payments, and the negative results of high CEO payments including feelings of unfairness, declining morale and greater cynicism among lower level employees are discussed. It was also found that high executive payment is related to reduced research and development budgets in the company.

When it comes to the justification of pay, studies show that companies are using various reasons to justify their actions. Crombie et.al (2010) did a content analysis to study how large firms in the US justify their CEO pay and identified 13 remuneration logics from the companies' proxy statements. It was showed in this study that companies are using the terms such as achievements, agency, consultant, contribution, appropriate, experience,



human resources, market, motivation, pay for performance, performance measurement, responsibility and fairness in their justification, and among the 13 logics, human resources, market and pay for performance were the most widely used. Furthermore, Bank (2016) studied the justification in relation to income inequality and did a discourse analysis of the discussion about executive pay in Germany. It was argued that the justification of the executive payment usually fell into five themes: the equality of opportunity, desert, procedure of salary determination, harmful consequences of income inequality and need.

However, it should be noticed that although the issue of pay is a problem of social justice, the study of company justifications in relation to pay does not go that deep. There are quite a lot of research that study the justification of the companies and the look through the reasons they are providing when justifying themselves, but it should be noticed that these studies are only focusing on the very specific reasons and terms in the companies' justification, while I would like to look into a broader social context, and explore how justifications are adopted by the companies, and how the justifications are influenced by the general discourse. This study will focus on how companies are justifying themselves in relation to pay, what kind of themes and terms they are using, and where are they locating their site of justification.

### **2.2.2 Equality and inequality in China**

Historically, the definitions of equality and equity can be traced back to the writings of Aristotle and Plato in the west and to the work of Confucius in China, which both premise the equal treatment of all people (Zhou, 2018). Equality is a measure based on what the distribution of income actually is, while equity is more of an ethical judgement on how the distribution of income should be (Wu, 2009). However, it is argued that if everyone receives an equal share regardless of their contribution and performance, equality is achieved but equity is not for those who worked harder; and from a functionalist perspective, inequality is somehow not avoidable in a modern society, and the differentiation could be acceptable as long as it is in line with the dominant values of the society (Wu, 2009).

More specifically, in modern China, the views and rhetoric of equality and equity are also changing over the years. In the 1950s, influenced by the long Chinese cultural tradition and the socialist ideas, the idea of egalitarianism was quite popular and favoured by the Chinese people. As Confucius articulated in his Analects, “he is not concerned lest his

people should be poor, but only lest what they have should be ill-apportioned”, the income distribution policy during that time also followed the idea of egalitarianism, aiming to achieve the equality between all groups of people. In the 1980s, to improve efficiency and boost productivity, the economic reform encouraged people to increase their income, and the policy of “efficiency as priority and equity as supplement” has actually ignored the equity issue in income distribution for almost two decades (Wu, 2009). Since the 21st century, as the inequality in the society significantly rose, the policy shifted to “paying more attention to equity”, and several policies were implemented to address the inequality issues.

For the inequality issues in China in recent years, Jain-Chandra et al. (2018) suggested that although China has experienced a rapid economic growth for more than two decades and people’s income have significantly increased, the economic growth has not benefited all segments of the population equally or at the same pace, which has resulted in a large increase in social inequality. Firstly, the income inequality has been increasing since the 1980s and has become a significant issue in the society. Statistically, the Gini coefficient in China has rapidly increased and is among the highest in the world, making it one of the most unequal countries in the world (Jain-Chandra et al., 2018). More specifically, Jain-Chandra et al. (2018) found that the income inequality is showed through different groups. For example, the most obvious inequality is the gap between the rural and urban areas, and the regional inequality between provinces is also significant. Besides, the salary difference between high-skill and low-skill workers, between directors compensation and the minimum wage, as well as between sectors also contributed to the income inequality. Secondly, the social inequality in China also lies in the inequality in opportunities, such as the access to certain financial services and basic governmental services (e.g. health care coverage and unemployment benefits). Thirdly, the inequality in education remains. Jain-Chandra et al. (2018) argued that although the primary and secondary education enrolment ratios seemed satisfiable, the education resources were distributed unequally among regions and rural-urban areas, especially for the higher education.

In the workplace inequalities, it was argued that the Confucianism is playing an important role. According to Wang (2020), China has a long history of obedience to authority due to a legacy of Confucianism. Some key aspects of Confucianism are respect for hierarchy, a striving for harmony and expectations of filial obedience, especially for those lower in the power/distance relationship, which could lead to silent obedience to authority. The Confucian virtue of silence to authority thus helps to create a docile labour force that is a

management's dream: no risks of strikes, no whistleblowing, and poor performers can be easily dismissed (Wang, 2020). In addition, performance standards can be raised to lift productivity without incurring extra labour costs.

The influence of this silence and obedience culture is particularly significant when it extends to migrant workers in the Chinese workplace. In recent decades, millions of migrant workers in China have moved from the countryside to the city to seek employment. Many leave their families behind and send most of their wages back to their families. Within a Chinese organizational context, such as in the service industries, where migrants occupy the junior and menial positions, the carry-over of the practice of silent obedience is uncontested. Moreover, in the case of Chinese migrants, supply exceeds demand, and this leads to migrant workers blindly following managers' directives, working long hours with unpaid overtime, a lack of personal freedom, and a heightened level of uncertainty related to a fear of dismissal if they fail to meet management expectations (Wang, 2020).

## **2.3 Overtime working**

### **2.3.1 Definition of overtime working**

According to Anxo and Karlsson (2019), working hours beyond a pre-defined threshold that gives rise to the payment of an overtime premium or time off in return is commonly considered as overtime work, while working hours above standard hours without wage or time compensation is usually called excess hours. And in this situation, the definition of overtime working is obviously dependent on a country's regulatory framework that states the legal norm on working time and the hours-threshold where overtime starts. Therefore, the definition and measurement of overtime hours might differ extensively across countries, and it is necessary to specify the definitions of overtime work used by international institutions (such as the OECD or the ILO) and also to analyse the regulatory framework at the country level.

In the statement of the OECD (2001), overtime working is defined as the "time worked in addition to hours worked during normal periods of work, and which are generally paid at higher than normal rates", the definition includes a condition of threshold ("in addition to hours worked during normal periods of work") but gives no universal condition for compensation. While on the other hand, the ILO (2004) suggested that working hours are "all working hours in excess of the normal hours, unless they are taken into account in

fixing numeration in accordance to custom”, similarly, a condition of threshold was introduced, however no distinction was made between paid and unpaid overtime working. Overall, it can be seen that there is no universal definition and common rules regarding the hours of overtime working, and the circumstance changes from country to country. Therefore, the situation in China will be discussed in more details in the later sections.

### **2.3.2 The incidence of overtime**

In the early studies, there were some researchers that studied how overtime working was happening among different groups of people. For example, Bauer and Zimmerman (1999) looked into the data for German workers in 1984-1997, and find that the share of low-skilled workers that does not work overtime is higher than the corresponding share of high-skilled workers. Furthermore, an increase of unpaid overtime was also found over the period, and it was suggested that the high-skilled workers are found to report relatively more unpaid overtime than low-skilled workers. In another study in the UK, Bell and Hart (1999) found that low-paid workers work more overtime than high-paid workers as a result of the low hourly wage, and the negative impact of low hourly wage on weekly earnings is partly offset by a rise in overtime hours, as low-paid workers need to work more to reduce the income differentials.

As for the social status, Golden and Wiens-Tuers (2005) provided an empirical analysis of mandatory overtime based on a US household survey, and it was found that mandatory overtime is more common among men, foreign born and individuals with lower level of education, while marital status does not affect mandatory overtime. Furthermore, the industries with a high incidence of mandatory overtime are farming and fishing, public administration, manufacturing and blue-collar jobs. And the job characteristics associated with a higher incidence of mandatory overtime work are inflexible work schedules, seniority and bonus compensation.

In a more recent study, Antal et al. (2024) did a systemic review of the relevant literature of 173 studies to learn about the working-time preferences outcomes. And it was found that childcare responsibilities reduce women’s preferred and actual hours, while on the other hand, men usually work more and want to increase work time when married. Also, there are specific occupations in which working hours are particularly long and overemployment is common, including certain medical specialities such as surgery, and for

people with a higher status (measured by professional, educational or financial indicators), long working hours is quite common.

### **2.3.3 Impact of overtime working**

According to Wong et al. (2019), short sleep duration is the problem to be most concerned about with regard to long working hours, and it was suggested that the longer the working hours, the higher risk of suffering from insufficient sleep for both male and female workers. A normal duration for sleep is about 7 to 8 hours per night, which can lower the risk of acute myocardial infarction, cerebrocardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus and high blood pressure, as well as reducing working injuries and mistakes. And the risk of short sleep duration was also explored in a lot of studies, and it was argued that short sleep duration increases the risk of suffering from cardiovascular heart diseases (Heslop et al., 2002), coronary heart diseases (Chandola et al., 2010) and obesity (Cizza et al., 2005).

Furthermore, in the study conducted by Wong et al. (2019), it was also found that fatigue was another impact of long working hours, and exhaustion adversely influences the performance of workers and the productivity of organisations. And the low quality of sleep related to this, can affect the physiological and mental health conditions of the employees, and can also lead to cardiovascular diseases, obesity and diabetes (Wong et al., 2019).

In the case of diabetes, it is one of the diseases shown to be related to long working hours. It is associated with daily diet and long working hours, and long working hours may cause workers to change their eating habits (Kawakami et al., 1999).

Some studies have also demonstrated that long working hours contribute to psychological stress and work stress. Working 10 or more hours per day, 40 or more overtime hours per month, and 60 or more hours per week tended to create stressful feelings (Wong et al., 2019).

Excessive working hours increase the risk of occupational injury. Studies on the effect of long working hours on occupational injury have shown that overtime working increased the risk of occupational injuries (Grosch et al., 2006). Further, a study found that working 12 or more hours per day and 60 or more hours per week increased the risk of occupational injury (Dembe et al., 2005). Grosch et al. (2006) reported an increase in occupational

injuries when working more than 70 hours per week compared to those working 41 to 69 hours per week.

## **2.3.4 Overtime working in China**

### **2.3.4.1 Reason of focusing on China**

In recent years, China has undergone rapid and profound socio-economic change which has important impacts on all sectors of the country's economy, and has become one of the countries that have the longest working hours in the world (Xiao et al., 2020). In China, with the improvement of globalization and the rapid development of the service industry, most employees, including blue-collar workers, administrators, managers, and professionals, have long working hours and high work intensity.

However, in literature, Liu et al. (2019) argued that most studies on overtime working were focusing on developed countries such as the United States and Japan, resulting in insufficient awareness of the effects upon developing countries. In the meanwhile, it was also indicated in quite a lot of studies that the overtime working in developing countries is more widespread, and employees suffer from more time-related stress, which can lead to more serious psychological and sociological implications (Chen et al., 2020). In the Chinese context, there are few studies on overtime working. Although excessive labour and its related consequences, such as social interaction, social status, social inclusion and exclusion, have attracted great attention by the media (*ibid.*), with the exception of the perspective of companies and employers, little is known about the problem of employees working long hours in China. Thus, it is important to give close attention to overtime working in the Chinese context.

### **2.3.4.2 Overtime working situation in China**

The Labour Law in China states that employees should not work more than 8 hours each day, however the overtime hours in China are much longer than that. For example, in the famous "996 working schedule", employees are required to work from 9 am to 9 pm, 6 days every week, and it has become a corporate culture and even a compulsory rule in Chinese high-tech industries in recent years, and have been adopted by many famous information technology enterprises such as Alibaba, Tencent, Jingdong, etc.

Overtime working has seriously damaged the employees' physical and mental health, and family life. According to the "National Time Use Survey Bulletin" released by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2018, the working time of people in urban areas is up to 46.2 hours a week, and the working hours increased by 22 % for both men and women employees in China over the past 10 years (Department of Population and Employment Statistics National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Furthermore, it was also argued by some researchers that the national figures provide a rough picture of the prevalence of overtime work worldwide, they underestimate all overtime work being performed, as the figures focus on the prevalence of overtime work (in many reports defined as over 40 hours a week) instead of reporting the accurate hours of overtime working (Chen et al., 2020). According to a survey of migrant workers in China, the average working hours per week of the respondents were 63.1 hours (Huang and Sa, 2015).

Moreover, Liu et al. (2021) suggested that the statistics were just one aspect of the problem, and that Chinese employees also endured more serious hidden overtime working problems. The continuous connectivity and availability of mobile communication technology has invaded employees' home-work boundaries increasingly, and has thus resulted in employees having to spend more hour, energy and even money to complete work tasks during their breaks. These hours were usually not included in the "working hours" because of their fragmentation and randomness, and are therefore called "hidden overtime" (Liu et al., 2021). For example, in the National Time Use Survey Bulletin in 2018, many Chinese employees' hidden overtime was widespread: The average daily commuting time was 2 hours, and employees were expected to spend more than 1 hour in training or work-related social activities every day. However, in China, these hours were not classified as work hours (ibid.).

#### **2.3.4.3 Influencing factors of Chinese employees**

In a study that examined the evolutionary trend of Chinese employees' working hours, Liu et al. (2019) suggested that the factors that influences the working hours of Chinese employees could be categorised into survival needs and social needs.

On the one hand, it was found that increasing the number of working hours is an important means so that individuals can avoid the pressure associated with unemployment, allowing them to ensure their survival (Liu et al., 2019). Studies have shown that working hours are used as an implicit way to regulate employment pressure. Employees reduce or increase

their work hours in exchange for their initiative to exit or enter certain labour markets. Furthermore, when considering the medical and health factors, such as individual health expenditure, individuals would also increase the number of working hours so that medical expenses could be paid and personal safety is guaranteed (Liu et al., 2019). Therefore, in general, the dominant position of these survival indicators indicates that the demand for long work hours by most Chinese people still exists, and employees seek to maintain their employment and ensure their physical safety through extra payment for overtime working.

On the other hand, social needs such as individual consumption and income indicators can also lead to a significant increase in working hours (Liu et al., 2019). It was argued that individual psychology, in terms of comparing one's consumption habits with those of others, is also urging individuals to increase their working hours for consumption purposes. In this case, the motivation that an individual seeks to extend their work hours change from a desire to maintain their existing job to a desire to obtain a wage increase and protect their consumption needs (ibid.). This is also a shift from physiological needs to the furtherance and enjoyment of social needs.

Moreover, from a broader social aspect, it was also suggested that technological progress, as well as the improvement in management brought about by technological progress, has resulted in the increase of working hours instead of reducing. The continuous advancement of modern science and technology, especially information technology, has accelerated the operation of business, intensified time competition, further invaded the boundaries between individual's working space and living space, and has led to an indefinite extension in the number of employee working hours (Liu et al., 2019).

Another general issue that is influencing the working hours of Chinese employees is the social insurance factor. On the one hand, it was found that there is a lack of standardization in China's market relations, and that there is an urgent need to improve the government's protection system for labour rights and interests (Liu et al., 2019). On the other hand, from the perspective of values, the Chinese cultural background is more inclined to collectivism, which leads Chinese employees to comply with the overtime demands of their employers, even in the absence of corresponding compensation (ibid.).

From the literature on working hours and overtime working, we can see that the factors and impact of overtime working has been explored, and that there is still a need to study the situation in the Chinese context. And it should be noticed that the existing literature has



studied the issue of working hours in a broad aspect, the impact and influencing factors are explored through large scale of statistics, and no actual voice of the actors involved in the overtime working has been explored. Therefore, to fill this gap, in this thesis, the focus would be the everyday practice of the employees and companies, and through the study of news reports, I am going to look directly at what the actors have said in relation to overtime working, and explore their justification and critique in a more detailed way.

## **2.4 Discourse studies in the literature**

The discourse analysis is regarded as an approach to study language in use, and apart from providing a methodology for the study, the discourse analysis also indicated the object for analysis, that is, the text and language. In this section, focusing on the text and language (rather than the ways of analyzing, which will be explored in the methodology chapter), the literature of discourse studies will be explored.

### **2.4.1 Company discursive activities**

There are studies which focus on companies' self-justifying and explanatory disclosures, and it is suggested that the company narrative disclosure is indicative of meaning and importance, and corporate attitudes can be established by the examination of disclosures (Campbell, 2017). In the accounting literature, researchers have been using different approaches to study the companies' discursive activities when talking about some social issues. For example, Moosmayer and Davis (2016) studied how firms and NGOs talk about supply chain responsibility in China through the cases of Apple and Adidas, and NGO published reports as well as company sustainability reports were analysed. This study adopted a cosmopolitan approach, which is based on a social connection model, attributes responsibility on the basis of a common humanity and tries to address a company's social role. Two main trends of cosmopolitanism were recognised in this study: legalistic (which is concerned with the construction of institutional measures to ensure the protection of the human rights of all persons) and moralistic (which is based on positive notions of the worth of each human). It was also shown through the analysis that different forms of cosmopolitan languages were used in different cases. In the case of Apple and a group of Chinese NGOs, legalistic cosmopolitanism was used because their reports talked a lot about the code of conduct and were acting like a promotional text. And in the case of Adidas and Greenpeace, the moral cosmopolitanism is recognised. These differences revealed the different roles of the companies. The legalistic cosmopolitan language of

Apple and the Chinese NGOs suggests that the company is taking a governmental function, while the moralistic cosmopolitan language suggests that Adidas is in the role of a citizen with the responsibility to do good to the other members of the community.

Focusing on the role of language in shaping organizational behaviour, Joutsenvirta (2011) studied the discursive activities in an environmental debate between a company and an NGO (StoraEnso and Greenpeace) in Finland for a period of 16 years. The study drew on the corporate legitimacy theory and the work of Van Leeuwen on grammar of legitimation, and recognised five discursive legitimation strategies: scientific rationalization, nationalistic rationalization, commercial rationalization, moralization, and normalization. And it was shown in the findings that both StoraEnso and Greenpeace used scientific rationalization as a central means, and the moralization was also frequently used by both parties. As for the nationalistic rationalization, it was addressed by StoraEnso to emphasize the Finish economic interest but did not occur in Greenpeace's writings. Besides describing the similarities and differences of discursive legitimation strategies used by the two parties, the author also located the discursive activities within the social context and showed how these struggles redefines the boundaries of CSR. It was found that in 1985, the StoraEnso attempted to defend its behaviour against the critique through scientific and nationalistic rationalizations, while in 1995, the appearance of moralization strategy made the defence more coherent and culturally acceptable. The author further argued that moralization strategy was acting as an ideological response to maintain legitimacy and political sustainability, and the socially acceptable corporate behaviour was redefined in this process. The boundary of CSR was therefore redefined through the combination of economic rationality and ethical reasoning.

In a later study in 2013, Joutsenvirta (2013) focused on a debate of executive pay and explored the discursive process by analysing the media texts from a leading influential newspaper in the country. Besides recognising legitimacy strategies, the author also adopted the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, who recognized the six stages of moral development, and studied the subject positions of managers, politicians, and citizens, and how they were constructed by different legitimation strategies. It was shown that after the financial crisis in 2008, there was an increasing willingness of the public and politicians to judge corporate decisions on executive compensation through virtue ethics and universal ethical values, and the value basis of the legitimation struggle therefore switched from the primarily rationalistic and pragmatic one to a moral one after the onset of the financial crisis (Joutsenvirta, 2013). This timing of shift indicated that the financial crisis changed

the political climate and people's views about economic life made them even more critical toward oversized manager rewards, and therefore changed the legitimation strategies of the companies.

Furthermore, in the study of discursive activities, there are also some studies that adopted the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) and explored how companies are justifying themselves. Patriotta et al. (2011) analysed the discussion after a nuclear accident and the ways that different stakeholders engage with the discourse by looking at the newspaper reports as well as official documents and communications during the debate. Building on the framework of justification offered by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) and their further dictionary work, the authors found that the most popular forms of justification were the industrial world, the market world and the civic world, followed by the domestic world and the world of fame, while the inspired world was almost never adopted.

Similarly, Nyberg and Wright (2012) focused on the climate change and studied the ways that companies are responding. The work of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot was also adopted and it was found that the adoption of the market and industrial world were quite obvious. Companies justify themselves by referring to their competitive advantages, profits, shareholder value, production costs and energy efficiency.

Also, in accounting, the study of company discursive activities has a special focus on the social and environmental accounting, taking the annual reports, sustainability reports and disclosure as a way to make justifications.

For example, Guthrie and Parker (1989) analysed the social content of annual reports of a particular company for 100 years to study the linguistic patterns of the social disclosure, and it was found that there are several themes in its social disclosure and the main theme in a report changes over time; and Patten (1992) focused on the social and environmental disclosure to explore the company responses when an environmental event happens. On the other hand, besides company reports, media articles are also used as a source of data to study company discursive activities. Brown and Deegan (1998), for example, included both environmental disclosures in the annual report as well as the media articles in their study to find out the relationship between media attention and corporates' disclosure. Furthermore, some other studies would also like to gather data through the interactions with people, and Wilmshurst and Frost (2000) collected their data through the questionnaire with companies' chief financial officers. To find out why companies within

similar environments act differently when disclosing environmental information, the responses from the CFOs were studied and eleven motivations for disclosing environmental information were recognised, and it was further suggested that the management perception played an important role in the companies' disclosure practices.

In social and environmental accounting, the study of discursive activities is often related to the legitimacy theory. Patten (1992) observed an increase in Exxon's social and environmental disclosure in its annual reports after an oil spill event and suggested that this could be understood with a legitimacy-based explanation; and to achieve a more general conclusion, the author extended the study to the petroleum industry and studied the annual reports of another 21 oil companies. It was also found that after the year of the oil spill, the whole industry was questioned with environmental concerns and therefore experienced an increase in the disclosure of environmental information. It was argued that the increase could be interpreted as an evidence of legitimacy theory, and the threats to a firm's legitimacy do entice a firm to include more social responsibility information in its report (Patten, 1992). Similarly, Deegan et al. (2000) picked five environmental events and compared the annual reports before and after the events. And it was revealed that companies not only disclose more information after the events, but they are also disclosing more positive information to deal with the negative disaster. The authors further concluded that the legitimacy threats after a particular event can be felt by the related industry and that the CSR reporting has been used by the companies as a way to keep their legitimacy (Deegan et al., 2000).

Besides legitimacy theory, the study of social and environmental accounting suggested that the reporting practice can also be explained with the reputation and media theories. Deegan and Rankin (1997) investigated the reporting practice of twenty Australian companies when they are facing environmental prosecution, and it was noticed that during the period of prosecution, companies tend to disclose positive information and avoid negative news, even when they do have negative ones that should be reported. This indicates that companies do care about their reputation and are trying to maintain a positive image when negative news comes out. Furthermore, Brown and Deegan (1998) borrowed the idea of media agenda setting theory and applied it to their study about social and environmental disclosure. Aiming to find out whether corporate environmental reporting practices will react to the changes in media attention, the authors analysed both the media articles and the annual reports, and noticed that the environmental disclosure as well as the media reporting of environmental issues increased after an environmental event, and that there was a

significant correlation between the levels of media attention and the quantity of environmental disclosures (Brown and Deegan, 1998). Therefore, it was argued by the authors that consistent with the media agenda setting theory, the media is able to cause change in public opinion through its reporting, and is therefore able to influence the reporting practice of the companies.

Moreover, some other studies about social and environmental accounting are done from the perspective of lobbying pressure groups. Tilt (1994) suggested that the lobbying groups is a good way of exploring how society influences the companies' decisions of social and environmental reporting, and a questionnaire was done to all the pressure groups in Australia (146 organizations in which most of them are related to environmental campaigning). And it was found that the pressure groups are not satisfied with the level of corporate social disclosure, and as a user groups of companies' CSR report, the lobbying groups are trying to exert their influence over companies' disclosure practices. Deegan and Gordon (1996), on the other hand, also analysed their data from a lobbying groups perspective. Firstly, the authors suggested that the environmental group membership is a way of showing the societal opinion, and by comparing the volume of environmental reporting in annual reports and the environmental group membership among 25 companies in four years, it was found that the increasing in environmental group membership can be used to explain the increase in environmental disclosures. Secondly, Deegan and Gordon (1996) argued that the motivation of increasing environmental disclosure could be linked to the intensity of attention an industry is receiving from environmental lobbying groups. As the lobbying groups are paying different levels of attention to different industries, the disclosure among industries should also be different. And through the analysis of the environmental disclosure of the companies and the criticism they have received from the lobbying environmental groups, it was concluded that the attention from the lobbying groups is also important in influencing companies' reporting practice.

#### **2.4.2 Newspaper as discourse**

In the papers that study a particular issue in newspaper discourse, both content analysis and discourse analysis are widely used, and usually the two methods are used in different ways. For the content analysis, it is quite common in the studies which need to show a broad picture of the data and to develop the features as well as some patterns in the news reports. According to Krippendorff (1980), the content analysis is defined as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context", and similarly,

Weber (1990) also suggested that the content analysis is a method that is able to make valid inferences from text through a series of procedures. Furthermore, based on the previous studies, Stemler (2001) argued that the content analysis could be regarded as a systematic and replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on some explicit rules of coding.

In most definitions of content analysis, the technique is used to study words and texts, however, Holsti (1969) argued that as a technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages, the use of content analysis should not be restricted to textual analysis, and it could be used to other areas. It is argued that the content of content analysis could be anything, and besides texts, it can also be other meaningful matters, such as the visual images (e.g. Bell, 2001), student drawings (e.g. Wheelock et al., 2000) and observed actions (e.g. Stigler et al., 1999). Therefore, the form of content analysis can be various, and it can focus on keywords, phrases, sentences, paragraphs as well as the whole text.

More specifically, in the study of media, the content analysis has been one of the fastest growing technique since its first use in the field of mass communication, and it is regarded as a specialized type of content analysis and a well-established research method (Macnamara, 2005). Macnamara (2005) further explained that in the media content analysis, researchers usually need to collect the data about the newspaper content, such as the topic or issue of the news reports, the volume of mentions, the messages and keywords in the text, and the circulation of the media. Therefore it can be seen that in the early stage of media content analysis, most of the studies are quantitative, and Neuendorf (2002) even stressed that the media content analysis is quantitative only. Furthermore, Hardy and Bryman (2009) also agreed that the content analysis is quantitative because it is based on the procedures that allow the categorised data to be translated into nominal scale.

Moreover, Tiozzo et al. (2019) did a time series and content analysis to study the media coverage of food risk in four leading Italian daily newspapers. The time series analysis helped to recognise the trends and peaks in the period, and the quantitative content analysis, which aims to identify the words and themes characterizing the media debate on food risks and related issues, helps to reveal the topics that were mainly covered and the aspects that were mostly stressed. The quantitative content analysis was also adopted by Aluç and Ersoy (2018). Based on the frame analysis, the authors explored the news coverage of an environment event in Turkey and coded the data according to the

newspaper name, publication date, information of the headline (quotation, description, comment) and the sources of news (source of story, official and unofficial sources). And it was found in this study that some particular groups were given more voice in the newspapers, such as the government and the elite authorities. Furthermore, Johnson et al. (2003) proved in a study about political correctness that the content analysis can also help to discover the themes and discourses in the news reports by conducting a keyword analysis, which means to use some software to compile the data and to recognise the most frequently occurred terms in relation to the issue.

Therefore, it can be seen that in the newspaper discourse studies, the content analysis is mainly quantitative, and it is helpful to provide a general picture of the data. The trend, peaks, themes, frame, frequency and the structure of the data can be shown through the content analysis, and in particular, for the studies that include a longer period of time (for example, Kirilenko et al. (2012) for 17 years; Yan (1998) for 40 years), the content analysis is applied (at least as a part of the study) to show the basic features of the data and to provide research focus for the subsequent studies.

On the other hand, different from the use of content analysis, the discourse analysis used in newspaper discourse studies appeared to be qualitative and focuses more on the language and its meaning. One of the most popular ways to do the discourse analysis is to study the choice of lexis, which is a way to show the attitude and stance of the news report. For example, Costelloe (2014) tried to explore the representations of national identity in French urban violence news reports through the use of “we” and the modal expressions, and Murata (2007) also explored the attitude towards whaling through “hunt” and “kill”, as well as some other negative judgemental words. Moreover, Teo (2000) argued that the over-lexicalization of a particular group of people is another way to show their powerless and biases (e.g. the use of lawyer and female lawyer).

Besides lexis, another widely used way in the newspaper discourse studies focuses on the quotations, and the more a particular news actor’s word is quoted, the more powerful it is in the news reports (Li, 2009; Teo, 2000). Furthermore, ways of generalization (the extension of a specific group to a much more general set) (Teo, 2000), grammatical structures as well as rhetorical devices (Murata, 2007) are all able to show the power relationship in the newspaper discourse analysis.

## 2.4.3 Discourse studies in the Chinese literature

### 2.4.3.1 Official discourse studies in China

In this section I will focus on the type of data used in Chinese discourse studies and the reasons why they are studied. It was found that to explore a particular discourse in China, several forms of data sources are used. Firstly, among the studies that focus on the discourse in China, one of the most widely used source of data is the official discourse, including governmental documents, official speeches and laws, etc. For example, to study the discourse of equality and equity in Chinese education, Zhou et al. (2018) focused on the national policy documents, and did a discourse analysis to the five-year educational plans and blueprint documents and related laws. The authors stressed that these data were chosen because those documents include the state's most important decisions on major educational topic and are therefore essential sources for understanding Chinese official state discourses. And based on these documents, the authors drew on Espinoza's equality–equity model, and found that in the 1980s, the government's agenda was shifted to economic reforms, and educational equality was not regarded as an outstanding issue. In the 1990s, the government began to treat educational inequality as a necessary process of Chinese socialist market economy; and since the 2000s, equality and equity has become an urgent issue as the government's agenda has shifted focus to stabilizing the nation's economy and society (Zhou et al., 2018).

Similarly, Wang (2014) also make use of five blueprint document and policies to study the changing discourse of internationalization in China's higher education. And when discussing the reasons of choosing the policies, it was argued that the guideline policies not only have significant effects on the development of education in China, but can also provide a comprehensive view of all aspects of education governance. Besides policy documents, Billioud (2007) also discovered other forms of official discourse. To explore how the traditional culture and Confucianism was reflected in the official discourses, Billioud (2007) on the one hand made reference to the document such as the 2001 Action Plan for the Development of Civic Morality and the 2006 Plan for Cultural Development, and on the other hand made reference to the speeches delivered by the leader of the country. And it is obvious that including the speeches has enriched the data of this study, and thus made it more convincing.



### 2.4.3.2 Media discourse studies in China

Secondly, the media has also been used as a data source in studying the Chinese discourses. To study the discourse of nationalism, globalization and cosmopolitanism, Camicia and Zhu (2011) explored the Chinese government's process of introducing the concept of "building a socialist harmonious society". Began with an official document from the Chinese Communist Party, the authors then focused on the media reporting and paid particular attention to the newspapers that are controlled by the government (People's Daily and the Xinhua Agent). In the conclusion of the study, it was found that the in the media articles, the discourse of nationalism was expressed as the national stability and safety, and it still predominates in the discursive process of introducing a new political idea, while the power of the discourse of cosmopolitanism is also rising (Camicia and Zhu, 2011).

Besides the media that is controlled by the government, the media that that market driven can also be an efficient source of data to study the discourse. Sun and Chen (2015) take use of three market driven magazines in China to study the gender discourse in the mainstream media. The authors suggested that the reason of choosing the three magazines is that comparing with the state media that must conform to the official ideology, the market driven media publications are arguably more critical and reflective of the public views. Moreover, the magazines are chosen rather than newspapers because magazines consist of mostly opinion articles and in - depth reports that allow for the examination of the discourses and standpoints embedded in the narrative. And it was found that over time, topics on marriage and private relationships became increasingly predominant, while concerns over gender discrimination diminished in the mainstream media (Sun and Chen, 2015).

### **3 Theoretical framework based on Boltanski and Thévenot**

Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot developed a theoretical framework that sheds new light on the nature of arguments. The framework can not only analyse critique itself, but can also extend its scope to the various forms of agreement. According to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), the order of worth framework aims at understanding how people express their disagreement in conflict situations and how they reach and maintain more or less stable and lasting agreements. Their work focused on common persons' judgemental capacities and developed a theoretical model that identifies the common principles of justice to which people implicitly refer in their daily lives, usually in situations of dispute, situations in which they have to develop an acceptable argumentation to defend their position. More specifically, the model is a means to analyse the nature of arguments to which people refer to when asserting their rights and explain why some arguments are more convincing than others. According to the model, arguments possess certain forms of generality, that is, the principles of equivalence which allow the production and distribution of worth and enable the processes of evaluation.

#### **3.1 Critical sociology**

Regarded as a critical sociology of domination, Bourdieu's sociology made an important contribution to the ongoing attempt at transcending the variety of conceptual oppositions that are often expressed as structure and agency, society and the individual, and perhaps mostly significantly objectivism and subjectivism (Hirst, 2020). According to Bourdieu (1980), the divide between objectivism and subjectivism has been the most fundamental, and the most ruinous oppositions in the history of social science. On the one hand, objectivist approaches focus on the autonomy of social structures, affirming the relative independence of norms and values from individual will. Subjectivism, represented by the philosophical tradition of phenomenology, on the other hand, focuses more on the immediacy of lived experience, excluding from its mode of knowing the conditions of possibility of this experience, that is, objective social structures.

To overcome these oppositions, Bourdieu takes up elements of Marxian and Weberian theory to explore the way in which relations of domination are maintained and reproduced at micro and macro levels. It is argued that the reproduction of institutions of domination flowed from a type of implicit consent on the part of individuals to their authority and not

just from the simple exercise of external power, and the concept of habitus, which was defined as a socialised subjectivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), has provided one of the means of articulating how social norms become internalised. In this way, the concept of habitus has made it possible to account for the ways in which certain behaviours come to be considered ordinary aspects of daily life, and to account for situations where they are maintained. One's habitus becomes a way of perceiving, structuring and making sense of the experience of oneself and others, and also becomes a way of reproducing existing social structures.

Furthermore, in opposition to the Kantian characterisation of aesthetic judgement as emerging from the inherent qualities of objects themselves, Bourdieu argues that, rather than being a purely disinterested activity, judgement and evaluation are in fact means of symbolically legitimating the dominant tastes and values of a society (Bourdieu 1984). In Hirst (2020), judgements of taste are described as “nothing more than the taste of one particular class, the ruling class”, and these tastes are confirmed in a variety of domains, including educational outcomes, national languages, aesthetic taste, sport and knowledge. In this situation, judgements appear to come from a place of “objectivity and disinterestedness” that merely conceal their real class origins, and thus becomes a way of maintaining social and class distinctions. And inequality, therefore, is maintained through socialisation, giving one's behaviour a natural feel and sense, believing that one particular style of music, artistic work, type of food, or professional aspiration, is (or is not) for people like me.

Within the sociology of education and the sociology of culture, Bourdieu's critical sociology of domination has been used a lot, and is regarded as a particularly instructive theoretical tool. Drawing on Bourdieu's idea, there are quite a lot of studies focusing on the way in which class inequalities are sustained through different kinds of symbolic violence, and it was found that symbolic violence is exerted through evaluations of good taste and through the system of education. And in addition to these, it was also noticed that symbolic violence is exerted through the media in the form of reality television (Hirst, 2020).

However, Bourdieu's critical sociology also receives criticisms. For example, Boltanski argued that it is particularly constraining within this formation of the issue of social relations. For Boltanski, when using the habitus to describe the internalisation of social factors and norms, it seems that to some extent, these structures completely dominate the

actor's dispositions, and the objective social structures remain totally independent of the consciousness of agents. Therefore for Boltanski, the concept of habitus left no room for the ability of people with different habitus to come to agreements.

### **3.2 Epistemological stance**

According to Boltanski (2013), the programme of a sociology of critical practices aims to pursue and enhance a critical sociology grounded in rigorous empirical fieldwork by offering fine-grained accounts of actors engaged in situations. One kind of situation the programme aims to study is that of disputes, in which people are producing criticisms and justifications; and another kind of situation the programme tends to study is affairs, which refers to a big public debate triggered by a case entailing uncertain features and involving a question of justice. In these affairs, an originally local conflict will spread and take on a general significance. And the different parties involved in the conflict will try to mobilize as large a group of actors as possible to support their cause, and different incompatible accounts are produced as a result.

Boltanski (2013) argued that inspired by the pragmatist tradition, the programme of a sociology of critical practices puts its sociological attention to the actors, and views them as active agencies rather than passive. The actors are openly critical and could be regarded as critical sociologists that press their demands, condemn injustice, produce evidence to support their complaints or develop arguments to defend themselves against criticisms levelled against them. Therefore, the social world is no longer a place of passively accepted domination from this standpoint, but a site full of disputes, critiques, disagreements, and attempts to restore harmony instead.

The book *On Justification* by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), is an important example of taking the stance of the programme of a sociology of critical practices. Based on the extensive fieldworks, the book developed a theoretical model of the sense of justice in the society, and outlines the cognitive resources and normative tools implemented by people to generate criticisms and justifications. Also, it stressed the plurality of the principles of evaluation and criticisms. It not only achieved a better description of the argumentation, but also tried to describe the procedures people use to support their claims.

However, it is also pointed out by Boltanski (2013) that the programme of a sociology of critical practices does not permit mounting a wider critique encompassing social reality

regarded in its totality, with different components systematically linked one to another, a critique that would consequently advocate for a change of the political order. To explain this, Boltanski (2013) distinguishes the reality with the world. The reality, in Boltanski's perspective, refers to a network of qualifications, definitions, standards, test formats, rules and selection procedures in which actors are involved, and the world, on the other hand, is "all that is happening" that cannot be conceivably totalized. And when the actors found that the world arguments and examples do not fit in with the qualifications, definitions, and test formats on which current social reality is based, they would question its necessity, expose its arbitrary nature, and, finally, propose other kinds of social arrangements.

Furthermore, to put the sociology of critical practices into the context of critical sociology, the book *On Critique* (Boltanski, 2011) designed a larger scheme from the question of institutions. It is argued that the institutions have the task of maintaining in working order the current formats and rules, that is, the task of confirmation of the reality of the reality, while on the other hand, critique draws on new resources from the world and questions this socially constructed reality, and when it succeeds in gaining a listening, transforms the reality and therefore participate in the social change.

This offers a way to put the pragmatic sociology and the discourse analysis together. In the theoretical perspective of CDA, it is discourse, the socially instituted use of language, that institutes the various fields. Actors draw on the various competing discourses during their own conflicts, and as they do so they reflect on the conditions of their practice, potentially with a critical attitude, and offer justifications for their action. In this sense, identification happens as individuals attach themselves to the subject positions that are construed in the various discourses, and they reflexively articulate discourses with moral meanings, that is, with different ideas about what constitutes the common good. These moral discourses, according to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), are regarded as different orders of worth. Actors draw on the orders of worth in order to justify their practice and institute it as distinct from other practices, evaluate and identify themselves, and qualify their relationships with others.

Moreover, it should also be noticed that Boltanski and Thévenot have developed their model over a long period of time. The preliminary version took three years to shape and was published in France in 1987. This exploratory publication enabled the researchers to refine their model and re-work some of their concepts before publishing their book *De la Justification* in 1991 (the English translation *On Justification* was published in 2006). And

in response to the critiques that arose from the book, Boltanski worked in collaboration with the French sociologist Eve Chiapello, and published the book *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* in 1999 (the English translation *The New Spirit of Capitalism* was published in 2005), in which they modified some elements of the model and introduced a new “order”, the “projective” order. And different from *On Justification*, which aims to present and describe the various order of worth, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* adopts a critical stance towards the new emerging order. Similarly, Thévenot also continued working on the model, and published in 1993 with the French sociologist Claudette Lafaye, to introduce a “green” order of worth. This shows that the order of worth model is not a closed system, but an unfinished model to which new orders and principles could be added. Moreover, this open and dynamic model also shows that Boltanski and Thévenot are aware of the complexity of a social world that is characterised by pluralism.

### **3.3 From critical sociology to a sociology of critique**

The sociology of critique developed by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), rejects the demand for a break between the participant and observer perspectives and emphasises the reflexivity of everyday practice. Moreover, it develops a vocabulary for analysing concrete practices of self-understanding that does not put “ordinary” agents down as “dopes” who do not know what they are doing, but understands them as competent agents who possess judgement and other reflexive capacities.

In the critical sociology, ethnomethodology not only restricts itself to the local production of meaning and order in concrete situations, but understands this construction itself as something contingent, that is, something for which no further ground can be found or given (Celikates, 2018). And the sociology of critique, in contrast, assumes that agents in their everyday practices are subject to certain demands to justify themselves, and that they try to satisfy these by drawing on general principles that are expressed in socially and culturally mediated forms of argumentation. In this case, the construction of meaning and order must rely on normative frameworks (“justificatory logics”) and is subject to their normative binding force. Therefore, critique is possible and necessary depends both on the existence of these demands and the factual power of the normative, and must be capable of justifying itself, that is, clarifying the normative supports that ground it.

Different from the perspective of critical social science, in which agents are incapable of coming to an independent and adequate understanding of the social and are therefore at

best considered “informants”, the sociology of critique takes the experiences and self-interpretations of “ordinary” agents as a starting point (Celikates, 2018). It does not reject the mutual ascriptions of a capacity for reflection and critique that are constitutive for everyday practice and for the self-understandings of agents as illusory, but adopts them. Thus, the focus of the sociology of critique is the everyday practices of justification and critique, argues that one could speak of the fact of critique and justification in situations of dispute.

The sociology of critique, accordingly, is a two-level theory: it starts with the reflexive capacities of agents that are expressed in everyday practices of self-understanding, and subsequently analyses these practices as a complex nexus of orders of justification, which involve grammars and topics of justification and critique. In Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)’s work, it was further proposed that there are two forms of critique. In the first case, the regime of justification is fundamentally accepted, while the way in which it is applied in the concrete situation is criticised. In such cases, critique can reveal that a worth is transferred illegitimately from one domain to the other and can point out either unjustified overestimations or underestimations, that is, unjustified privileges or disadvantages. In the second case, the critique questions the very order of justification or its appropriateness in the situation at hand. This is a more radical form of critique, one that aims at the replacement of a regime of justification that is deemed inadequate in the situation at hand, and that can support this demand by pointing out that the description of the situation that had thus far been generally accepted is inappropriate.

Therefore, in the sociology of critique, the focus is the everyday practice of the agents, and critique lies in the process of making judgements and justifications, and could be shown through the relationships between the different logics.

### **3.4 The principle of equivalence**

For Boltanski and Thévenot, it is argued that the social life is characterized by a “necessity of justification,” and human beings are motivated to behave in a manner that is justifiable in order to make their actions comprehensible to themselves as well as to social actors whom they interact and engage with. And to explain this necessity of justification, Boltanski and Thévenot suggest that people have the capacity to criticize. The authors noticed in their empirical work that when people involved in ordinary relationships, do things together and coordinate their actions, they will experience moments of discontent,

during which people will realize something is wrong and needs to be changed. Therefore, to express discontent to the other persons, the one who criticizes other persons must produce justifications in order to support their criticisms, and the person who is the target of the criticism must justify his actions in order to defend his own cause. And this means that people need to behave in a manner that their actions can stand the test of justification.

Boltanski and Thévenot suggested that to be acceptable to others, arguments have to possess a certain “degree of generality”, and this kind of valid public justification thus leads to a common reference, that is, a principle of equivalence. That is to say, in resolving these justificatory disputes, people have to establish what they have in common. From their own extensive empirical studies, Boltanski and Thevenot (1999) suggested that the most common forms of equivalence are based on a “common sense of humanity” which has its genesis in notions of the “common good” shared by all members of the human race. In order to achieve this equivalency, Boltanski and Thevenot (1999), argued that “persons must divest themselves of their singularity and converge towards a form of generality, transcending persons and the situations in which they interrelate”. Persons who seek agreement therefore have to move towards a position which is governed by a convention of equivalence which is external to themselves. In other words, persons need to make the transition from personal convenience to collective conventions (Crawford, 2015).

With a principle of equivalence, comparisons can be made, and things or persons are judged in accordance with a common superior principle. For Boltanski and Thévenot, a principle of equivalence is similar to the idea of cultural value to some extent, but unlike the idea of cultural value, the principle of equivalence is neither universal (a single reference on which we would all base our judgement in all times) nor relativist (an infinity of principles that vary according to eras, places and cultures). Indeed, Boltanski and Thévenot argued that there exists a plurality of principles of equivalence that can be used to justify the assessment of people’s status.

Furthermore, with the studying of western political philosophies, Boltanski and Thévenot believed that to make one’s critique and actions comprehensible and reach a state of agreement, social actors tend to make reference to a limited number of broad-based sets of values and conceptions of the common good, and thus recognised six principles, that is, six orders of worth in their study. An order of worth can be regarded as a model of a good society constructed on a singular basis of value that acts as the sole standard for determining what matters or what is worthy within that society, and it can provide a



normative way of evaluation and classification within that particular world and thus can serve as the basis for the determination of people's states of worth and the justifiability of their actions.

### 3.5 The common world

In the disputes, actors seek to define the valid moral order of a particular practical situation, and justifications as well as critique emerge in this process. Actors reflect on the situation and justify their practice as they draw on a plurality of moral discourses. These general discourses, in the language of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), are the different orders of worth that form around particular principles for the distribution of worth, and subjects, objects, activities, and tests for the distribution of worth to persons are included in each order of worth.

To study the orders of worth in detail, Boltanski and Thévenot developed a framework with a set of dimensions that can help to present the various worlds. In the process of justification, an ability to use various "objects" to assess one's worth is involved. According to Boltanski and Thévenot, people's value or worth does not depend on some inalienable and permanent qualities, on the contrary, people have to constantly be re-assessed by means of instrumental methods, which are composed of "objects". For example, "good manners", "titles", "gifts" are objects that are used to assess the domestic worth, "wealth" and "money" can help assess the market worth, "tasks", "plans", "methods" can be used to measure the industrial worth, while "rights", "law", "policy" are used to evaluate the civic worth.

Besides objects, other beings are also included in a common world. Boltanski and Thévenot included these beings in a list of "subjects", and it is suggested that the subjects could be human or not. For example, a "spirit" or a "god" could be included in the list of subjects, while an association or a group of people could also be considered as a subject if it has the power to influence other human beings. Moreover, subjects are defined through the role they play. It is suggested that individuals bear different roles in their daily lives, in which there could be parents, children, citizens, consumers and workers at the same time. This also helps Boltanski and Thévenot to explain that there exist various ways to assess someone's worth from different orders of worth.

Besides the list of subjects (the people qualified by their state of worth, unworthy and worthy beings) and the list of objects (the mechanisms of the worth, such as the rules, codes, tools, etc.), common worlds are also composed of other dimensions. For example, the higher common principle is basis of each world, and it is the principle of coordination that characterizes an order of worth, and it is also a convention for establishing equivalence among people. The state of worthiness is regarded as the way that various states of worth are defined, and the state of deficiency is defined as lacking the quality of worthiness in an order of worth. Human dignity is the common humanity that is rooted in nature and expressed in a common capacity to rise to occasions in the service of the common good. The investment formula refers to the sacrifice of the private pleasures associated with a state of lesser worthiness in an order of worth. The model test, or a peak moment, comes about in a situation that holds together and is prepared for a test whose outcome is uncertain. And the state of deficiency usually means the unworthiness state in an order of worth.

### **3.6 The six worlds**

Based on the extensive fieldworks, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) identified six orders of worth: the inspiration world values creativity, authenticity and intuition, and it is present in artistic and spiritual practices. The industrial world values efficiency in the application of means to ends, and can be considered as the moral backbone of the professions and sciences. The domestic world is founded on respect for hierarchies and principles, and beyond familial and intergenerational relationships, it refers to traditional modes of organisation where seniority is respected. In the world of fame, the opinion of others is used as a way to measure recognition and renown, and this is where journalists are central figures. In the market world, the pursuit of profit is considered moral behaviour. The civic world values collective and community welfare and justifies the organisation of individuals in groups, which includes political action.

The inspired world is defined by the outpouring of inspiration, which is driven by love, passion, and the desire to create. In the inspired world, the most inspired who have higher status of worth are the ones with imaginative powers, such as children or artists, and investment in inspiration means to evade regular routines and accept the risks of failure in pursuit of creative success. The inspired judge positively those who are independent, unique, and touched by genius. True inspiration is found or intuited in the masterpiece or stroke of genius, that is, the unusual ideas, images, memories and dreams. Inspired

encounters may be mysterious, unexpected, and affective, facilitating creativity and originality. Tests of inspiration are adventures, voyages or quests, taking uncertain and wandering paths. Failure or loss of inspiration occurs when people give up dreams, lose originality, slip into routines, “come back down to earth”, and look to external signs of success (such as money or titles).

The domestic world is based on tradition and hierarchy. Superior figures and leaders are the most worthy, characterized by ‘good up-bringing’, delicacy, and firmness towards subordinates, and ‘good sense’ and bearing towards others. Superiors and inferiors are closely interdependent, ensuring future generations are ‘well-raised’, instilling rules of etiquette and good manners, and principles of pride, honour, respect, and shame. Domestic investment bestows individuals with harmonious social relations in return for duties and responsibilities. Peak moments are found in family ceremonies such as births, deaths and marriages, where individual worth is adjusted or confirmed. Judgement flows from the superior figure, bestowing different levels of trust upon others through appreciation, congratulation, criticism or even contempt. Evidence to back this judgement is provided through anecdotes, examples and cases. Decline or failure in the domestic world occurs when social actors lose inhibitions and become indiscreet, gossipy, impolite, disorderly, or even betray the group’s trust.

The world of fame is defined by the public opinion, and the most worthy ones in this world have high public exposure and the need for recognition. It is suggested that the world of fame is populated by stars with distinctive personalities, their fans, and various professional intermediaries (such as journalists, public relations officers) who legitimize this realm. Fame is gained through naming in the media, and pursued through branding, public campaigns, press releases, and opinion surveys. Investment in the world of fame requires participants to reveal their secrets to the public. Relationships of fame are based on being recognized, gaining celebrity status, and influencing or persuading public opinion. Peak moments or tests occur when social actors are fully in the public eye and in presentation mode. Judgement is provided by public opinion, such as through audience ratings and responses. Falling out of fame means that social actors lose their public image or become unknown in the society.

The market world is defined by competition and natural rivalries. The market worthiness is measured through saleable goods that have price or value, and the most worthy are the ones who can hold the most valuable possessions and the goods that sell for high prices.

The natural market environment centres on satisfying individual desires, while its key subjects are individual competitors such as businessmen, salesmen, buyers, sellers and clients. Market investment requires opportunism and emotional distance from others. Tests or peak moments in the market arise in the completion of deals, transactions and contracts, and judgement is established through the price and profit. As for the failure in the market world, it is usually associated with poverty and financial losses.

The industrial world favours the efficiency, productivity, reliability and performance of social actors, and the people with higher status are the ones with energy and are productive, while the unworthy are deemed unproductive, inefficient, and lazy. Work represents the natural condition within the industrial world, and the main subjects are professionally qualified and hierarchically organized, while the objects are the means and instruments of work, such as tools or production methodologies. Investment in the industrial world involves a commitment to progress and development, and the test happens in the industrial world when new projects are launched or fresh arrangements are made to function effectively. Judgement in the industrial world centres on the question of effective functioning, with evidence involving measurement of performance. The industrial world faces a failure when there is amateurism and the lack of productivity.

The civic world is rooted in the collective interest, and the worthiest entities within the civic world are representative and rule-governed collectives, which unify and act for the people. Civic social actors have a natural commitment to political bonds, civil rights, and collective identities, typically within political parties or community associations, as officials, members and delegates. Civic relations are facilitated by legal objects, such as laws, rights, and policies, and forged through assemblies, democratic debate, and collective action. Civic investment requires abandoning individual or sectional interests in favour of the collective, and the test or peak moments occur through demonstrations of the collective will or a moral cause. Civic judgement is exercised through the vote, especially at elections and collective mobilizations, and evidence is shown through legal statutes and rules. The civic world fails when collective bonds split up and individualism takes hold.

### **3.7 Critiques among the worlds**

Once the different worlds are identified, they will be associated with different persons. However, unlike objects, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) argued that human beings can manifest themselves in different worlds, and in order to function in society, they must be

able to adjust on a regular basis to situations with different forms of worth. And this is how a dispute happens, when multiple worths are invoked to access a person's worth.

When a dispute occurs, it may lead to two forms of critiques. In the first form, a worth of a subject is questioned, but the world itself was not called into question. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, p.133) called this a contention, which is "the disagreement over the worths of the persons, and thus over the equitability of the way worths have been disturbed in the situation at hand". In these situations, beings are questioned as not being "well ordered", and a reassessing of their worth is needed. In a contention, the harmony of a situation, where "beings from the same world" should be "arrayed in natural relations compatible with their state of worth" (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.133), was disrupted by the traces of some other world. The accusation of "transport of deficiency" in a contention means that someone's worth is overestimated or underestimated because of the influence from another world. However, it should be noticed that in these situations, "reference to other worlds seeks not to challenge the test's relevance or the principle on which the test is based, but on the contrary, to reinforce its validity by purifying the conditions of realization" (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.218), and to "purifying the conditions of realization," a involvement of "beings better identified in the world from which the test stems, beings that are consequently more worthy" (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.219) is required.

More specifically, Lemasson (2013) gave an example of contention through a situation where employees argue that one of their colleagues was promoted just because she was the boss's niece despite of her true competence. In this example, the woman's worth may have reached a higher rank due to her position in another world (transport of deficiency). Her relation with the boss (domestic world) may have contributed to her promotion in the company (industrial world). And as a result, she was accused of having a higher rank by the reason of privilege rather than satisfying the company's requirements of being promoted. And to maintain her position, the promoted employee might be urged by the human resource director (a worthy being in the industrial world) to do several tests. The examination will be able to measure her knowledge and skills (to undertake a purified test in the industrial world), and it will be confirmed whether she possesses or not the competence necessary to the good functioning of the company (reassessment of her worthiness).

On the other hand, a second form of critique happens when people disagree with the very principle on which the evaluation is based, and this is called “clash” by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). In a clash, the discord “has to do with the true nature of the situation, with reality and the common good to which reference may be made to reach agreement. The goal is no longer to repeat the test in a purer and more equitable fashion by eliminating privilege and neutralizing handicaps, but to demystify the test as such, in order to place things on their true ground and to institute a different test that will be valid in a different world” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.224). This means that the clash is a more fundamental disagreement over the principle of the world, and the question of the principle might also lead to an overturn of the situation by relacing the test in a different world.

To make it more practical, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) provided a matrix to show how the critiques could be addressed between different worlds.

### **3.7.1 Critiques addressed form the inspired world**

In the inspired world, stability and certainty, as well as other things that might constitute an obstacle to inspiration have to be sacrificed. And the critiques issuing from the inspired world, therefore, are addressed first and foremost to “the aspects of other worlds that situate persons within the continuity of time” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.237). The stable and fixed things are devalued in this logic. For example, the sacrosanct principles (from the domestic world) and norms (from the industrial world) are shackles that inhibit creativity, and traditions from the domestic world that bring to bear on the weight of others’ actions in the past, promises from the domestic world that commit to the future, and the forecasts and plans from the industrial worlds that entail obligations, and all regarded as constrains that limit a person’s availability. In the same way, everything that supports the state of worth in other worlds, such as hierarchies (domestic world), titles (civic or industrial world), habits (domestic world), or routines (industrial world) are all criticised by the inspired world.

More specifically, addressing to the domestic world, the hierarchy situations, established order, respect due to rank, and social positions, are criticised by the inspired world. Habits and inherited rules are criticised as opposed to originality, and culture is criticised as traditional. Furthermore, the inspired world requires people to give everything up to follow his own path, which also leads to the critique of personal bonds in the domestic world. To

reach independence, masters in the domestic world are questioned by the creators from the inspired world to get away from the “old skin”.

Addressing to the world of fame, opinion and other external signs of success are criticised of silencing the imagination. In the world fame, worldly worths are the ways that people are valued, and the inspired world criticises this as “a stage on which inauthentic persons play roles” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.239).

The civic world was criticised from the inspired world when it is envisaged in its most institutionalized forms. The warmth of affective relations from the inspired world was forgotten by the heavily instrumented and detached relations from the civic world.

Addressing critique to the market world, money is said to be of little importance by the inspired world. “Subjection to money is criticised either because it presupposes enslavement to desires oriented toward the satisfaction of personal pleasures, or because it implies submission to other parties during the process of making a deal” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, pp.239-240). Particularly, in the art market, or a situation where an idea is commercialised, the inspired world insists that creativity itself is not a commercial product, and the deals will stop at nothing.

Addressing to the industrial world, the well-established methods and ways of doing things are accused of inhibiting creativity by the inspired world, and industrial routines are criticised from this perspective.

### **3.7.2 Critiques from the domestic world**

Addressing to the inspired world, the domestic world criticises inspiration of disrupting the configurations set up according to hierarchies and plunging the situation into disorder. Associated with the character of spontaneous, the inspired world is criticised by the domestic world as an absence of control, especially over one’s emotions and one’s body. And any sort of sloppy and unrestrained behaviours is regarded as a lack of self-restraint, and is therefore targeted by the domestic world.

Beings in the world of fame and the domestic world both knows how to behave according to the good manners, however, the difference is that in the world of fame, it is a behaviour for social climbing, “in order to gain approval or win favour” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.242), and is therefore criticised by the domestic world of “self-interested”. On the

other hand, the distinction between inside and outside, public and private, is valued by the domestic world, and secrets from the inside is important. The world of fame, which on the contrary, aims for attracting public attention, and is criticised of giving up secrets. The show-off tendencies of the social climber from the world of fame, is criticised by the domestic view of lacking ambition.

The critiques addressed to the civic world is somehow similar to that in the world of fame. The domestic value of family relations suggests that the differences are not supposed to be aired in public, and the civic world break this distinction between inside and outside by making reference to the state. For example, an internal disagreement is made public when it is called into the judicial system and proceeded to a trial through a civic logic. Moreover, in the domestic world, worth is recognised through personal attachments, and “the focus is the father with his authority, his experience, and his desire to educate” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.244). And the civic nature of “associations of strangers” is contrasted with this personal responsibility of the father, and is therefore criticised by the domestic world.

Addressing to the market world, the domestic world makes its criticism by recalling the limits of market relations. In a domestic world, money must be subordinated to merit and virtue, and it refuses the market idea that everything can be bought. The domestic property is inscribed in a chain of ownership rooted in the past, and this is in contract with the market good. In the domestic world, the family property is inappropriate to sell as it is attached to the domestic realm. Instead, these items should be circulated through family relations as inheritance or as gifts. Furthermore, in a domestic family, money is not to be discussed as it may lead to damage of personal relationships. The market world is criticised by the domestic when interest is introduced into families ties or bonds of friendships and cause troubles by breaking the relations of trust.

In relation to the industrial world, the form of judgement is different from that of the domestic world. The measure of professional competence that relies on formalized criteria and standardized procedures in the industrial world is of little weight with regard to the authority that will be manifested in a trade. And critiques that “contest the scope of industrial arrangements rely on the opposition between the process of generation in which trust is rooted in functional efficiency”, and “the producing volume or producing profits are activities that prevent domestic relations from guaranteeing the quality of the beings that depend on resources of a domestic nature” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.246).



### 3.7.3 Critiques from the world of fame

Addressing to the inspired world, whose confirmation depends on the certainty of an intimate conviction, the world of fame depends on the opinion of others, and is incompatible with it. In the previous discussion, it was argued that the temptation of fame is one of the main causes of a fall in the inspired world. And conversely, in the world of fame, inspiration is criticised as madness on the other hand, because it is assimilated. In a world which favours public opinions, there is a critique of esotericism of the inspired world, and it is argued that the esotericism “ignores the tastes of the public and fails to direct its messages to the largest possible audience” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.248). In other words, if the message and information is too esoteric, only the most sophisticated sector of the public can be reached, and the rest, that is, the vast majority, won't even notice it, let alone understand or remember anything about it.

The domestic world is criticised by the world of fame in relation to the spread of information. In the world of fame, information is spread into public opinion, and is broadcast not to a particular recipient but to the public as a whole, and to the largest possible audience. While the domestic world, on the other hand, circulates the transparency of information within personal relations. Therefore, the domestic world is criticised of keeping secrets and hiding things by the world of fame.

The market world is criticised by the world of fame through the discussion of public relations. It is argued that there is a difference between public relations (the world of fame) and advertising (market world). On the one hand, the goal of public relations is to inform the consumers and to attract their attention. On the other hand, the goal of advertising and promotion is to sell something, which should be avoided during a public relation presentation. Moreover, the market world is also criticised through the distinction between marketing and public relations. For marketing, it is the consumer's desires and needs that is the most important, while for public relations, it is the establishment of a network of good relationships that matters.

Addressing to the industrial world, the experts and scientists are criticised to be too isolated and esoteric by the world of fame that they are unable to guarantee on their own that their work will find an echo in public opinion.

### 3.7.4 Critique from the civic world

The inspired world is criticised as impulsivity and individualism in the civic world. It is argued that from the worth of civic, the “individualism is typical of avant-gardes that are in a minority and cut off from the base” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.251). Similarly, ferment from the inspired world, is also criticised as a barrier to the unity of collective persons: “a general ferment does not suffice. What is required is a steady flow of information, collective reflection, coordination” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.251).

The references to domestic world from the civic world are mostly critical, which is determined by the opposite position of civic bonds and domestic bonds. The civic bond is the one that liberates from relations of personal dependence, and the domestic bond focuses on the family and personal relationship instead. In relation to this, when there is a conflict about collective and personal nature, paternalism is often criticised. A collective conflict falls under the authority of unions and can be addressed by instruments of a civic nature, while a personal conflict has to be settled in the register of the domestic world. In the domestic world, the hierarchical relations are criticised because they imperil the cohesiveness of collective persons, and the domestic authority is also criticised and rejected because it subordinates everyone’s destiny to the decisions of a single person. In the election proceedings, the civic world requires the independence of judgement and to comply with legal principles, and the domestic world is criticised of bringing corruption when the principles are ignored. Furthermore, in scandals, the domestic world is criticised when the secret of a personal bond is revealed in public.

The critique addressed to the world of fame lies in its different meanings of public opinion with the civic world. In the civic world, the opinions of independent individuals express the general will that is attached to the collective through the process of voting, while on the contrary, the public opinion in the world of fame is “constituted by the converging adherences of persons who are subjected to the influence of others” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.259). Therefore, a critique to the world of fame happens when summation is referred to, and it is suggested that “union action is not a simple summation of positions or individual initiatives but rather a collective action” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.259).

The critique addressed to the market world is quite obvious from a civic perspective. As an example of the expression of an irreducible opposition between the public good and private

interests, the debate over the relations between the right of residency and the possession of goods has never stopped. As a result, the civic critique of market worth is the object of a great deal of studies, and can be seen from the conventional opposition between the owners (characterised by selfishness) and the workers. Moreover, another form of a civic critique is the self-serving individualism, and it is hard to achieve democracy in an individualism world. The public service, in this case, is build around the opposition to a market service.

Addressed to the industrial world, the operation of training is criticised by the civic world. The training refers to the acquisition of a skill or competence, and it is criticised of “knowledge cut off from life” and of “experts bringing information” when “detached from the industrial world” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.261). To make the training meaningful, collective enrichment is required.

### **3.7.5 Critique from the market world**

The inspired world is criticised by the market world when a distance is achieved to form a market bond. In a market world, emotional distance and self-control are necessary conditions for seizing opportunities and making deals, without letting oneself be blinded by his impulses and acting on the spur of the moment, which is the behaviour of inspiration. The market world requires an avoidance of emotional crises so that people can remain coolheaded, and the inspired world is thus criticised of lacking self-control in this perspective.

The critique addressed to the domestic world lies in the personal attachments and local ties that a market world would like to free from. In a market world, traditional, prejudices, and routines from the domestic world are only shackles that prevent the development of opportunistic relations, and the freedom from personal dependencies and from influences are regarded as the critiques to the domestic order. Also, in a market world, the relations with influential persons, which are favoured in the domestic world, can lead to troublesome shadows over free market contracts. And to lessen the threat of personal or local attachments, staff rotation is practiced in businesses to avoid prejudices that hinder adjustment to market conditions. Looking into the extension of the market, it is argued that it is different from the domestic world as there is no limits in time or space in the market world (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.264), and all forms of provincialism, such as local attachments and implantation in regional territories, are the shackles that hinder the global extension of the marketplace. In the economic literature, the elements such as “barriers to

entry” and “barriers to mobility”, stemmed from a domestic order, are criticised as impediments to the free circulation of merchandise. In the domestic world, time is considered as valuable because the tradition flows from it, however, in the market world, the preconceived ideas and popular wisdom that gained their worth from the tradition, are considered as obstacles in defying prejudices (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.264). Similarly, the critique of consumer loyalty is also a critique addressed to the domestic world because it leads the consumer to miss opportunities and pay too much for the brand name.

Addressing to the world of fame, a “snobbish client” was criticised for turning up his nose at goods that are not sufficient distinctive, and the meaning of competition might be hurt by this. It was argued that when goods can no longer be identified in a stable fashion, the market as the higher common principle will be questioned, and as a result, there might be shift towards the worlds of fame, in which opinion get in the way instead of competition. This kind of shift is manifested by a pathological fluctuation of prices that reveals the damaging effects of speculation. Apart from this, another critique towards the world of fame lies in the critique of brand name, in which fame is contributing to the value of the goods. And appearances and celebrity are criticised for their low value in the market order.

The critique addressed to the civic world comes from the term “collective”. In the market world, deals are worked out face to face, and group configurations, as well as collective procedures, are criticised. The market order is regarded as the only available form of justice, and legal activity, in this perspective, does not have any special status, and may lead to an extra cost on justice. “The intervention of justice in market relations is criticised as soon as it diverts the participants from the direct face-to-face signing of contract” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.266).

The industrial world is subject to criticism from the market standpoint for its rigidities. And “the anonymous and formal expression in the industrial world is called into question because it leaves no place for the interaction of subjective desires”, (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.267), from the market world, industrial capacities of machines and experts are only impediments to deal making. Specifically, this kind of critique of the rigidity of tools and methods is addressed to structure, flow charts, systems and organizations in the industrial world, and it is argued that all these objects disturb the market world and threaten to make the market subject forget his dignity of getting rich. Furthermore, plans from the industrial world are shunned and their lack of realism runs

counter to market opportunism, which encourages people to leap every chance to make a fortune. Among the free-market economists such as Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek, this kind of critique to the restraining effect of bureaucratic rules and planning is particularly explicit.

### **3.7.6 Critique from the industrial world**

The inspired world is criticised for unpredictability of muddled activity and the wastefulness of improvisation by the industrial world. Build on the support for coordination, the industrial world is disturbed by the eminently uncertain quality of beings from the inspired world. For industrial order, the unforeseen events that is implied by the inspired order is risky for its own functioning, and is subject to criticism in this perspective.

The domestic world is criticised by the industrial world in terms of old and personal attachments. From the industrial order of efficiency and progress, what is old is out-dated, and what is traditional is old-fashioned. Things that have a past will be criticised as ill adapted, for example, a dilapidated building is regarded as no longer functional in the industrial world. In terms of domestic attachments, personal relations are criticised to cause troubles in the industrial world, e.g., the mix of private life and professional life. In a familial capitalism where domestic bonds are inscribed, critical tensions are created when they are judged from the industrial management of a company. “The board of directors is an arrangement that is easily disturbed by a confrontation between domestic and industrial qualifications” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.270).

A common address to the civic world is the inefficiency of administrative procedures, and acquired privileges are also questioned by the industrial world. In companies, the costs of a labour policy are also criticised from an industrial perspective, and it is suggested that a company that practiced a costly labour policy and not financed by increased productivity would go bankrupt and would be unable to ensure the welfare of its employees.

Critique to the market world could be expressed through the conspicuous consumption of luxury goods, which are expensive but not very useful, as they do not satisfy real needs in the industrial world. More often, the tensions between industrial and market worth are manifested during market tests of “make a deal” and “agree on a fair price”. “Market contentions that are expressed before a sale in the course of preliminary negotiations often

degenerate into clashes when the price is challenged in the name of a different worth, that is, when reference is made to the low degree of usefulness or efficiency of a market being with respect to its price” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.272). Furthermore, the criticism to market worth is also expressed in the industrial world by highlighting the unpredictability and random character of market beings. The market pressure could shake up the industrial arrangements and lead to deficiencies in industrial quality.

### 3.8 Compromise

In the dispute and critiques, the harmony of a given world is disrupted, and this can create a great deal of anxiety or discomfort among participants. In order to avoid incongruity and the clashes that might follow, it is important for actors to set up situations that hold together. In some circumstances, the dispute can be settled through “recourse to a test in just one world” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.277), while in other instances, the dispute could be simply “suspended” by maintaining a “composite” situation, which is the form of a compromise.

In a compromise, “beings that matter in different worlds are maintained in presence, but their identification does not provoke a dispute” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.277). This means that the beings involved are aware of the existence and the worth from another world, but decide that “do not attempt to clarify the principal of their agreement” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.277). Beings are reaching out for a common good that transcends different forms of worth in a compromise, they seek to satisfy their own interests, but also that of beings “not immediately involved in the compromise as such” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.278). Take Lemasson’s (2013, p.39) work as an example, in a business community (market world), it is accepted that the state (civic world) regulates the market to some extent, so that the position of smaller businesses could be enhanced, and otherwise they would not be able to face international competition. In this compromise between market and civic world, it is not only the smaller business that benefits, but the local economy is also preserved, and that is where the common good lies in.

However, it should also be noticed that although the compromise seeks a form of common good, the social beings continue to belong to their own worlds, and thus makes the compromise fragile. The common good that hinges the compromise has not been the subject of universalisation, and it is not “formalised” in any political philosophies and

therefore there is no higher principle to coordinate the human relations in a compromise (Lemasson, 2013). And as a result of the absence of such principle of equivalence (as it is in a common world), no order of worth could be clearly established, and this leads to the fragility of a compromise.

Similar to the critiques, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) also provided a matrix of compromise to show how the different world are connected in a compromise.

### **3.9 Other ways to achieve an agreement**

Apart from a compromise, there are other ways to achieve an agreement.

A first way to reconcile difference and achieve an agreement is that actors may try to assert or reassert the order of worth they champion as the dominant one, and close the dispute by resorting to this dominant order of worth. And this is particularly used when power is an unbalanced power relation between the different actors in the discursive event.

Another form of reconciling difference is through relativization. In this case, the individuals involved do not seek a justification; instead, they try to avoid disagreement and find a private agreement that is to their mutual satisfaction, without searching for a common good. However, van Bommel (2014) argued that this kind of arrangements are local, contingent and oriented towards private interest, and is therefore difficult to generalize.

In addition, it should be noticed that the work of Boltanski and Thévenot has limitations to some extent. On the one hand, it is argued by some researchers that the six worlds in the justification framework are not exhaustive, and the forms of justification are not limited to the six worlds presented in the book *On Justification*. Therefore, there might be more worlds in the contemporary society, and the framework needs to evolve as the society evolves. On the other hand, it is also suggested that the overall framework of Boltanski and Thévenot is western-centred. The common good and the higher order principles articulated in the justification framework were based on the texts that were influenced and shaped by the modern capitalist society, and it mostly focused on the western modern societies and their specific understandings of the public good. And it needs to be applied to other contexts across time and space so that the boundaries of the framework could be expanded.

## 4 Methodology

### 4.1 Discourse analysis

According to Foucault, discourse operates through “discursive formations” and is a way of producing meanings. Rather than focusing on the individual conversation, Foucault focuses on the specialised language developed by a particular community at a particular point in space and time (Olsson, 2010), and argues that the discourse is quite broad and historical in its scope, and it is a complex network of relationships between individuals, texts, ideas, and institutions (ibid.).

The discourse analysis, therefore, according to Foucault (1969), is a way in which the human sciences perceived the world. Emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s from different but related developments in anthropology, ethnography, linguistics, psychology, mass communication, history, micro-sociology, political science and other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, modern discourse analysis is interested in the analysis of text or talk. And despite the many directions in discourse analysis, one thing that is in common is that it is understood to entail the detailed study of the various levels or dimensions of natural discourse, such as everyday conversations, institutional dialogues, stories, argumentation, media discourses (including news reports, advertisements or television programmes), and many other genres of text or communicative events (Van Dijk, 1991).

Focusing on the systematic study of textual or conversational structures, discourse analysis is argued to be an interdisciplinary approach. Meyers (1997) regards the discourse analysis as a methodology to analyse the language and its usage, that is, to explore the discursive structures and the rhetorical strategies of the texts, while on the other hand, Richardson (2007) stressed that the discourse analysis is more than a way to analyse the language use and the inter-relations of the sentences, but it is also a way to study what the speaker is doing through the discourse and how this is related to a wider inter-personal, institutional and socio-cultural context. Van Dijk (1991) also suggested that the discourse analysis specifically aims to show the cognitive, social, historical, cultural or political contexts of language use, and how communication impinges on the contents, meanings, structures or strategies of text and dialogue, and to show how discourse itself is an integral part of and contributes to the structures of these contexts. Gee (1999) further concluded that the



discourse analysis is to study how the language reflects the reality while at the same time it constructs it to be a certain way.

## **4.2 Fairclough and critical discourse analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a theory and method for the study of meaning-making that seeks to unveil how language establishes and changes power relations (Fairclough, 1989). It is regarded as an interdisciplinary approach to study language in use, and it is a critically contextualized way to identify issues of ideology, power and inequality, and to promote the understanding of how discourses figures in social processes, social structures and social change (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2017). The critical discourse study combines the theories of language and the theories of society, and studies the society through discourse, and understands the discourse through the analysis of its historical, social and cultural foundations.

### **4.2.1 Development of Fairclough's CDA**

Fairclough's CDA has changed over time in response to the social change, and has developed three main versions. The first version, developed in Fairclough (1989), is a radical view of CDA in response to the post-war social settlement. As a part of a concern with the reproduction of the existing social order, the core of the first version is the critique of ideology. By studying both the power behind discourse and the power in discourse, this version explores how people with power shape the order of discourse and the social order, as well as controlling specific interactions. Focusing on the critique of ideological discourse, it is argued that the ideology is not just persuaded and manipulated, it is also correspondingly emphasised. And in response to the social reality during that period, this version of CDA views the discourse as a site of social struggle and helps to explore how language can contribute to the domination of some people (Fairclough, 2017). It is both normative and explanatory critique as it not only evaluates the ideological discourse, but also explains why features of the discourse are necessary to keep the social order.

Secondly, the second version of Fairclough's CDA, which was emphasized in Fairclough (1992), centred upon the critique of discourse as a part of the social change, especially part of attempts to impose the top-down neoliberal restructuring in response to the neoliberal capitalism since the 1970s. Fairclough argued that a discursive process is quite common in the marketisation during this period, and such changes in discourse include changes in three categories: genre, discourse and style. Genres are ways of acting and interacting

discursively, such as news or job interviews, reports or editorials in newspapers, or advertisements on TV or the internet. Discourses are ways of representing and construing of the world (physical, social or mental) that can generally be identified with different positions or perspectives of different groups of social actors. Styles are identities, that is, the positions and ways of being in the reality. The ways that genre, discourse and style are combined are the order of discourse, and as the order of discourse changed over time, the configuration of genres, discourses and styles also changed. Fairclough (1993) argued that these changes are both intertextuality and interdiscursivity, and that the different discourses, different genres and different styles came to be combined in new ways, producing hybrid articulations. And accordingly, the study of these changes is textually oriented, that is, the discourse analysis includes detailed analysis of texts, both linguistic (grammatical, semantic, pragmatic, genre) analysis and interdiscursive analysis of hybrid articulations.

Thirdly, in response to the 2007+ financial and economic crisis, the third version of Fairclough's CDA focuses upon critique of political debate as an element of struggles over strategies to overcome the crisis (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012). It is argued that in these different versions, the focuses are shifting in a cumulative way, and that the concerns in earlier versions (e.g., ideology) do not disappear, but they are now addressed into new syntheses. For example, action (genre) is seen as the primary aspect of discourse, and representation and identity (discourses, styles) are addressed as aspects of actions. And in this version of studying political discourses, the practical argumentations usually include the reasons stand up to critical evaluation and lead to decisions, actions, and transformative effects on reality, and the constructive effects on social reality is also shown in this process (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012).

#### **4.2.2 Dialectical reasoning in Fairclough's CDA**

Norman Fairclough regards critical discourse analysis as dialectical reasoning, and argues that it could show the relationship between critique, explanation and action.

Fairclough (2012) states that the critical analysis of discourse is a part of the critical social analysis, and it is the critique that makes the critical social analysis different from the other forms of social analysis. Firstly, the critical social science regards the existing social realities as humanly produced constraints that can unnecessarily reduce human well-being and increase human suffering in certain respects. Secondly, the critical social science can

provide historical explanation of how and why such social realities have come into being. Thirdly, the critical social science can also provide possibilities for transforming the existing social realities into the ones that can enhance human well-being and reduce human suffering.

For Fairclough (2012), the critique in the social science is both normative and explanatory, and is concerned with both values as well as causes. He argued that it is one thing to critique people's practice and language that they are racist, but another thing to explain how racism emerged and why people become discriminated against certain groups. Therefore, as a form of critical social analysis, the critical discourse analysis is normative critique because it does not simply describe existing realities but also evaluates them, assesses the extent to which they match up to various values; the critical discourse analysis is also explanatory critique because it does not simply describe existing realities but seeks to explain them (Fairclough, 2012). Further, Fairclough (2012) argued that his version of critique is different from other versions that are only normative or moral, but it is in line with the Marxist view which suggests that to change of the world for a better one must first be able to explain how the reality has come to be the way it is.

Therefore, as a form of critical social analysis which shows not only how social life can damage human beings, but also how it can be changed, the critical discourse analysis contributes to the social science by showing how discourse is related to other social elements such as power, ideologies and institutions, and offering the critique of discourse as a way into the wider critique of social reality, so that people can change for the better (Fairclough, 2017). Although academic researchers' critiques alone are not able to change the reality, the increasing understanding of the reality and its problems they can give can contribute to the possibilities of political actions for change. And the CDA, in this perspective, offers better understanding of the reality through the explanation of the relations between discourse and other components of social life, and thus contribute to the change of social life (Fairclough, 2017). In this way, the critical discourse analysis is dialectical reasoning as it combines the critique of discourse and the explanation of how discourse figures in existing social reality as a basis for action to change reality.

### **4.2.3 Fairclough and other forms of analysis**

Fairclough's CDA is unique and different from others because it proceeds from the general normative critique of discourse to the explanatory critique of the existing social reality, and

seeks the relationship between discourse and other social elements, and is able to provide a basis to change the social reality. While the other forms of critical analysis, according to Fairclough (2015), are not able to include the explanatory critique in their studies, and thus do not have the dialectical character between the normative critique of discourse and the actions to change the reality.

For example, in the discourse-historical approach developed by Ruth Wodak, following the principle of triangulation, this approach regards discourse analysis not just to be a method of language analysis, but a multidimensional project incorporating theory, methods, methodology, empirically based research practices and background information. Different from some other views of critical discourse analysis which try to evaluate the social realities, the discourse-historical approach holds the view that choices should be made at each point in the research itself, and tries to justify theoretically why certain interpretations of discursive events seem more valid than others (Wodak, 2001). This approach studies a discursive event through a large quantity of available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political fields, and analyses its historical dimension by exploring the ways in which particular genres of discourse changed.

Moreover, in the comparison with the discourse-historical approach to CDA, Fairclough (2015) suggested that there are three aspects in its work of critique. Firstly, the discourse-historical approach seeks an unpolitical immanent critique that aims at discovering inconsistencies and contradictions within the discourse. Secondly, from a normative and ethical perspective, the discourse-historical approach includes a sociodiagnostic critique which aims to reveal the persuasive, populist and manipulative character of the discourse. Thirdly, the discourse-historical approach tries to provide a prospective critique to make a change and improvement to the communication. However, Fairclough (2015) argued that comparing with his version of CDA, the different aspects of critique in the discourse-historical approach are all normative critique, and do not include an explanation or explanatory critique. Also, Fairclough (2015) holds the opinion that rather than critiquing the social reality through the relationship between discourse and other social elements, the discourse-historical approach sees CDA as only critiquing the discourse, and thus excludes the critique of ideology as a consequence, which is conversely an important character in Fairclough's CDA. Furthermore, another difference between Fairclough's CDA and the discourse-historical approach is that the discourse-historical approach only seeks changes in discourse, but not the changes in the social reality.

### 4.3 Teun A. van Dijk and analysing news as discourse

In the media studies, the critical discourse analysis has been deployed to analyse the media texts and the intertextual relationship between thematically linked media content. CDA scholars have developed different ways to analyse media. For example, one way of analysing is to highlight the structures of media texts and language, which is regarded as the closest to linguistics. Researchers will usually explore the semantic and grammatical properties of different media genres (reportage, editorials, interviews, etc.) and the ideological function of particular text types such as headlines and leads (Banda and Mawadza, 2015; Teo, 2000). Another way of studying the media discourse concentrates on the interdiscursive and intertextual character of media discourses (Craig, 2013). Scholars explore how certain ways of representing the world are normalised in media spaces, and questions of who gets to speak, what discourses are privileged and what discourses are absent, are studied. A third way focuses on the sociological implications of media discourses (Olausson, 2014). Analysts examine how media representations influence the discursive constitution of different social phenomena: for example, capitalism, neo-liberalism, racism, climate change and feminism. However, O’Keeffe (2013) argued that the impact of CDA in the study of the discourse of media may have been lessened by the largely qualitative nature of CDA, whereby single texts were often the basis for analysis and therefore limited the scope for generalization of findings. She suggested that the wider availability of newspaper texts in electronic form has allowed for the merging of the more quantitative approach from corpus linguistics with CDA to provide a very sharp analytical tool.

Despite the various ways of studying media texts, one of the earliest scholars to study news as discourse was Teun A. van Dijk, who provided a new, explicit and systemic way to the study of mass media discourse in general and to news reports in particular. Van Dijk (1988) insisted that news reports, whether in the press or on TV, constitute a particular type of discourse and should be analysed as a specific kind of sociocultural practice.

Firstly, Van Dijk (1988) argued that the news reports should be studied in terms of their structures at various levels of description. The “surface” structure lies in a description of syntax and style, word formation, sound structures (e.g., intonation) and graphical presentation (such as lay-out of news reports) (Van Dijk, 1991, p.45). These surface structures are described as “expressions” of the underlying levels of the meanings, reference or functions of words, sentences, paragraphs, or whole texts (ibid.), and are

usually analysed as a study of grammar. However, to study the news reports as discourse, one major difference between the discourse analysis and linguistics is that linguistics is limited to the study of grammar, while discourse analysis goes beyond the surface structures and the sentence boundary, and studies the structures of discourse as whole (Van Dijk, 1991).

Van Dijk (1991) suggested a distinction between the micro-structure and the macro-structure of news reports. On the one hand, the micro-structure concerns of grammatical description of the words and sentences, and on the other hand, the macro-structure explores the topics and themes of a news report. Furthermore, Van Dijk (1991) also proposed the study of super-structure, in which the overall meaning of a text is organised by a schematic form. And in this way, across the different micro and macro levels of form and meaning, we are able to describe the structures and textual functions of headlines or leads of news reports in the press, as well as the style, ordering, and thematic organization of such media stories (Van Dijk, 1988).

Secondly, it was argued that the study of discourse is not limited to the structures. Through the development of cognitive psychology, microsociology, speech communication, social psychology, and ethnography, it was found that the discourse is not just an isolated textual or dialogical structure, but it is a communicative event that embodies a social context, featuring participants as well as production and reception process (Van Dijk, 1988). In a communicative event, news participants (such as journalists and media users) are regarded as social actors who have their own positions, and as the social representatives that are closest to news reports, it is their actions and practices that link the news texts to its institutional and societal production or consumption process. Furthermore, in a communicative event, the cognitive dimension focuses on the interplay between representation and operation in actual discourse processing (Van Dijk, 1988), which also requires a contextual, that is, a social cognitive analysis of the discourse.

#### **4.4 Discourse and justification**

The critical discourse analysis concerns the changes that are taking place in the social life, and how discourse is engaging with these changes. However, it was also argued by Chiapello and Fairclough (2002) that the discourse figures broadly in the social practice and is an open system that is dialectical and inevitable, and it is sometimes difficult to show its position and changes. And to solve the problem, the authors tried to develop a

transdisciplinary research methodology between critical discourse analysis and an approach to analysing changes in capitalism developed by French sociologists, 'New Sociology of Capitalism'.

On the one hand, it was argued that in the book by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005), an account of changes in capitalism since the 1960s was offered. It focused on one aspect of the new 'spirit of capitalism' associated with the new form of capitalism which began to emerge in the 1980s, an ideology which justifies people's commitment to this form of capitalism: new management ideology. The book includes analysis of two bodies of texts, management literature from the 1960s and from the 1990s.

On the other hand, it is also suggested in this paper that CDA is particularly concerned with the radical changes that are taking place in contemporary social life, with how discourse figures within processes of change, and with shifts in the relationship between discourse and other social elements within networks of practices. And as long as the new sociology of capitalism offers an account of the changes in the developed capitalist societies since the 1960s, it is possible to put the two approaches together to study the language of capitalism.

More specifically, to study the way in which the spirit of capitalism changed between the 1960s and 1990s, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) need to identify the exact nature of the notion of fairness as depicted in the management texts, and they used a theoretical construct that Luc Boltanski had developed together with Laurent Thévenot in an earlier publication (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006): the 'justificatory regime' model. This construct had initially been designed with a view to highlighting the conditions that make it possible to say whether an evaluation or distribution of goods was being done in a fair and legitimate manner. And six justification logics were identified.

This paper actually brought the framework of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006) and critical discourse analysis together to study the management ideology and the spirit of capitalism, and offered a way to study and track the changes in discourse. An "order of worth", or a logic of justification, can be regarded as a discourse, and each discourse is specified in its basic terminology including subjects, actions and objects, and could be analysed through the texts and language used in this order. For example, the market world can be analysed through the terms of "business opportunity", "customers", "shareholders"

and “products”. Through the analyse of justification, the changes of discourses can be showed clearly.

## 4.5 Adopting Boltanski and Thévenot’s work

In accounting literature, it is pointed out by Annisette and Trivedi (2013) that as a means of characterizing discourse and argumentative frameworks, the orders of worth employs a coding of interpreted narrative data that are evaluated for its underlying logical structure, and has been increasingly used as a result of its rich descriptive language for delimiting each world, and thus provides a framework that is sufficiently detailed to render a straightforward identification of each world of worth present.

As for the specific methods adopted in the analysis, the first step is to identify the different justification logics. The work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), and Patriotta et al. (2011)’s provides a systemic way of doing that. To study the public debate about nuclear power in Germany, Patriotta et al. (2011) conducted a content analysis to classify their data with the different common worlds. The authors first developed a rudimentary list of semantic descriptors based on Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) schematic account of common worlds, which allowed them to identify the presence of a given order of worth in the text. Then the authors expanded the original list through dictionary work and inductive reading of the sample texts (e.g. by adding synonyms as well as other terms that were systematically deployed in the text to refer to a particular order of worth), and came up with a complete list of descriptors for the different orders of worth emerged from the analysis.

The list developed by Patriotta et al. (2011) was quite helpful and has been used as a reference in some other studies to help with the identification of the justification logics. For example, in a study about gas exploration in Canada, after coding all the justification units, Gond et al. (2016) also used the list of semantic descriptors provided by Patriotta et al. (2011) to identify whether each unit could be corresponded to a justification involving one or several of the common worlds described by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). And it was argued that though helpful, the list of descriptors did not replace the researchers’ interpretation of their data. Similarly, Skilling and Tregidga (2019) also subjected their data to a systemic content analysis where the initial codes were based on Boltanski and Thévenot’s typology of orders of worth. However, to retain the maximum sensitivity to actors’ use of language and their argumentative strategies, the coding was conducted



manually in the first step, and the list of descriptors in line with Patriotta et al. (2011) and Gond et al. (2016) was used as a secondary check on coding to ensure the accuracy of the analysis.

In discussing the relationship between the different orders of worth, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) suggested that as the different ways of justification can apply in any given situation and social actors have the capacity to draw on each order of worth, orders of worth are potentially always in conflict and the attainment of worth is a constant achievement that reflects a settlement or agreement between multiple orders of worth. Further, it is suggested that a settlement can be reached by resorting to one dominant order of worth, constructing a local arrangement, or by reaching a compromise between various orders of worth.

Among the different ways of reconciling difference and reaching a settlement, compromising between orders of worth has been a focus in the accounting literature. Anisette et al. (2017) did an analysis of the implementation of an advanced form of net present value method to show how accounting performed in the contrasting values of water, legitimising their importance, and settling a compromise between technical and environmental criteria, able to balance the different interests involved. It was suggested that accounting's unique ability to occupy different worlds as a qualified object enables it to act as an ambiguous object, which allows compromises to be worked out more easily as it derives from more than one world, and therefore it could be used as a mechanism to hold things together to form a compromise.

Based on Anisette et al.'s (2017) view on compromise, Cortese and Andrew (2020) did an empirical work on the process of accounting regulation development, and tried to explore how different stakeholder groups produce justifications to promote their positions and how a regulatory body makes sense of the justifications in the production of the legislation under Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) framework. It was found that although the different groups draw on different justification logics in the lobbying process, the need of transparency was referred to by all groups. It is represented in each world as a desirable and important feature of the common good, and therefore the ideal of "transparency" could be used as an "ambiguous object" to bring things together so that a compromise is achieved.

However, the above studies are from a more general theoretical level that has implications for understanding how accounting practices can play as a form of justification and gain legitimacy in pluralistic environment, and in the cases of conflicting demands, there is not enough exploration about the micro-level processes of how organizations and actors respond to the competing institutional pressures and how they seek to establish legitimacy. More specifically, the mechanisms for compromise need more exploration, through which a certain topic could be acceptable and legitimate for a broader audience. For example, in the study of justification around integrated reporting in Netherlands, van Bommel (2014) recognised three mechanisms that help to explain the dynamics of reaching a legitimate compromise: establishing a common interest, avoiding clarification, and maintaining ambiguity and plasticity. It is argued that the common good does not belong to one particular world, but it transcends the two different forms of worth in presence by including both of them, and could be regarded as a means to reinforce the compromise. In creating a common interest, it is also suggested that the mechanism of avoidance of clarification plays an important role, as there is no higher-ranking polity in which the incompatible worlds associated in the compromise can converge (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). As a result, this nature of the compromise requires it to maintain a degree of ambiguity and plasticity so that it can include different aspects from more than one world.

## **4.6 Data collection**

### **4.6.1 Sources of the data**

In Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)'s work, it is assumed that agents in their everyday practices are subject to certain demands to justify themselves, and that they try to satisfy these by drawing on general principles that are expressed in socially and culturally mediated forms of argumentation. On this view, the construction of meaning and order must rely on normative frameworks, and these normative orders also make everyday practices of justification and critique possible in the first place (Celikates, 2018).

Therefore, in Boltanski and Thévenot's work, the experiences and self-interpretations of ordinary agents are taken as a starting point, and has a specific focus on the everyday practices of justification and critique (Celikates, 2018). The newspaper articles, in this perspective, could be regarded as a good way to study the justification and critique practices of the agents.

On the other hand, in the literature, the issue of working hours has been studied through large scale of data and statistics, but very few of them are looking into the voice of the actors involved in the issue in a detailed way. By studying the newspaper articles, the justification and critiques could be explored through the actors' own voice, and thus contribute to the existing literature.

Furthermore, in the literature of media settings, it was also argued that news in all its forms is seldom a value-free reflection of the facts, and that there are powers and machinations which lie behind this process (Wang, 2018). The news media influence the society at large through news coverage, manipulating and influencing people's thoughts and beliefs, such as their patterns of thinking about specific events, or their perceptions, attitudes and ideologies about important social events (Zhu, 2023). Therefore, in this study, the newspaper articles are used as the main source of data.

However, it should also be noticed that focusing on the study of newspaper articles has its limitations. On the one hand, Gillings et al. (2023) suggested that for studies that based on a corpus, identifying phenomena that are absent from the corpus is a problem, because corpus linguistic techniques, by their very nature, are primed to look for what is there. And it was emphasised that it remains the researcher's job, drawing upon their world knowledge, to interpret why something is absent. Therefore, in this study, some silences are recognised according to the justification framework. On the other hand, Wang (2018) argued that there are power and value behind the news production process, and newspapers have their own political stands. And in the context of China, with a highly institutionalized propaganda apparatus (Yang and Zhu, 2024), the result could be biased to some extent.

Newspapers were sampled according to the following criteria: (1) availability of all the newspapers in an electronic format and consistent in at least 10 years, so that the analysis could be systematized through coding; (2) inclusion of regional and national newspapers; (3) inclusion of general newspapers and financial newspapers; and (4) focus on daily newspapers, so that more articles could be included comparing with weekly newspapers.

Following these criteria, seven newspapers were selected:

(1). People's Daily (National general daily newspaper).

People's Daily is an official newspaper and mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party at the central level. Established and published its first issue in 1946, it is one of the most influential newspapers in China and undertakes the task of propagandising people by releasing theory, policy, decisions and information by the Chinese Communist Party. Therefore, as a newspaper that receives direct supervision under the Chinese propaganda system, People's Daily is in accordance with official statements and thus reflects the voice of the Chinese Central Government and the Communist Party of China.

(2). Workers' Daily (National general daily newspaper).

Workers' Daily is a general newspaper sponsored by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. Founded in Beijing in 1949, it is a national central-level newspaper focusing on economic area. The readers of Workers' Daily are mainly workers and trade union workers across the country. The aim of the newspaper is to protect the rights and interests of the employees, and to improve their enthusiasm for labour.

(3). China Youth Daily (National general daily newspaper).

China Youth Daily is the official newspaper of Communist Youth League of China (CYL), and is a popular general daily newspaper and the first independently operated central government news media portal in China. Although China youth Daily is run by the CYL, it is also the first for profit newspaper in China. The profit enables the paper to support itself, and the paper welcomes individuals as well as companies to advertise in the paper. According to China Youth Daily, most readers of the newspaper and online users are between the ages of 18 to 48. The majority of readers are of the age of 19-25 (50%) and 26-35 (32%), and most readers attain a tertiary education background.

(4). Economic Daily (National financial daily newspaper).

First published in 1984, the Economic Daily is a national daily newspaper under the supervision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. As a newspaper that focuses on the economic area, the Economic Daily is one of the most authoritative and credible newspapers among the national economic newspapers, and thus plays an important role in influencing the public opinion for the national economic work.

(5). Southern Metropolis Daily (Regional general daily newspaper).

Southern Metropolis Daily is a for-profit tabloid newspaper located in Guangzhou and its circulation is throughout the greater Guangdong and southeast region of China. The newspaper is a part of the Nanfang Media Group, and publishes daily with multiple sections relating to consumer products, international affairs, sports, and other topics of the public interest. Southern Metropolis Daily is best known for its investigative reporting and critical view in public discussions.

(6). China Business News (Regional financial daily newspaper).

China Business News is a Chinese financial and economic daily newspaper located in Shanghai. It was founded in 2004 together by Shanghai Radio and Television Station, Beijing Youth Daily, and Guangzhou Daily Newspaper Group, and aims to create value in a professional way. Since its establishment in 2004, China Business News has gradually become one of the major financial newspapers in mainland China.

(7). 21st Century Business Herald (Regional financial daily newspaper).

21st Century Business Herald is a Chinese business-news daily newspaper located in Guangzhou. The newspaper was officially launched in 2001 as part of the Nanfang Media Group, and it is one of the most famous business newspapers in China. 21st Century Business Herald aims to analyse the international situation, observe the Chinese economy and the industry trends, and help to guide a healthy economic development. It also aims to effectively reflect the world economic patterns and changes, and to track and report the dynamics and development of Chinese economics.

Followed by the previous criteria, the seven newspapers are all famous and top ranking newspapers with a large circulation in China, and they are selected according to their different perspectives as well as audiences: the People's Daily represents the governmental voice, while the Workers' Daily targets at workers and labour unions, and the China Youth Daily cares more about young people and their work and lives in the Chinese society, as for the financial specific ones, the Economic Daily, China Business News and the 21st Century Business Herald are of the top listed business newspapers in China.

The seven newspapers have a combination of the political stance. On the one hand, the Worker's Daily, People's Daily and Economic Daily were the official newspapers that are more connected to the attitude of the government. On the other hand, the Southern

Metropolis Daily, China Business News and 21 Century Business Herald were the commercialized newspapers that are more critical in their opinion. The China Youth Daily, however, was the first for profit newspaper and the first independently operated central government news media portal in China. With the feature from both sides, the stance of China Youth Daily was kind of in the middle between the official and commercialized ones.

#### **4.6.2 Sampling**

The sampling was conducted through the Wise Search Database, which has the largest Chinese media database in the world. The Wise Search database was produced by Wisers Information Ltd, and it is a news search platform with over 1,200 newspapers and 8,000 websites, and the coverage of the news can be traced back to the year 2000.

The articles are all searched and collected in Chinese. Focusing on the dispute of working hours, keywords “overtime working” and “working hours” were applied, expecting to capture as many articles as possible about the issue. The keyword “working hours” describes the hours workers and employees spend on their work, while the keyword “overtime working”, in Chinese, it describes a broad range of phenomenon in working, and covers different kinds of overtime working including general overtime working and excessive overtime working.

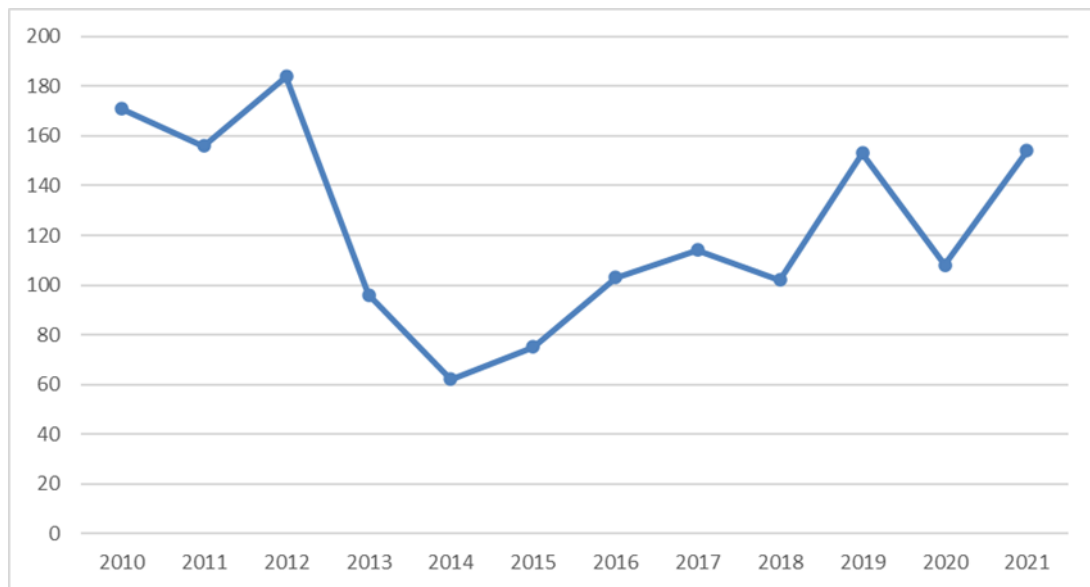
The choice of the two keywords come from both the focus of the dispute and the literature. The focus of this study is the issue of working hours and overtime, and also in the relevant literature, working hours is the most used expression. Therefore the keyword used to collect the articles are “working hours” and “overtime working”, so that the articles could be captured as much as possible.

The search was conducted among the above seven newspapers using the two keywords for the period of 2010-2021 (12 years in total, from the year when Foxconn was reported several suicides and brought the issue of working conditions into public’s attention). And the initial search resulted in over 10,000 articles (17,542 articles) including duplicates.

Then a further sampling was conducted. Firstly, it was found that among the articles collected from the initial search, sometimes one article can be picked up and reprinted by another newspaper, and thus created a duplicate article. To deal with the duplicated articles, the cluster function of the Wise Search Database was inactivated, which helps to

find and drop the duplicates. Secondly, in the initial search results, it was found that some articles are not relevant to the study: some articles used the word “overtime working” in a somehow positive way to show people’s hard work, some articles did not involve the working hours in the workplace, and also quite a few articles were simply stating the fact of overtime working and did not include a controversy. Therefore, to clear the irrelevant articles, I did a quick reading of the headlines and the preview of the sentence that contains the keyword used for searching, and keep the articles that were related to the dispute and controversy of long working hours as well as working conditions. And this leads to a dramatic decrease of the number of articles, and 1,659 articles were found after this process.

#### 4.6.3 Descriptive results of the sampling



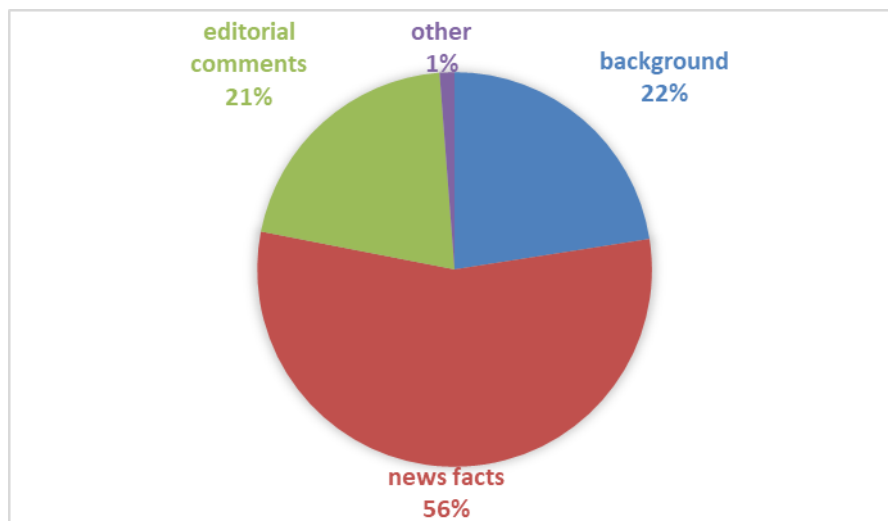
**Figure 4-1 Number of articles in different years**

The overall number of articles collected in each year showed an obvious fluctuation. During the first three years (2010-2012), there was a peak in the number of articles, and it is the time when the Foxconn company was involved in several incidents in relation to poor working conditions and long working hours. Working conditions in the manufacturing industry was criticised, and companies had to offer higher wages for overtime working.

The reports on disputes of working hours decreased in 2013, and remained a relatively lower level for the following years. During this period, the internet industry continued its rapid growth, and was dominated with an extremely optimism. People hold the belief that

the Internet has eliminated the threshold for entrepreneurship as long as one has “good business ideas”. Inspired by the optimism, large amounts of venture capital flowed into start-up Internet companies, creating millionaires while stimulating the overtime work culture in this very competitive industry. The employees “volunteered” to work on a 996 schedule or “flexibly”, in exchange for potential salary raises and steps up the career ladder.

Form 2018, the Internet economy experienced a slowdown in China, and the once-booming tech sector has come back down to earth, experiencing a so-called “capital winter”, financing was becoming increasingly difficult for tech companies. Since then, the Internet industry, including the big influential Internet firms, began to be affected by a wave of layoffs. And in this circumstance, the overall recruiting in tech firms is either slowing down or frozen, which has made the labour market even more increasingly competitive. The Internet companies, speaking on behalf of the interest of capital, are asking employees to invest more of themselves (effort, commitment, new aspects of labour power such as emotions) at work, while at the same time retreating from investment in human capital, a retreat manifested in declining security, career ladders, pensions and the like. And this had triggered the very heated discussion about “996 working schedule” in 2019.

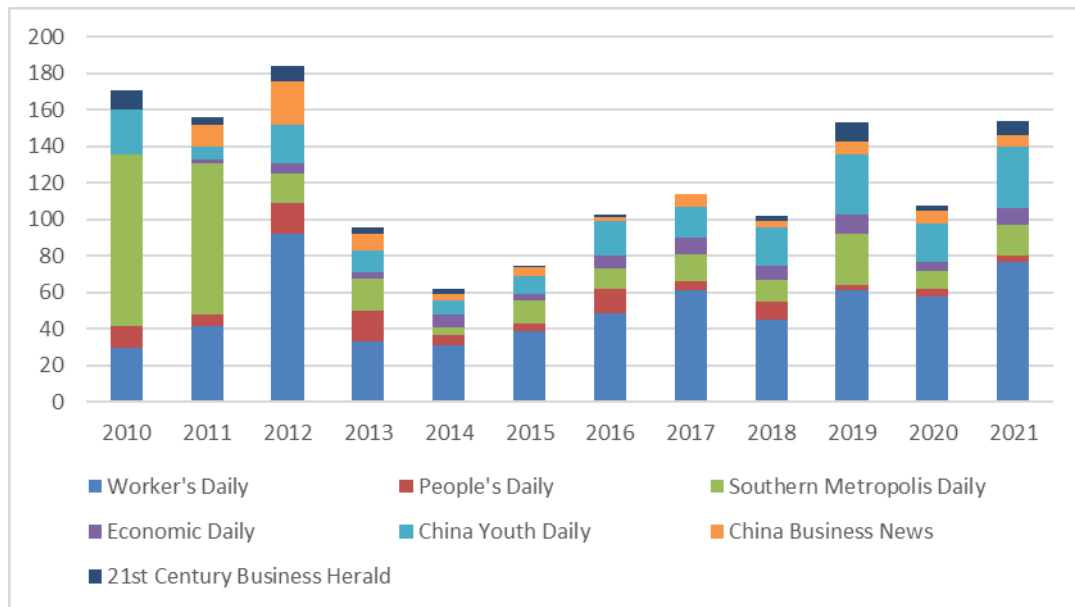


**Figure 4-2 Type of articles**

The newspaper articles were classified into three main types: news facts article, background article, and editorial comment article. The news facts articles focused on the fact of a particular event or a person’s experience, and told the readers what had happened. The background articles were the ones with a broader social context, and in these articles,



the background information or the general ideas of the dispute were introduced. The editorial comment articles, on the other hand, is the place where commentators shared their views and comment on the dispute. Among the collected articles, a majority of them were news fact articles, amount to 56%. The editorial comment and the background articles were of the similar coverage, with 21% and 22% respectively.



**Figure 4-3 Source of the articles**

Among the seven newspapers, the Worker's Daily contributed the most articles, followed by the Southern Metropolis Daily and the China Youth Daily. Furthermore, the Worker's Daily and China Youth Daily showed an increasing trend as time went by, while on the other hand, the articles collected from the Southern Metropolis Daily reached a peak in the first two years, and then decreased over the years. This could be explained by the features and positions of the newspapers. The Workers' Daily focuses on workers and employees' lives and interests, and the China Youth Daily focuses on young people's lives, which are all connected to the dispute of overtime working. The peak in the Southern Metropolis Daily was related to its geographical location. The newspaper was located in Guangzhou, centre of Pearl River Delta, in which the manufacturing industry was highly developed. And in 2010 and 2011, when the labour conditions in the manufacturing industry, especially the labour-intensive ones, was noticed, it was spontaneous that the Southern Metropolis Daily had the most reports among the seven newspapers in those two years.

#### 4.6.4 Topics discussed in the sampling

Along with the recognition of the actors, the topics discussed by the actors were also recognised, and overall, 28 different topics were found in the news reports.

**Table 4-1 Topics found in the dispute**

	Topics
1	996 working schedule
2	overtime pay
3	defend for rights
4	holiday system
5	dismiss employees
6	sudden death
7	lie down
8	platform economics
9	decrease hours of overtime working
10	performance management
11	overtime working
12	working experience
13	striver agreement
14	safety
15	labour rights
16	occupational disease
17	welfare for overtime working
18	minimum wages
19	child labour
20	attendance management
21	annual bonus
22	back pay
23	suicide
24	internship
25	labour union
26	salary for workers
27	big, small week
28	karoshi

Then the topics were categorised and grouped into broader issues, such as working hours, working conditions, and fair pay.

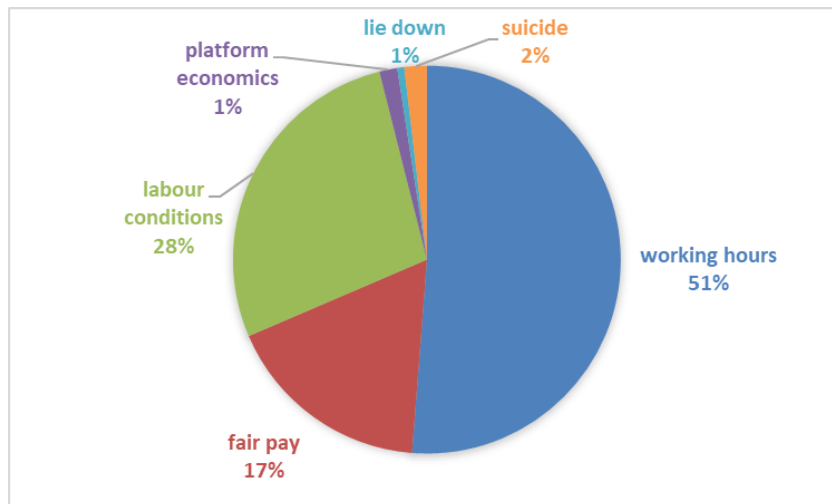
**Table 4-2 Grouped topics**

<b>1. working hours</b>
overtime working
decrease hours of overtime working
big, small week
996 working schedule

striver agreement
karoshi
<b>2. fair pay</b>
annual bonus
overtime pay
salary for workers
back pay
welfare for overtime working
minimum wages
<b>3. labour conditions</b>
labour rights
labour union
performance management
dismiss employees
holiday system
attendance management
working experience
internship
defend for rights
sudden death
safety
child labour
occupational disease
<b>4. platform economics</b>
<b>5. lie down</b>
<b>6. suicide</b>

Of all the 28 topics, overtime working was the most mentioned one, followed by the 996 working schedule. And related to this, labour rights, overtime pay and working experience were also mentioned a lot. With the development of time, it was also found that some topics were decreasing gradually, while on the other hand, some new topics were coming out into the picture. For example, working experience, overtime pay, salary for workers, and the back pay were mentioned more in the early years, and were dying out in the later stage, while the striver agreement first appeared in 2014, and the 996 working schedule came out in 2015 and became popular afterwards. After the 996, the topic of big/small week and lie down also came into the picture. Furthermore, with the development of new industry, the topic of platform economics also appeared in the later years.

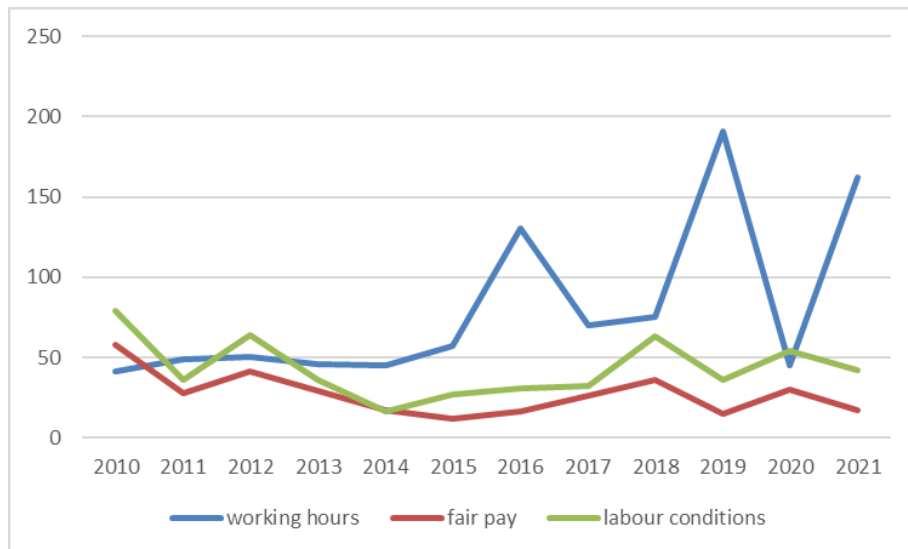
Of the broader issues in the Table 4-2, the working hours, labour conditions and fair pay were the three main ones. As it is shown in the Figure 4-4, working hours is the most mentioned issue, taking 51%, and the labour conditions took 28%, while the fair pay took 17%.



**Figure 4-4 Broader issues in the dispute**

From this broader perspective, the issues also showed a different trend over the years. The labour conditions as well as the fair pay were somehow in a decreasing trend, while the working hours issue increased as time went by (Figure 4-5). This shows that the change of the focus in the reports. In the early years, the issue of long working hours was taken as an established fact, and no matter compulsory or optional, people had to accept this fact. Therefore the discussion during that time focused on the related issues of working hours, such as the pay, experience, and welfare of their working. In the later years, however, people were focusing more on the hours spent on the work, and began to question the fact itself, asking whether it is reasonable to work that long, and started to refuse the excessive overtime working.

It can be seen from above that the working hours issue was the central focus of all the issues and topics, and has been reported continuously over the years. This had made the issue of working hours an ongoing dispute in the reports, which has been increasing over the years. Therefore, in the following analysis, it is reasonable to focus on this dispute of working hours, and to study the justifications within the working hours.



**Figure 4-5 Main issues over the years**

## 4.7 Recognising the cases

In the selecting process of the data, I've noticed some different expressions and companies are involved in the dispute. Appeared in different periods of time, the coverage of reports about a particular expression or company tend to happen in a particular time, which made it possible for a case study. Different themes were recognised and articles were collected according to the theme, and further detailed analysis was conducted through the case study.

The number of the articles showed two peaks during this period, one is from year 2010 to 2012, while the other one from 2019 to 2021. When studying these two peaks, it was found that there were significant events happened in these two periods, and most of the articles were taking about the events. From 2010 to 2012, the topic was the incidents happened in the Foxconn company, while in 2019 to 2021, the topic was the 996 working schedule in the IT industry. And these two topics made it possible for a case study to study the dispute and its justification in details.

### 4.7.1 The Foxconn company

In 2010, Foxconn, an electronics contract manufacturer, was involved in several incidents relating to poor working conditions and long working hours. Throughout the year, 14 employees in Foxconn committed suicide, and the company was criticised of poor working conditions. In response to the criticisms, Foxconn took several actions. For example, the

company installed suicide-prevention netting at the base of buildings in some facilities, introduced several measurements to care for the workers, encouraged the communication between workers and managers, provided consulting services, increased the basic wages as well as the overtime pay for the workers, and decreased the hours of overtime working.

In this dispute, the discussion about Foxconn's labour conditions lasted from 2010 to 2015, and articles were collected from the corpus that formed after my sampling process. In the corpus (which contains 1,659 articles), to collect the articles that talked about the Foxconn company, another keyword search was conducted, and the keyword "Foxconn" was applied. 101 newspaper articles were collected. And among them, the working hours and salaries of employees were discussed a lot.

#### **4.7.2 The 996-working schedule**

A "996" working schedule refers to an unofficial work schedule practiced by some companies in China that has been gaining popularity. The work schedule got its name from its requirement that employees work from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm, 6 days per week, and serving a company that encourages the "996" work schedule usually means working for at least 72 hours per week. In China, this work schedule is adopted by a lot of companies, especially in internet and technology companies.

In 2016, the 996 working hour system first came into people's eyes. In September 2016, 58.com, a classified advertisement website, was reported to be implementing the 996 work schedule. The discussion of 996 became heated in 2019, when employees and programmers began to complain about the work schedule and company managers shared their view on this. During this period, there were a lot of discussions focusing on the 996 working schedule. Different groups, such as top managers and entrepreneurs, employees and programmers, official and state media, commercial press all have comments on this working schedule. Furthermore, there are also changes to stop the 996. In July 2021, several technology companies including Kuaishou and Meituan have decided to normalize the two-day weekend and stop overtime working during weekends. In August, the Supreme People's Court released 10 typical cases of excessive overtime working, and stressed that the 996 working schedule is a serious violation to the law, and any labour contract relating to this should be recognised as invalid.

In this case, the dispute lasted from the year 2015 to 2021, and articles were also collected from the corpus after sampling which contains 1,659 articles. To collect the articles that talked about the 996, the keyword “996 working schedule” was applied, and 103 newspaper articles were collected from the corpus after the search.

### **4.7.3 Lenovo**

In the newspaper articles, the voice of workers and employees and commentators is always louder, while the companies’ response was reported with a smaller proportion, and most of the time was regarded as a target to question or criticise.

In the discussion of working hours and working conditions, the working hours of the executives are mentioned in some news reports, suggesting that they are nothing different from the employees. And in literature, the working hours and work-life balance of executives are also explored (Kofodimos, 1990; Mills and Grotto, 2017), suggesting that there is an inter-role conflict in which individuals’ responsibilities in the work domain hinder functioning in nonwork domains, especially for executives given their substantial work demands. However, in relation to this, the executive compensation was mentioned occasionally in the discussion of working hours to show the great rewards and motivation for the executives, and that there is an income gap between the employees and executives. And this is also a topic that companies have been questioned a lot. Therefore, to take a closer look of the company responses in the related context, the Lenovo company and its CEO compensation was selected.

Yang Yuanqing, the current chairman and CEO of Lenovo, joined the company in 1989 and became the CEO of Lenovo in 2001. As the head of a large company, the pay of Yang Yuanqing reached a very high level in 2006, and his pay continued to increase since then. In the media, Yang is called “the working emperor”, which is used as a way to describe the people who works with extremely high pay.

In this case, the data was collected from the internet, including different kinds of articles, such as newspaper reports, magazine articles, internet articles and TV interview. Overall, 320 articles as well as a 30-minute TV interview programme were collected from the year 2006 to 2020.

#### 4.7.4 Analysing the cases

The cases will be analysed based on the framework of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). Firstly, the focus and the actors involved in the case will be identified through exhaustive reading of the articles. Then the identified arguments provided by the actors will be coded with different justification logics, involving one or several of the “common worlds” described by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). (The details of the coding process will be discussed in the next section).

Particularly, in the study of the cases, a specific focus would be how the dispute was resolved. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) proposed several ways to resolve a dispute and reach an agreement in their work, such as a compromise, relativization, or resorting to the dominant logic. The different ways of resolving a dispute also show the power relation between the actors, and provides a better understanding of the relationship between the different justification logics.

### 4.8 Data analysis

To do the analysis, first I began with an exhaustive reading of all materials to familiarise myself with the case and its background, and its main stakeholders, events and developments. This will allow a better understanding and the overall characteristics of the case. In this stage, the result of the sampling process was also double checked as the articles were read in details, and the articles that are not related to the dispute and controversy of long working hours were deleted.

Secondly, to have an overall picture of the data, the articles are classified by year, source of newspaper, and type of article.

Thirdly, to identify and recognise the different actors involved in the dispute, passages that consisted of a “unit of meaning”, that is, either one sentence or short paragraph of two to four concise phrases (Gond et al., 2016, p.337), were recognised. Each passage was assigned to an actor. Besides actors, to explore the macro-structures suggested by Van Dijk (1991), the topics that have been talked about by the actors (e.g., overtime working, back pay, holiday system, etc.) were also coded at this stage.

Fourthly, I engaged with the conceptual framework of the orders of worth outlined by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). In the passages where actors defended their practice and



opinions of long working hours as well as working conditions, actors give answers to “why they are working/it is necessary/unreasonable to work long hours”, and arguments provided (e.g., salary, overwhelming workload, cost-saving, etc.) are coded. Furthermore, these arguments are coded with Boltanski and Thévenot’s framework, including different forms of justification and their dimensions, such as state of worthiness, human dignity, qualified objects and subjects, investment formulas, relations of worth, model tests, the form of evidence, state of deficiency, etc. When a passage referred to multiple worlds, it was assigned to more than one code.

To do this coding, Patriotta et al. (2011) provided a refined list of semantic descriptors for the common worlds. The list was based on Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) work, and was expanded through dictionary work and inductive reading of the authors’ sample texts (e.g., by adding synonyms as well as other terms that were systematically deployed in the text to refer to a particular “order of worth”). However, when trying to apply this refined list to my data, it was found that the list was too specific related to the authors’ own data, that is, sustainability controversy in Germany, and therefore did not work very well with my Chinese data and context.

On the other hand, Skilling and Tregidga (2019) did it manually, aiming to retain maximum sensitivity to actors’ use of language and their argumentative strategies. They tried to approach the task of articulating actors’ statements with specific orders of worth holistically, looking at arguments in terms of their overall logic. Furthermore, Skilling and Tregidga (2019) used the list of Patriotta et al. (2011) to do a secondary check on coding, and inspired by this, to ensure the robustness of my coding process, I looked back to focus on the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), and developed a list based on their description of the different worlds. (See in the appendix).

In the work of Patriotta et al. (2011), the initial list was based on Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)’s work, and was then refined by the authors to suit with their context of sustainability controversy in Germany, and it was different from the dispute of overtime working in the Chinese context in my study. Therefore, I decided to go back to the starting point of Patriotta et al. (2011), that is, to focus on the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), and used the keywords provided in the book. (See in the appendix Table 4-3 for the list developed based on Boltanski and Thévenot’s work)

In the analysis, I'm doing the coding through an interpretive way, by reading and interpreting the meaning of a certain passage, and then categories it into a justification logic. The list developed from the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) was used as a way to check my coding.

Table 4-4 provides illustrations of coding for each of these justification logics. In many cases, one argument involved several logics.

**Table 4-4 Illustrations of the coding of the justification logics**

Justification logic	Illustrative coding for the logic (a quote may also refer to another order of worth)
Market	<p>“Wang Jian, an employee of an Internet financial company, said: “The salary and benefits of Internet companies are relatively high. If people can work overtime in exchange for greater development and prospects, many employees will not object the idea.” (Worker’s Daily, September 10, 2016)</p> <p>“In Li Jie's view, in order to save costs, the company has assigned an unreasonable amount of task to employees.” (China Youth Daily, May 11, 2018)</p>
Civic	<p>“Qiao Jian, director of the Labor Relations Department of the China Institute of Labor Relations, believes that no matter what, it is necessary to insist on the protection of workers’ rights to remuneration and rest, and the protection of occupational safety and health.” (Economic Daily, April 15, 2019)</p>
Industrial	<p>“The overtime working culture can easily lead to the problem of formalism overtime working, which is waste of time and resources. In the case of being forced to work overtime, it may slow down the overall efficiency. In order to cater to the overtime working culture, you have to pretend that you are still busy with the work after finishing your job.” (Southern Metropolis Daily, March 11, 2021)</p>
Domestic	<p>“Liu Rong, who works at a group-buying website, also said that his boss leaves work very late every time. Gradually, colleagues in the department have all developed the habit of getting off work late. “How dare you leave work earlier than the leader?” (Worker’s Daily, June 10, 2017)</p> <p>“Jack Ma once again explained 996 through Sina Weibo: “No company should not and cannot force employees to work 996; but young people themselves must understand that happiness comes from hard work! I will not defend for 996 working schedule, but would like to pay my respect to the strugglers!” (Southern Metropolis Daily, April 14, 2019)</p>
Fame	<p>“Because of his “personal image” in the eyes of the leaders, Xiao Zhou sometimes deliberately delays his time of getting off from work. He said that the pressure of career promotion and peer competition will also prompt him to “voluntarily” work overtime.” (Worker’s Daily, May 31, 2017)</p>
Inspired	<p>“For companies, creating a corporate culture that encourages overtime work is not only unhelpful for enhancing the core competitiveness of the company, but may inhibit and damage the self-innovation ability of the company. In the fierce market competition, what companies should strive for is technology, quality, and management, rather than the physical strength and endurance of employees.” (People’s Daily, April 11, 2019)</p>
People-oriented	<p>“Labor is glorious. As long as the people-oriented idea is adhered to, and within the scope of the legal framework, the struggle of laborers is always worth encouragement. The point of the matter is that struggle should bring happiness to workers, but not harm or overdraw their physical and mental health.” (China Youth Daily, September 1, 2021)</p>

	“If you do not pursue profits, capital will not be capital. However, you must not forget that people are not machines and have their own spiritual needs.” (Worker’s Daily, May 19, 2010)
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Fifthly, the relation among the various worlds is examined, such as critique and compromise between the different worlds. Critique is the disagreement not only over the result of the test of a world, but also over the principle that govern its implementation, while a compromise is a situation in which disagreement is set aside and therefore avoiding test.

Sixthly, the justification used in the dispute will be explored in relation to Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) framework, such as principle, subject, evaluation, worthiness, etc. To explore how the logics were adopted in the dispute, arguments are looked into carefully, and the changes will be recognised over the years. Also, the logics used by each actor will also be explored.

Seventhly, the sources of justification and the modes of justification recognised in the Chinese context, which will be presented in Chapter 5, will be studied together with the justifications used in the dispute. The work recognised in the Chinese context is regarded as discourse, and the logics in the dispute are the practice of justification. The relationship between the discourse and practice will be explored.

## **5 Justification in the Chinese context**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) actually explored how the sense of fitness or rightness is expressed in different ways and how the common good is specified, and thus provided a series of orders of worth for people to make justifications. However, it should be noticed that the work is basically oriented to the western capitalist context and has a limitation in applying to other social contexts. As a socialist country with a long history, China is often widely assumed to be different from the west. Both outsiders and locals tend to emphasize its cultural distinctiveness and uniqueness, and even nowadays, the saying of “with Chinese characteristics” is still often heard. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that in China, the way of justifying things also has its own characteristics and is influenced by its own history and culture.

In this chapter, the justification framework will be taken into the Chinese context. Through the study of the Chinese literature, the different views of justice in China will be explored, and the sources of influences will be recognised. With the adoption of Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) work, the variation of the existing logics will be studied, while in the meantime, a new logic of justification will be identified.

### **5.2 The background of Chinese justification**

China is not only one of the oldest and most continuous cultures in the world, but it has also been subject to the massive socio-economic changes since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Child and Warne (2003) listed three qualifications of China that we need to bear in mind when studying the Chinese culture and justification. Firstly, it was stressed that China is a country which embraces many regions with their own subcultures, and the regional differences are quite significant. Secondly, over the past forty years, China has experienced the world’s largest social experiment through its economic reform, and has led to rapid industrialization as well as great generational differences. Thirdly, the Chinese economic and business system now includes a variety of forms of corporations, such as state-owned enterprises, collectively owned enterprises, privately owned enterprises, and enterprises with foreign investments, etc. Therefore, as a huge and highly complex country, the background of Chinese justification needs to be explored in further details.

### **5.2.1 Historical background**

Child and Warne (2003) suggested that China's long history has been marked by two overriding social imperatives. The first social imperative is the preservation of its integrity in terms of protecting its extensively long borders and maintaining internal utility, which helps to justify and reinforce the hierarchical status while at the same time helps to centralize the powers of the emperor as well as his imperial officials. And this also led to a possibility of abuse of the authority. The second imperative is the need for communal self-help in the face of recurrent natural disasters, such as starving and flooding. In some dangerous situations, threats are combined with natural causes and arbitrary imperial rule, which had led to a reliance on mutual support within family units and local community. This historical legacy is still somehow sensible in the Chinese society today: that high trust is accorded to group members or those with whom there are special relationships, while others are actively mistrusted.

Moreover, the Chinese culture and tradition is deep rooted in its historical background, and before the 19th century, it was undisturbed by foreign influence. The Chinese culture is a strong attribute of the Chinese society, and its members remain strong self-conscious of it.

### **5.2.2 Social and economic background**

The People's Republic of China has been one of the fastest growing economies in the world in recent times, and has been experienced great changes after its establishment in 1949. Its achievement has been an amazing success and quite unanticipated in many respects.

From 1949-1960s, the Chinese Communist Party came to national power and aimed to reduce the social strife and to achieve improvements in health and living standards. Greatly influenced by the writings of Karl Marx, the Chinese government aimed at achieving a socialist society, in which private ownership should be abolished and the distribution of economics should be based on one's work. During this period, the government developed several approaches and policies to build a central planning of all aspects of the economy, and put the main focus on the country's industrialization and improvement in urban living standards. By the end of this period, the urban and industrial life had been developed rapidly, and most industries as well as all urban land had been nationalized. The majority of the urban working age population were employed by state run working units, such as factories, hospitals and schools, while the majority of the working age population in rural

areas had been mobilized into collective agricultural production together with the land, livestock and equipment.

From 1960s to 1976, the government placed more emphasis on central planning, and launched the Great Cultural Revolution in 1966, focusing on the class struggle in the country. This revolution called on young people to act as “red guards” to engage with the class struggle and to destroy the feudal and bourgeois culture. During this period, the education system was greatly influenced, the university entrance examinations were stopped and a lot of schools closed, and the urban youth were encouraged to go down to the countryside to learn from the peasants.

From late 1970s to mid-1980s, great changes happened in the society as a result of the economic reform. In 1978, the “Open Door” reform was initiated by Deng Xiaoping, the policy shifted from class struggle to economic growth, and the Chinese economy has expanded by leaps and bounds. During this period, the agricultural in China was largely decollectivized, and the land-usage rights as well as the control over production decision making were devolved to the households. Diversification and commodification in agricultural production were also encouraged in this period, which led to the growth in agricultural productivity and the increase in rural income. Moreover, people’s living standards rose greatly, and industrial production grew with a rapid speed. As a considerable feature of China’s comparative advantage, labour resources have been increasingly more effectively channelled into productive uses than under the planned economy system. People benefited from the economic growth, while at the same time, a new middle class has also emerged.

From the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, the government turned the focus of the economic reform to the restructure of the urban industrial sector, and the role of central planning was reduced. In the enterprises, managers’ autonomy and the decision-making power were increased and the productivity and profitability of the enterprises were also increased as a result. Furthermore, the state-run enterprises were also opened up to new forms of ownership and management, and the operational mechanism of the state-owned enterprises was changed into the modern enterprise system. The aim of the reform was to transform the state-owned enterprises into modern commercial entities, and a growing number of them began to issue shares to be traded on stock exchange.

Different from the times when the state bears all the burden of the enterprises, after the state-owned enterprise reform, the SOEs operate as other types of enterprises do, and pursuing profit maximization in response to market competition. In this period, a lot of employees were laid off by the enterprises, and the traditional view that the enterprise provides all the services (including housing, health and education) was broken, and the view of the government was also changed. Job is not secured, compete in the market. In the meanwhile, the government also came up with several policies to attract the foreign investment and to engage more with the global order.

In the beginning of the 21st century, China joined the WTO, and has been engaging more with the global economy, and the changes also happened to employees' remuneration system. Besides a base wage, which reflected the seniority grade of the employee, the remuneration also included performance-linked rewards (such as bonus payments, profit shares and some other incentive rewards) and non-cash benefits and allowances (such as insurance and subsidization of employees' purchase of housing). In the meanwhile, in response to the growing inequality during this period, the policies aiming at a harmonious society and people-centred development were introduced, including investing in infrastructure and removing the agricultural tax.

In 2008, caused by the excessive risk-taking by banks and the bursting of the housing bubble in the US, the financial crisis led to several bank failures and spread into an economic shock in the whole world. Being the centre of the financial crisis, the financial and banking industry gained great attention during this period of time. In China, income inequality reached a very high level in 2008, and with the influence of the financial crisis, the discussion of income inequality in the society was triggered, and people began to question whether it is reasonable and just for some people to get the extremely high pay.

### **5.2.3 Inequalities in the Chinese society**

Firstly, the development between different regions in the Chinese society was unbalanced, which was caused by regional geographical differences and the differences in policy.

From the perspective of economic development, there are different advantages and disadvantages in the country's eastern, central, and western areas. The eastern area has incomparable advantages over the central and western areas in relation to geographical position, human resources and technology. The natural resources in the central and western

areas are richer than those in the eastern area, and great importance have been attached to the mining and processing of natural resources in these areas (Tang, 2020). While on the other hand, the eastern area attaches importance to non-resource-based industries, which made it easier to participate in the international trade.

From the perspective of policy guidance, the government put its focus on eastern area at the beginning of the economic reform and opening up, and the central and western areas were supporting the development of eastern area (Chen, 2019). The guidance of the policy has produced excellent results, and the economy of the eastern area has been greatly developed. With rapid development, the uneven development between the eastern and central and western areas began to appear. In respond to this, the country has implemented the Western Development Strategy, the Central Rising Strategy and the Northeast Revitalization Strategy, trying to lead the various development elements that have been developed in the eastern area to enter the central and western areas to promote the economic development. The strategies have exerted a certain degree of effect, and the central and western areas have been developed, but as the developed eastern region is more attractive to development elements such as talents, capital, and technology, the development of the central and western area still lacks the support of development elements, and even the talents and capital of the central and western areas are still flowing to the east, which further exacerbating the inequality in regional development (Tang, 2020).

Secondly, there is also significant inequality between the rural and urban areas in the Chinese society. At present, the rural areas of in China are still dominated by the primary industry, while most of the urban areas are dominated by the secondary and tertiary industries. Compared with the secondary and tertiary industries, the primary industry is more constrained by natural conditions, which made the economic development of the village has a higher level of instability.

On the other hand, the urban area has become a source of various factors for urban development, which eventually leads to more prosperity in urban areas, while the economic development of rural areas is relatively backward, and the urbanization process of the country has led to a large flow of rural population into cities, which made the inequality even worse (Tang, 2020).



Thirdly, the Gini coefficient in China has exceeded the international warning line of 0.4 in recent years (Chen, 2019), which indicates that the income gap has been relatively large in recent years, which has seriously affected the development of social justice.

Excessive gaps between the rich and the poor can easily lead to class solidification. As a result of the lack of necessary resources, low-income groups cannot obtain the same rights as high-income groups in education, medical care, employment, etc., which can lead to decline in social status (Tang, 2020). Moreover, besides reducing people's sense of justice, a large income gap between the rich and the poor can also lead to the emergence of social injustice. An excessive gap between the rich and the poor can lead to people's intense pursuit of social wealth, and social injustices such as trading power for money and industry monopoly are more likely to happen in order to obtain social wealth.

### **5.3 Sources of influences on Chinese justification**

Focused on the fair and justice thought of socialism with Chinese characteristics, Xie (2015) studied the meaning, theoretical basis, realistic foundation and the development of fair and justice thought in contemporary China, and it was argued that in the different historical period, the Marxism and socialist ideas were explored and developed by the party leaders according to the different national conditions, which formed the main basis of the fair thought in China. While at the same time, the traditional Chinese justice thought as well as the western thought also provides a number of beneficial ideas for the fair and justice thought in the Chinese society. Therefore, for the Chinese justification, it was suggested that these three parts, that is, the traditional Chinese culture, the western ideas of justice, and the Marxism and socialist ideas are the main sources that influence the Chinese ways of justification.

#### **5.3.1 Traditional Chinese culture**

The justification in China is influenced by the traditional Chinese culture, which is a combination of Confucianism, Mohism, Taoism, Buddhism and the legalist school.

##### **5.3.1.1 Confucianism**

As the root of the traditional Chinese culture, the Confucianism plays an important part in the Chinese view of justice and justification. On the one hand, the idea of equality was an important part of the Confucianism. From the perspective of human nature, it was argued

that the human nature is a natural attribute that everyone is born with, and everyone is same in terms of this. What makes a difference is the way people talk, act, and think, which was influenced by the environment (Jiang, 2021).

In relation to education, Confucius was the first one to advocate equality in education in ancient China. At the starting point of education, Confucius tried to “make no social distinctions in teaching”, and it was argued that the education should not be limited to the noble class, and that it should be expanded to the common people. In the process of education, Confucius proposed the method of “teaching students in accordance of their aptitude”, which shows his respect to individuals (Li, 2016). In the result of education, Confucius also tried to break the limit of hereditary of official career, and argued that “the one who excels in learning can be an official.”

On the other hand, however, besides the idea of equality, there were also ideas of hierarchy in the Confucianism. The Confucianism includes three bonds of loyalty that bound the whole society (loyalty to the ruler; obedience to parents and obedience of wife to husband), in which two of them were set within the family and all three represented the relationships between superior and subordinate. Based on the respect for tradition and the hierarchy of primary relationships between family members and between the people and their rulers, the idea of Confucius provided a guidance for people’s daily lives (Zhao, 2017).

In the idea of Confucianism, the major ideas were three basic guides (ruler guides the people, father guides son, and husband guides wife), five constant virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trust), and the doctrine of the mean (harmony). Among these, Confucius argued that benevolence (Ren) was the supreme virtue for people to attain. As a strictly natural and humanistic love, benevolence (Ren) is regarded as the core of the society, and the standard of justice is the standard of benevolence. On the one hand, for the individuals, justice means benevolence, fairness, honesty, forgiveness and being kind to other people; on the other hand, for the ruling class, justice means the policy of benevolence, and it is very important for the ruling class to care about the lives of the lower class, and the idea of egalitarianism was favoured so that they can keep the harmony and stability in the society (Liao, 2016). Furthermore, to maintain the social stability, the Confucianism also stresses the hierarchical and close-remote order relationships in the society, which led to the different standards for different people.

In Confucianism, to attain benevolence (Ren), people have to practice propriety (Li), which represents social norms. This could be rituals, rites, or proprieties, and includes all moral codes as well as social institutions. For Confucius, the optimal way to govern is not by legislation, but by the way of moral education and role models. And the ideal government is thus a government of non-action (wuwei) through an infallible groundwork of moral education (Zhang, 2017). This indicates that the Confucianism prefer to achieve a peaceful world (harmony) through self-realization, and also the strong Chinese cultural preference for basing business transactions upon the quality of interpersonal relationships and for settling disputes through mediation rather than relying upon contracts and legal process can be seen to stem from this philosophy.

### **5.3.1.2 Mohism**

The Mohism tried to promote an idea of “universal love and non-aggression” from the perspective of the survival and development of the common people. It was argued that regardless of the family relationship and the difference in wealth and social status, people need to love and benefit each other, which showed a specific concern about the people (Li, 2016). Moreover, in the area of politics, the Mohism argued an equal opportunity for people to participate in government and political affairs, and was a great progress in ancient China.

### **5.3.1.3 Taoism**

As another important part of the Chinese traditional culture, Taoism also has a great influence on the Chinese ways of justification. In Taoism, the origin of the universe was attributed to the “Tao”, which was the most primitive materiality source of the world. According to Taoism, the “Tao” was born even before the world exists, and it was independent without modification (Jiang, 2021). In the real world, different things shared a same origin, that is, the “Tao”, and they can be unified as a whole. In this perspective, all things are “common as one” (Jiang, 2021, p.23), and this provided a basis for equality.

Taking the idea of “Tao” to the human society, it was suggested that all people are born from the “Tao”, regardless of the social status, and there was no difference between superiors and inferiors. The “Tao” requires people to no longer make value judgments according to closeness, distance, hierarchy, and superiority, but treat all things in nature with a fair attitude instead. This shows an inclusive to differences, and a respect for vulnerable groups and unique individuals (Jiang, 2021).

Furthermore, the origin of “Tao” also indicates role of the nature, and that everything works in a natural way within the “Tao”. And the justice for Taoism, in this view, is to obey the law of the nature (Zhou, 2014). The Taoism argues that people should clearly realize that the natural law cannot be violated, and that individuals should be strict with themselves to adapt to the natural law. The highest principle of justice according to Taoism is the natural law.

#### **5.3.1.4 Buddhism**

Du (2016) mentioned that Buddhism also influenced the traditional view of justice of Chinese people, which stressed the importance of destiny and self-improvement. On the one hand, different from the equal rights in Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) civic world, Buddhism believes that people are equal because death is an unavoidable destiny and everyone needs to face it (Tang, 2017). This it is similar to the justice of natural law in Taoism and made it easier for people to accept and put up with the inequality aspects in the society to some extent. On the other hand, Buddhism stresses that people need to do the spiritual practice continuously so that they can resist the injustice thoughts, and this is similar to the Confucianism, which regards personal integrity as a form of higher principle.

#### **5.3.1.5 The legalist school**

As the Foundation of the Qin Dynasty, the legalist school emphasised the importance of the law, and explored its origin, nature and function. According to the legalist school, the law is of greater importance than benevolence in the governance of a country, and it is compulsory and fair to all, no matter he is a minister or a civilian (Zhang, 2017). Although still biased to the ruling class back then, the legalist school had touched on the idea of quality under the law to some extent.

### **5.3.2 Western ideas of justice**

After the economic reform in China, the Chinese society has been influenced by some western ideas such as the idea of market, consumerism and individualism (Du, 2016), while in the meantime, some western theories of justice are also influencing the ways that Chinese people justify things (Liu, 2017).

In the fairness and justice thought of western society, the neoliberalism concept of fairness and justice occupies a very important position. The neo-liberal school of thought believes

that freedom is the ultimate goal pursued by human society and the highest embodiment of social fairness and justice, and freedom is above everything else (Wang, 2021). Focusing on individual rights, the neoliberalism stressed the pursue of individual freedom, the protection of private property, and the practice of social fairness and justice (Wang, 2021).

Although the concept of fairness and justice of neoliberalism is different from the fairness and justice emphasized by the Communist Party of China in some aspects, some of its views, such as emphasizing the importance of rights and justice, advocating that the market as an effective means of resource allocation, and emphasizing equal opportunities, etc., are helpful for China to maintain and promote social fairness and justice in the new era.

Another influential trend in Western society is the idea of communitarianism. Starting from the whole, communitarianism believes that fairness and justice always exist in various historical and specific communities, and emphasizes that every member of the society should regard the common good as his own value goal, while the good of this kind of community must be higher than the good of the individual, and the value of the community must be higher than the value of the individual (Wang, 2021). To achieve a unity and balance between personal and social interests, the communitarianism stresses the importance of strengthening the cooperation between members of the community (Wang, 2021). The fairness and justice thought of communitarianism has similarities with some specific practices in China, which shows that the Chinese Communist Party's concept of fairness and justice in the new era has borrowed some part of the positive views of communitarianism on fairness and justice in this process.

### **5.3.3 Marxism and socialist ideas**

In modern China, it is obvious that the Marxist and socialism have a great influence on the Chinese view of justice, and they formed the basis for the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era.

Marx proposed his proletarian concept of equality through the critique of the bourgeois concept of equality. Firstly, he argued that equality is a realistic description of the relationship between people, and as a product of historical development rather than an eternal truth, the concept of equality is constantly changing with the social existence, and has its specific meaning in a particular social and historical period (Jiang, 2021). For Marx, equality comes from the social and economic relations, and is a reflection of the social and

economic foundation. It is related to the economy, politics and culture, and cannot be separated from them. In real life, people are not completely independent from the environment. As an individual, he has his own gender characteristics and unique personality. At the same time, as a member of the society, he also bears the influence from his family, society, and the era he lives in (Jiang, 2021). Therefore, as a concept of value, equality has completely different meanings for different people in different social environments, and we must make a comprehensive evaluation based on the characteristics of a certain region and a certain period of time.

Secondly, from the perspective of the working class, Marx criticised the capitalism system of its focus on capitalists' interests. It was argued that the equality of capitalists was limited to a certain scope, and did not take the interest of working class into consideration (Jiang, 2021). According to Marx, the interest of capitalists sacrificed the interest of the working class, and was a form of exploitation and oppression, which caused the increasing income gap between the rich and the poor.

Thirdly, as a result of the history, Marx suggested that the concept of equality has a class character, and different classes have different needs for equality. For example, in order to develop the economy and realize the continuous proliferation of capital, the bourgeoisie emphasizes equal status in the market economic competition, free trading of commodities, and the legalization of exploiting the labour, while the working class seeks the same rights as the bourgeoisie in terms of voting, speech, economics, and education, so that they can realize the development of personal freedom and equality (Jiang, 2021). Therefore, it is the aim of Marx to abolish the class to achieve equality.

Fourthly, Marx stressed that in a socialist society, the principle is to “distribute on the basis of labour contribution”, and it is also the right way to achieve social equality.

## **5.4 Socialism with Chinese characteristics**

Socialism with Chinese characteristics is the product of the combination of the basic principles of scientific socialism and China's social reality, and is developing with the social practice. Based on the goal in different historical periods, the Socialism with Chinese characteristics has different connotations about social value and justice.

### **5.4.1 President Mao's view on justice**

Before the economic reform in 1978, it was the Mao Zedong Thought that guided the development of the Chinese society.

Politically, the people's sovereignty and equal right to participate in politics are guaranteed. Mao Zedong believed that the primary task of the People's Republic of China was to realize the people's sovereignty politically (Li, 2021). In China, people are entitled to a wide range of freedom and democratic rights such as the right of speech, assembly and association. Furthermore, the quality in political field also requires ethnic equality and the equality between men and women (Li, 2021). The system of regional ethnic autonomy is a basic political system in China, which has effectively promoted the equality and unity of all ethnic groups. As a national policy, the equality between men and women has ended the feudal tradition that men were superior to women in the past thousands of years. Citizens have equal social status and political rights regardless of their gender, and equal pay for equal work has greatly protected women's rights and interests.

In the economic field, President Mao suggested that the public ownership of the means of production and the distribution system according to work had provided the fundamental conditions for the establishment of equal socio-economic relations (Li, 2021). People is entitled with equal social status and rights, and therefore have the equal right to possess and distribute the social wealth. Taking the outcome of the laborers as the principle of determining their income, the method of distribution to work can not only realize the fairness and justice of the laborers, but also help the laborers to promote their working efficiency (Li, 2021).

### **5.4.2 Deng Xiaoping's view on justice**

As the one that led China's economic reform and opening up, Deng Xiaoping pointed out that in order to realize social fairness and justice, the first task is to develop the productive forces. Only when productivity has been greatly improved, can we gradually get rid of poverty, make the country prosperous and the people rich, build a social fairness and justice that can make people's lives better, and achieve common prosperity on this basis (Li, 2021).

Deng Xiaoping stated that economic fairness is an important content of the concept of fairness and justice, and to achieve economic fairness, the reform of the economic system

is needed. And according to China's conditions during that period, he argued that different economic forms should be fully developed, and the country need to insist on taking the public sector of the economy as the main body, and allow various non-public sectors of the economy to develop.

In the development of socialist market economy, fair opportunity and fair rules, fair competition, fair distribution and social redistribution are valued (Cui, 2015). Fair opportunity and fair rules mean that different people and entities participate in market competition as equals and take responsibility for their own profits and losses, and that everyone acts in accordance with the rules and no privilege is allowed. Fair competition means that justice is achieved through the equal status of different people as well as organizations in law and politics, and that market competition is done in a fair and orderly manner. Fair distribution means that different from the distribution system that is based on status, class, capital, or the previous egalitarianism, the socialism justice with Chinese characteristics requires a distribution according to people's work. And social redistribution means that the justice is achieved through the benefit of all people in the society, which requires the development of public services as well as social insurance.

Furthermore, Deng Xiaoping stressed that in the socialist economic distribution, the form of redistribution should be used to improve the inequality in the primary distribution of income (Li, 2021). And only by giving full play to the role of the state in redistribution, the economic fairness could be realized, which forms a foundation for the realization of social fairness and justice in all fields.

### **5.4.3 President Jiang's view on justice**

President Jiang proposed the thought of Three Represents, and argued that the Communist Party of China always represents the development requirements of China's advanced productive forces, which is the premise for the Communist Party of China to lead all the people to make steady progress in the direction of common prosperity; the Communist Party of China always represents the development direction of China's advanced culture, and the advanced nature of ideology and culture determines the mainstream values of Chinese society. This is a further in-depth understanding of the idea of fairness and justice; the Communist Party of China also always represents the fundamental interests of the Chinese people, which is the starting point and foothold of all the work of the Communist



Party of China. This is also the key to advancing the understanding of socialism with Chinese characteristics on fairness and justice (Li, 2021).

In the economic field, President Jiang believes that the principle of “efficiency in priority and fairness in consideration” should be adhered to. During that historical period, when productive forces were not developed enough, it was argued that efficiency must be given priority to development, fairness should be taken into account while improving basic productivity, and the concept of fairness and justice must be implemented in the process of social construction (Li, 2021).

In the development of productivity, there will be inevitable differences in working income due to the differences in regions, industries, and positions. Jiang Zemin believes that it is reasonable to let some people get rich first, and then those who get rich first drive other people to get rich later (Li, 2021). It is also a reflection of the idea of fairness and justice, which can ultimately achieve the ideal goal of common prosperity. This policy is in line with the basic conditions of the country, and it is the most efficient and optimal way for social development during that time (Li, 2021).

#### **5.4.4 President Hu’s view on justice**

President Hu proposed the basic policy of building a harmonious society. In the 21st century, China has entered a period of rapid modernization, and besides the development of the socialist market economy, there are also problems such as the gaps between the rich and the poor, excessive consumption of resources, and serious damage to the ecological environment. And focusing on the problems and inequalities, the Scientific Outlook on Development was proposed, and it was regarded as the way to achieve a harmonious society (Chen, 2019).

The role of the people was stressed in the Scientific Outlook on Development, and it requires to take the basic needs of the people as the basis, fully consider the real wishes of the people, and enable all the people to share the fruits of social development (Li, 2021). President Hu regarded the people-oriented idea as the core of the Scientific Outlook on Development, and it is based on the fundamental interests of the majority of the people.

In the people-oriented idea, the first is to establish the principle of development for the people, and to regard the needs and evaluation of the people as the way to measure the work of the party and the state. The second is to establish the principle that development

depends on the people. The third is to establish the principle that the fruits of development should be enjoyed by the people, and adhere to the path of common prosperity (Zhao, 2017).

In terms of income distribution, President Hu suggested that although redistribution was used as a method to make up for the inequalities of the primary distribution, it still needs to pay attention to the efficiency and fairness, and take the combination of efficiency and fairness into account (Li, 2021). Hu Jintao pointed out that it is necessary to increase the proportion of wages and salaries in the primary distribution, which is of great importance in improving the quality of people's life and increasing the people's legal labour income. Therefore, on the basis of improving efficiency, we should pay more attention to fairness, so that a fair and just distribution system could be established.

## **5.5 Justice and equality in contemporary China - Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and President Xi's view on justice**

Proposed by President Xi, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era is the guidance in contemporary China, and shows the view of justice in the Chinese society.

Equality and justice in the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era includes three principles, that is, distribution according to contribution, inclusive growth and shared development. Firstly, the distribution according to contribution means that each person should get the remuneration he deserves according to his pay out and contribution, that is, the distribution should be made reasonably and appropriately according to the amount of his contribution (Liu, 2017). In the process of the formation of social wealth, the contribution of each member is not the same. For example, the quantity and quality of labour input, the factors of production input, etc., all of which vary with each individual. Therefore, the principle of distribution according to contribution shows its respect to the difference among social members, and helps to achieve social fairness and justice, and the goal of common prosperity.

In Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Socialist equality is a kind of distributional equality, and the income distribution system has been improving with the principle of distribution. In the report submitted to the 18th CPC National Congress, it was agreed to "speed up and improve the redistribution adjustment mechanism with taxation, social security, and transfer payment" (CPC, 2012). In the process of income distribution, both

efficiency and fairness should be taken into account, and more emphasis should be placed on fairness in redistribution. And since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017, on the basis of distribution according to contribution, attention has been paid to the improvement of laborers' income, and more attention has been paid to the distribution between urban and rural areas, between regions, and between different groups. "Adhere to the principle of distribution according to work, improve the mechanism of distribution according to factors, and promote a more reasonable and orderly income distribution system" (CPC, 2017).

The income distribution system pays more attention to the income of laborers, strengthens the role of tax adjustment, especially the adjustment of direct tax, and further narrows the income gap. Moreover, in the third distribution, the role of charity and other public welfare programmes was valued, which helps to promote a more reasonable and orderly income distribution system, and so that all the people can benefit from the development results.

Secondly, the principle of inclusive growth is a response to the unbalanced social development and income gap. It means that all members of society share the fruits of development, and it is a kind of growth that takes both equality and efficiency into account and promotes social fairness and justice (Chen, 2019). The core of inclusive growth is the equal opportunity, and by providing equal opportunities to all members of the society, all the people can fully participate in the whole process of economic growth and social development.

The principle of inclusive growth stems from people's concern about the inequality in the process of economic growth, and to eliminate poverty and inequality and to increase social welfare, the growth of economics is quite important. And the inclusive growth, in this perspective, provides impetus for sustained economic growth through equal opportunities and equal development. Focusing on inequality, the inclusive growth helps to maintain social stability by continuously solving problems such as income gaps.

For an inclusive growth, the first is to achieve the equality of opportunity, such as equality in education, employment and public services. Everyone can participate in the sharing of economic achievements based on their contribution to society. This will not only help people to fully realize their potential, but will also help to increase the overall income of society and gradually solve the problem of income inequality. The second is to achieve equality at the starting point, such as opposing gender discrimination and racial

discrimination, and resisting all kinds of discrimination. With a fair starting point and equal opportunity, people's talent and ability could be encouraged, and thus contribute to the development of economics.

Thirdly, a shared development is a new concept embodied in the new era. It emphasizes the protection of the basic rights and interests of every member in the society, and different from the idea of average, which emphasizes the average of the result, a shared development focuses on the sharing of resources in the process, and is a real reflection of equality (Li, 2021).

A shared development requires the participation of all members of the society. Everyone is a part of the social construction and should also share the fruits of social development. A shared development promotes the social development on the premise of ensuring every member's interest. Therefore, the innovation of the shared development lies in the "people-centred" development idea (Wang, 2021), which argues that the development we pursue is the development that benefits the people.

From the contents of shared development, the basis is to meet people's basic living needs, and to protect people's fundamental interests at the basic level of living, so that the spiritual needs could be realised gradually. To achieve this, the first is to form a security system which aims to guarantee the basic life of people, and strives to solve various problems encountered in the construction of people's livelihood. The second is to realise the positive interaction between economic development and environmental protection. It is argued by the principle of shared development that the environment should not be the expense of economic development, and it is necessary to establish a sustainable development concept that promotes a high-quality economic development with the focus on the goal of protecting the ecological environment.

From the results of shared development, it requires the benefit of all members of the society. This means that all members can enjoy the fruits of development, and its essence is to protect the fundamental interests of all members. This is also the meaning of "shared by everyone" (Wang, 2021), which is a way to raise the enthusiasm of the workers, and to make them more motivated and participated, while at the same time improves the productivity and efficiency.

The main content of equality in the new era includes equal rights for participation in the whole process, equal opportunities for all-round access, equal rules applicable to all fields, and equal distribution of all-factor development (Jiang, 2021).

Firstly, the equality of rights is the basis of the concept of equality in the new era. Equality of rights means that every member of the society has equal and indiscriminate rights in terms of survival and development, career choice, resource acquisition, and political participation. Politically, it is the people's democracy that ensures the equality of rights. In China, people are enjoying a broad, sufficient, real, concrete, and effective democracy (Li, 2021). Economically, it is the development of multiple ownership economies, especially the continuous improvement of the socialist market economic system, that maximize the protection of equal rights among people. The equality of rights is also promoted through the livelihood projects, in which people's basic rights of survival and development are protected.

Secondly, the equality of opportunity is the premise of the concept of equality in the new era. Equality of opportunity means that fair competition and development opportunities are fully open to all members of the society, regardless of their gender, race, family background, and social status. The personal achievement is determined by personal ability, and everyone has the opportunity to achieve their personal Chinese dream (Wang, 2021). In the new era, the equality of social members in obtaining opportunities in all directions mainly involves the equality of survival and development opportunities, the improvement of political environment to ensure equality in the process of realizing opportunities, and the improvement of economic ecology to ensure equality in the participation and competition of different economic entities.

The equality of survival and development opportunities of social members is guaranteed through public services, such as the education system, the medical and healthcare system and the employment system. The improvement of political environment to ensure equality in the process of realizing opportunities requires the opposing and overcoming of privilege. It is argued that the privilege itself represents inequality, and what is worse is that it creates more inequality (Li, 2021). And the officials should be in awe and use the public power in their hands with cautious. The improvement of economic ecology refers to the improvement of business environment. A good economic ecology is the soft power of economic development and an important guarantee for improving the overall economic competitiveness. And to achieve a good economy ecology, all kinds of ownership

economies should use the production factors equally in accordance with the law, participate in market competition fairly, and receive equal legal protection.

Thirdly, equality of rules is the guarantee of the concept of equality in the new era. Rules are the general normative propositions that evaluates human behaviour from the perspective of legitimacy (Jiang, 2021). More specifically, a rule is a general norm in which we can ask whether a behaviour is justified. The norms mentioned here include laws, regulations, and power supervision, etc., and can be applied to different fields in the society.

In China, the law is of great importance, and governing the country by law is the characteristic and advantage of the country. Everyone is equal under the law, and no one, regardless of their position, has any special power beyond the law, and this shows a form of equality. In the legal construction in China, the protection of civil rights has increasingly become an important part, and people are guided to defend their legal rights in the process of their own development.

Fourthly, equality in distribution is the focus of the concept of equality in the new era. Distribution is an important economic and social activity of human beings, which determines the rights and methods of people's possession and use of various resources (Li, 2021). The issue of distribution is of great importance to the stability of the whole society and the long-term development of the country.

At present, the unbalanced development between urban and rural areas, and the unbalanced development between different regions are the biggest feature of the country's development. And to deal with this, the mechanism of distribution according to production factors needs to be improved. The production factors include land, technology, management, capital, labour, etc., and the distribution according to production factors shows a respect for labour, knowledge, creativity, and talents, which is helpful in encouraging the enthusiasm and creativity of citizens and promote the development of productivity.

After the primary distribution, the income redistribution and the third distribution are also importance approaches to achieve social justice. In come redistribution is a resource allocation mechanism realized by relevant government departments through compulsory measures such as taxation and social security, while the third distribution is a voluntary

distribution adjustment activity led by enterprises and individuals, and different forms of activity, such as charity, volunteer service, non-governmental donations, social assistance, are included in the third distribution. The third distribution is a beneficial supplement to the market's primary distribution and the government's secondary distribution, and it plays an irreplaceable role in narrowing the income gap.

## 5.6 Modes of justification

Bommel (2014) suggested that when social actors make justifications, they tend to make reference to a limited number of broad-based sets of values and conceptions of the common good. That is, in order to make one's critique and actions comprehensible and reach a state of agreement, social actors will draw on the different orders of worth. The six orders of worth identified by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) include the market worth, the industrial worth, the civic worth, the inspired worth, the domestic worth and the world of fame. Specifically, the market worth values the market performance and profit, it has a short-term focus and the evaluations are based on the prices and costs. In the industrial worth, technic, efficiency, rationality as well as professionalism are regarded valuable. While in the civic worth, on the one hand, the equality and rights of members of society is regarded valuable, on the other hand, it is also encouraged when personal interest is sacrificed for the collective common good. The inspired worth is based on creativity, being artistic, singularity and grace. The domestic worth is based on kinship, paternal authority, traditions and hierarchy. And in the world of fame, worth is based on the reputations and opinions from the outside.

From the different sources of influences on the Chinese ways of justification, it can be seen that there are also different modes of justification in the Chinese context.

Firstly, influenced by the Confucianism, the harmony and stability in the society is regarded as a higher principle and therefore provides a way for people to justify their actions. This means that when a dispute happens, it could be considered as a part of the social relationship rather than a single legal case, and resolving the dispute means to come up with a suitable and feasible plan for everyone to fix the social relationship and keep the social stability. For example, in a research that studied how mediation was done to resolve the disputes in a Chinese rural village and how agreement was realized in different types of disputes and in different situations, Wang and Wang (2012) noticed that to resolve a dispute, sometimes a concession needs to be made, and some personal interest need to be

given up. And in this kind of situation, the social stability and maintaining social relationships is a higher order of justice comparing with the obtainment of individual rights through legal proceedings. Apart from the traditional culture of Confucianism, the concern for stability is also influenced by the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government. In the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, stability and harmony in the society is valued, and President Hu proposed a goal to build a harmonious society in his political view. And the different development strategies and social projects from the government also showed a need to reduce the unbalanced situations so that the stability of the society could be kept. And this is in line with the value of the domestic logic, in which hierarchy is valued.

Moreover, similar to the domestic world developed by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), which values kinship, traditions and hierarchy, the hierarchical and close-remote order relationship is another mode of justification in China. And this means that the principle of justice is “situational”, and that the justice principle and action logic vary according to the hierarchical order of the social statuses as well as the close-remote positions in the social connections. For example, Wang and Wang (2012) suggested that within the hierarchical and close-remote order relationship in the society, the same behaviour might be acceptable for one but completely unbearable for another, and in a dispute, it was argued that it is acceptable and reasonable to ignore or sacrifice the interest of someone that is remote to you, but it is regarded as unreasonable and unfair if someone close to you was ignored.

Another variation in the domestic world is personal integrity and individual morality, which is also specified in the Chinese context. From the perspective of Confucianism, the standard of justice is the standard of benevolence, and this means that virtue such as love, fairness, honesty, forgiveness and being kind to other people are favoured. On the other hand, as another source of influence in the traditional Chinese culture, Buddhism also suggests that people need to do the spiritual practice continuously so that they can resist the injustice thoughts, and this is similar to the Confucianism, which regards personal integrity as a form of higher principle. In this mode of justification, individual morality is a higher order of principle, and behaviours that can show good morality such as honesty, caring, kind, etc. are regarded as justice in the society. And this is also in line with the domestic world of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), in which a good upbringing was valued.

Secondly, in the socialism with Chinese characteristics, market economy is an important part, and this is also a mode of justification that lies in the market worth developed by



Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). Cui (2015) suggested that in the socialism with Chinese characteristics, justice is achieved through fair competition, and entities are supposed to take part in the market competition without government intervention and to take responsibility for their own profits and losses. In this mode of justification, market performance and profit are the higher principles, and this also agrees with the market worth by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006).

Thirdly, the industrial worth favours the efficiency, productivity, reliability and performance of social actors. Work represents the natural condition within the industrial world, and the main subjects are professionally qualified and hierarchically organized, while the objects are the means and instruments of work, such as tools or production methodologies. Investment in the industrial world involves a commitment to progress and development, and the test happens in the industrial world when new projects are launched or fresh arrangements are made to function effectively. In the Socialism with Chinese characteristics, the development of productivity is regarded as the basic goal, and this is similar to the idea of efficiency.

Fourthly, in the civic world by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), on the one hand, the equality and rights of members of society is regarded valuable, on the other hand, it is also encouraged when personal interest is sacrificed for the collective common good. This mode of justification is also available in the Chinese context. For example, from the Marxism and socialism perspective, it is also argued that all people are equal, and that the members in the society should have equal social and political status. More specifically, in the economic field, it is also stressed that different entities are equal and no privilege should be allowed. Moreover, Cui (2015) suggested that as a socialist country, collectivism is also an important part of the fair view as well as the social justice in China, and the collective common good should always be considered when making decisions.

Fifthly, the inspired world is defined by the outpouring of inspiration, which is driven by love, passion, and the desire to create. The inspired judge positively those who are independent, unique, and touched by genius. True inspiration is found or intuited in the masterpiece or stroke of genius, that is, the unusual ideas, images, memories and dreams. Inspired encounters may be mysterious, unexpected, and affective, facilitating creativity and originality. Failure or loss of inspiration occurs when people give up dreams, lose originality, slip into routines, “come back down to earth”, and look to external signs of success (such as money or titles).

Sixthly, the world of fame is defined by the public opinion, and the most worthy ones in this world have high public exposure and the need for recognition. Fame is gained through naming in the media, and pursued through branding, public campaigns, press releases, and opinion surveys. Investment in the world of fame requires participants to reveal their secrets to the public. Judgement is provided by public opinion, such as through audience ratings and responses. Falling out of fame means that social actors lose their public image or become unknown in the society.

Seventhly, a new mode of justification in China is the people-oriented idea. It is the core of the Scientific Outlook on Development. Tang (2017) suggested that as a socialist country, putting people in the centre and caring about the people's interest is the basis of its ideology, and therefore it is also a unique mode of justification in the Chinese context. In this mode of justification, the people's interest is the most valuable, and the common prosperity is one way of achieving it. For example, Cui (2015) suggested that to benefit all people in the society and to avoid the polarization between the rich and the poor, social insurance and social redistribution could be seen as one form of justice in China, and therefore make the people-oriented mode of justification unique in the Chinese context.

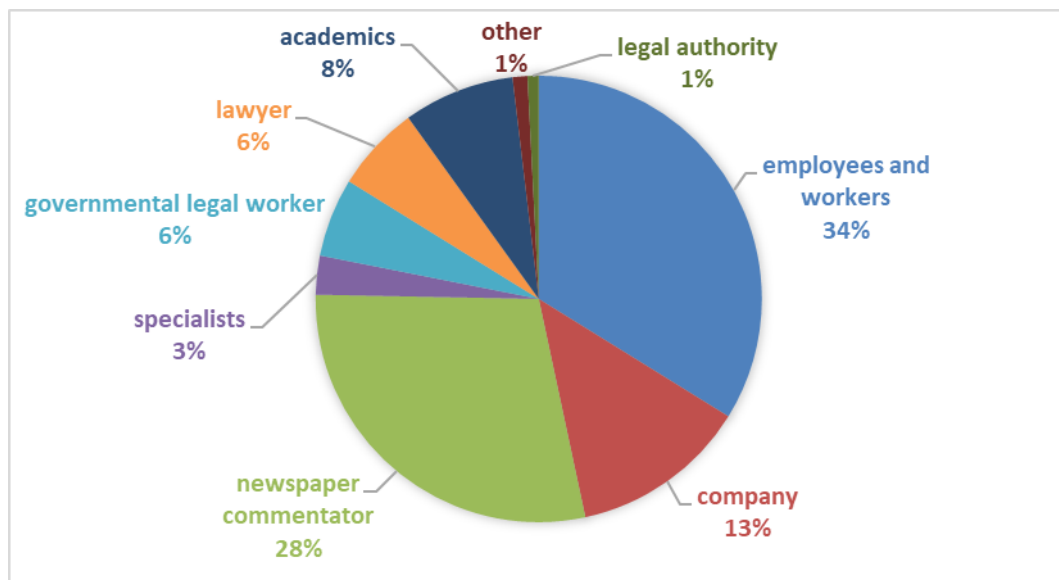
In the people-oriented logic, common prosperity is regarded as its goal of development. It is argued that common prosperity does not mean egalitarianism and equal wealth, and Deng Xiaoping suggested that common prosperity accepts a reasonable income gap and allows some people to get rich first, which could set a good example to influence and encourage other people, therefore become a practical way to achieve common prosperity.

## 6 Justification in the dispute

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the justification logics in the news reports will be studied in a general way to show the ground for justification. Starting with the descriptive results, the source, type and time of the collected articles will be explored. And then within the articles, the topics, actors, and justification logics will be identified. Further, the adoption of the logics will be analysed. Each justification will be studied in relation to its arguments, actors, and the changes over time. Influenced by the social and political context, the variations and changes of the logics showed a ground for justification.

### 6.2 Actors involved in the dispute

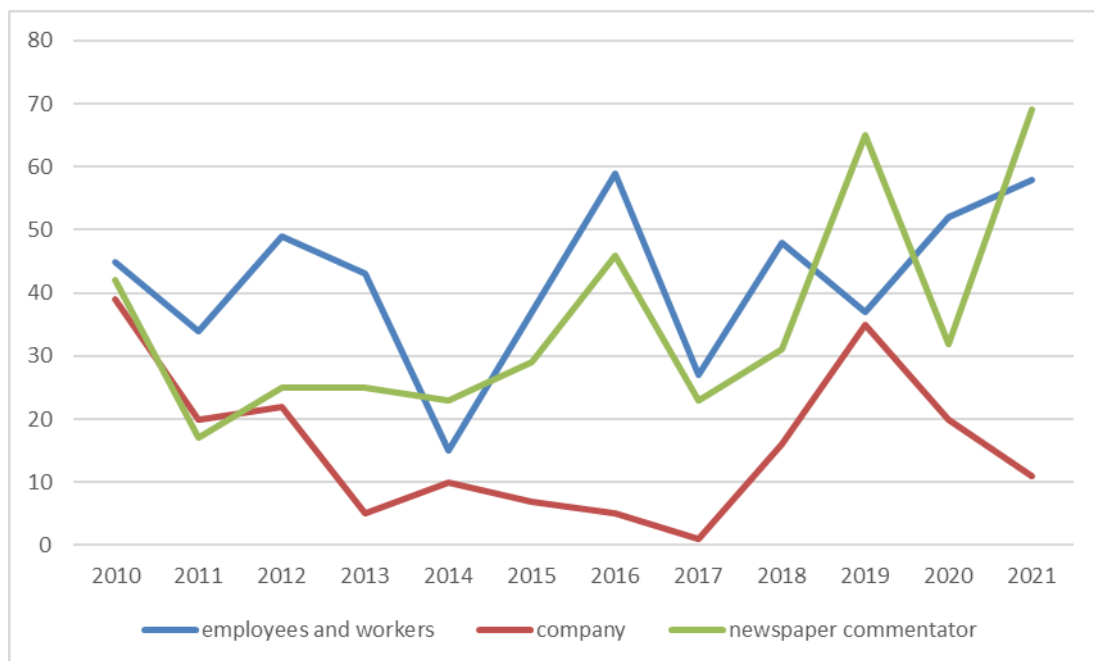


**Figure 6-1 Actors involved in the dispute**

In the articles collected, eight actors were recognised, that is, the workers and employees, newspaper commentator, company, academic, governmental legal worker, lawyer, specialists, and the legal authority. Among them, the academics are the scholars from universities and research institutions, the specialists are the professionals interviewed by the newspapers but did not mention a specified occupation, the governmental legal workers are the people who work in the government legal departments, e.g., judges from the court, and the legal authority was the organization that publishes the law and provides legal interpretations. The governmental legal workers and the legal authority are both regarded as a representation of the voice from the government.

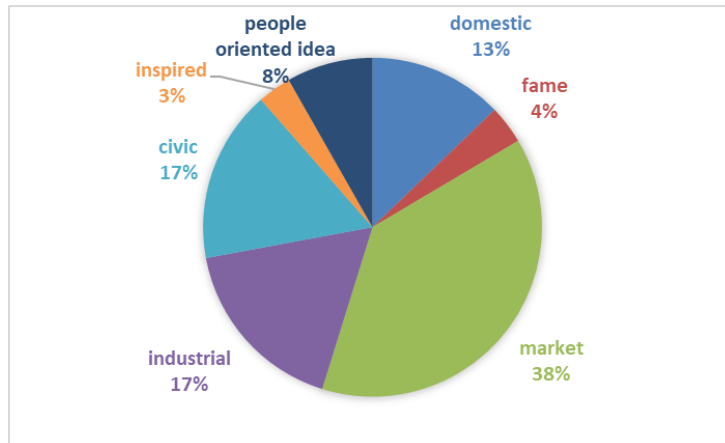
Workers and employees, newspaper commentator, and the company were the main actors involved in the dispute, and the professionals, including academic, lawyer, governmental legal worker and the specialists, also played an important role in the dispute. It should be noticed that the legal authority was a new actor that came into the discussion in the later stage (from 2017), and had played an important role since then.

Over the years, most of the actors showed an increasing trend in the number of passages, except for the voice from the company. Figure 6-2 shows the voice of the three main actors through the years, and different from the employees and newspaper commentators, the company's voice showed a decreasing trend, especially before 2017, and after the peak in 2019, the voice of the company decreased again in 2020 and 2021.



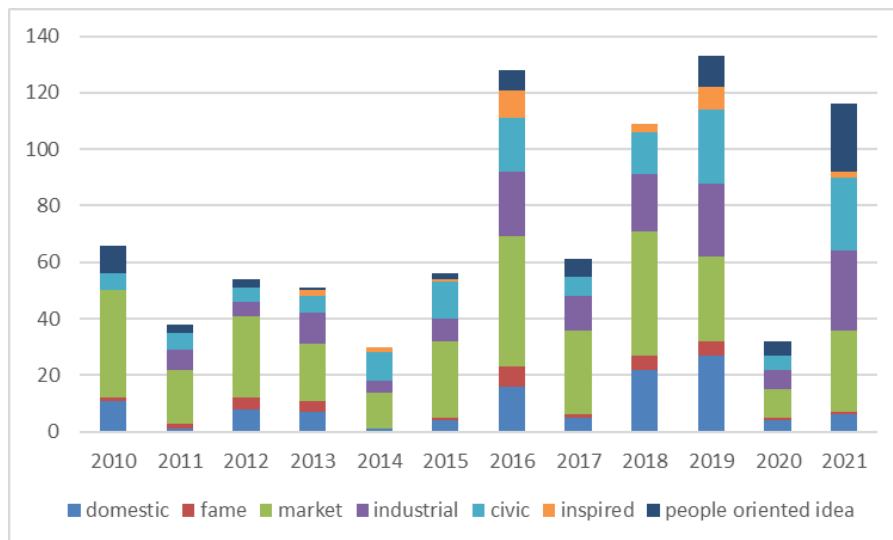
**Figure 6-2 Main actors' voice through the years**

## 6.3 Justifications used in the dispute



**Figure 6-3 Justifications in the dispute**

In the dispute of working hours, justifications logics were recognised when actors expressed their opinions. The market logic is the most used one, with 38%, followed by the civic and industrial logic, both took up 17%. The domestic logic also played a significant part in the dispute with a proportion of 13%, and the above four were the main logics in this dispute.



**Figure 6-4 Justifications over the years**

Over the years, as the one that has been used most, the market always kept a dominate position, while the inspired logic came out and played a part in the discussion after 2016. The industrial and the civic logic were increasing over the years. As for the people-oriented idea, it was adopted and then experienced a decrease in the early years, and came back again into the picture in 2016.

### 6.3.1 Market logic

In the market logic, the most used argument was the salary. It was argued that the salary was one of the most important reasons for the workers to work overtime, and the longer they work, the more they will get:

“Wang Daqiao told the reporter that for him, overtime working hours are very important and directly affect his wages, and this is the purpose of him coming to Shenzhen to work.” (China Business News, September 27, 2012)

Also, in the IT industry, the high pay was the motivation for the employees to work long hours:

“Wang Jian, an employee of an Internet financial company, said: “The salary and benefits of Internet companies are relatively high. If people can work overtime in exchange for greater development and prospects, many employees will not object the idea.” (Worker’s Daily, September 10, 2016)

“In the early days, companies that implemented 996 were often in a period of rapid growth. It was either cash, share options, or stock levels, employees could obtain relatively considerable returns.” (Southern Metropolis Daily, April 8, 2019)

According to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, p.202), in the market worth, “the generality of the price is ensured by a monetary standard”. Money is the measurement of all things, and thus constitutes the form of evidence. The profit, the benefit, the payback, the result of the transaction is thus expressed in cash, a commission, a fee, or an honorarium. Therefore, the salary, including the overtime pay, become the measurement of the employees. Workers work for their salaries, and therefore this is a justification from the market logic.

Secondly, it was also argued that people work overtime because they have to finish their work or they are facing an overwhelming workload.

“Long Ming is currently working in a state-owned enterprise in Wuhan, and will work overtime when the project task is urgent.” (China Youth Daily, October 14, 2021)

“The work intensity is too high, and it is impossible to complete a day’s workload without working overtime.” Zhou Yibo said that the overwhelming workload can only be completed by extending working hours.” (Worker’s Daily, May 31, 2017)

“Some enterprises do not explicitly require employees to work overtime, but as the workload assigned to employees is impossible to complete within 8 hours, employees can only “voluntarily work overtime.” (Worker’s Daily, August 16, 2016)

In the market world, business consists of at least two individuals and an object whose purchase and sale they negotiate. The object, a good or a service, helps to fashion a link between people by attracting and interesting. “The test is the moment, when a deal is done, settled, in the bag. The end of the test is expressed by the signing of a contract” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.202). In this perspective, employees are hired by the companies when they sign a labour contract, and to remain the test valid, employees have to finish their work, even if they have to work overtime. And in the discussions, it is suggested that companies are organising overwhelming workload for employees, which put the employees in a situation of excessive overtime working.

Thirdly, the career development and afraid of losing job were another two arguments used in the market logic.

“ Those who volunteered to work overtime hope to gain promotion opportunities by increasing their business volume. “Our promotion is linked to performance.” An employee of Baidu said, “Many people in the company will work overtime.” Since performance evaluation is based on workload, many people volunteered to work overtime for a promotion.” (China Youth Daily, September 12, 2016)

“Under the great employment pressure, the employees are having a strong crisis awareness.” Professor Liang Ping believes that most employees do not want to argue with their company because they are afraid of losing their jobs, or getting underhand punishment from their leaders. So they usually choose to swallow their anger when facing endless overtime working.” (China Youth Daily, May 11, 2018)

Competition plays the role of the higher common principle in the market world, and “the competition between beings placed in a state of rivalry governs their conflicts through an evaluation of market worth, the price, which expresses the importance of converging desires” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.196). Worthy objects are saleable goods that have a strong position in a market. Worthy persons are rich, millionaires, and they live the high life. And the state of unworthiness is one in which persons fail and lose out, and in which goods are rejected and hated instead of desired.

More specifically, from the employees’ perspective, the market order of worth positions workers as saleable labour in the marketplace. The valid test for the worthiness is the demand for that worker’s labour, as judged by the qualified person: the potential buyer of the labour. Within this order, a person is judged unworthy if it fails and loses out in a market, that is, if your labour is not desired, then your labour is judged unworthy.

Employees and workers are facing great competition as a result, and to keep their positions in the labour market, they have to accept overtime working and are not able to refuse.

On the other hand, from the company’s perspective, the valid test for a firm’s worthiness is the market demand for what it produces. And to keep the position in the competitive market, companies will need to capture bigger market shares and produce more products, which will also lead to employees’ overtime working as a result.

Fourthly, the argument of cost and profit also followed a market logic. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, p.197) suggested that “the human nature that flourishes in the market world is characterized by a desire as innocent as any dignity”. In the market world, interest is the real motivation, the property of their self that makes them be themselves by wanting to obtain satisfaction. For companies, the profit is their motivation. And as profit is influenced by cost, this provides an incentive for companies to reduce their costs, including labour costs. In the discussions that argue why companies tend to ask employees to work overtime, it is suggested that the cost is an important reason for companies. For example:

“ In Li Jie's view, in order to save costs, the company has assigned an unreasonable amount of task to employees.” (China Youth Daily, May 11, 2018)

“The profit margins of labour-intensive companies are limited, and in order to maximize the profits, the companies focused on lowering labour cost, which



resulted in long-term low income of employees, and has seriously hindered the coordinated development of the society.” (China Youth Daily, June 4, 2010)

Furthermore, as dignity designates a capacity to participate in a common good, the fact that it takes the form of a selfish desire in the market world is almost paradoxical. And this also receives critique from the civic world. According to the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), the market world is used as a target to criticise in the logic of civic world. In the history, the irreducible opposition between the public good and private interest has made it quite difficult to bring about a compromise between the two worlds, and nowadays, the civic critique of market worth, is still the object of a great deal of study, and can be expressed in the lapidary form of slogans. For example, in the conventional opposition between owners and workers, owners are characterized by selfishness, which forms a critique from the civic to market logic. In the discussions of overtime working, the chase of cost and profit was criticised from the civic logic. It was argued that motivated by profits, companies would always want more from employees with a limited labour cost, and this has led to the ignorance of the law and rights of the employees.

Besides the civic logic, the market logic also received critique from the inspired world. In the inspired perspective, the market’s “subjection to money may be criticised because it presupposes enslavement to desires oriented toward the satisfaction of personal pleasures” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.239). In the dispute, some arguments suggested that the overtime working was bad for people’s work-life balance, and it was the innovation and creativity that makes a company more competitive in the market, which formed a critique from the inspired logic. Moreover, from the industrial logic, the market was criticised from the efficiency perspective, arguing that the overtime working can lead to health issue and thus reduces the working efficiency.

Overall, as a dominate logic of justification, the market logic was used continuously over the years. In the early stages, it was the argument of salary and cost that followed the logic, and in the later years, the competitiveness of the labour market was mentioned more, from which the unbalanced position between the employee and the company was showed.

### **6.3.2 Civic logic**

The civic logic was increasing over the years, and the arguments in the civic logic mainly falls in three dimensions.

Firstly, the most used argument in the civic logic was the reference to the law, and in particular, the Labour Law published by the Chinese government. On the one hand, The Labour Law stipulates that the daily working hours shall not exceed 8 hours, and the average weekly working hours shall not exceed 44 hours. And it was argued that the excessive overtime working is obviously against the law:

“Lawyer Chen Li said that there is no such thing as an overtime system where “the boss asks and the employee agrees”. To the extent permitted by the law, employers must follow legal procedures when arranging workers to work overtime. And no matter the employees or the companies are willing to work overtime or not, overtime work is illegal.” (Worker’s Daily, September 17, 2016)

“Recently, the Supreme People’s Court and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security jointly released 10 typical cases of overtime and overtime work, regulating the legal application standards for disputed issues such as the working hours system, overtime pay, and workers’ rest and vacation rights. What attracts attention is that the two departments made it clear in one typical case that the content of the “996” contract seriously violated the law’s requirement on working hours, and should be deemed invalid.” (China Youth Daily, September 1, 2021)

On the other hand, when referring to the law, it was also suggested that the supervision was inefficient, and that reinforcement was needed:

“It is not difficult to find that the legal provisions are ignored by some companies, and the supervision by the labor supervision department is insufficient. By the time the extreme incident of karoshi happens, it is already too late.” (People’s Daily, July 15, 2013)

“To protect the basic rights and interests of workers, the key is that the relevant departments should do something in supervision and law enforcement, and not just wait until the labor disputes happens.” (Southern Metropolis Daily, October 9, 2017)

“In terms of law enforcement, the supervisory departments are not paying enough attention to illegal overtime working, and the supervision is not strict enough.” (Worker’s Daily, May 21, 2014)

According to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), the civic world is rooted in the collective interest, and the worthiest entities within the civic world are representative and rule-governed collectives, which unify and act for the people. Civic social actors have a natural commitment to political bonds, and the civic relations are facilitated by legal objects, such as laws, rights, and policies, and forged through assemblies, democratic debate, and collective action. In the civic world, the law is the expression of the general will, and is therefore the form of evidence. “Its reality is clear when it is embodied in texts that can be invoked and in legal rules that can be applied (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.193)”. In the arguments, the law was used as a way to argue against the excessive overtime working, and follows a civic logic.

Secondly, the rights and benefits of the employees, more specifically, the right of take a rest and the right to refuse, were also mentioned in the civic logic:

“The occurrence of Karoshi is largely due to the fact that the company implicitly violates the workers’ right to rest, resulting in the violation of the right to life and health.” (Worker’s Daily, December 25, 2016)

“Qiao Jian, director of the Labor Relations Department of the China Institute of Labor Relations, believes that no matter what, it is necessary to insist on the protection of workers’ rights to remuneration and rest, and the protection of occupational safety and health.” (Economic Daily, April 15, 2019)

In the civic logic, beings attain worth because they are naturally political, and they “harbor in themselves an aspiration that inclines them toward what is common, toward what unites them and incites them to break down their isolation” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.187). And this is the civil rights that shows the quality of citizens. This means that the civil right defines the dignity of persons, and the argument of employees’ rights and benefits followed a civic logic.

Thirdly, another argument in the civic logic was the discussion of the income distribution system. It was suggested that the workers were not able to refuse the company’s

requirement of overtime working because they need the salary to make a living, and the incomplete income distribution system was one of the reasons that led to this situation:

“In recent years, there are always news about migrant workers voluntarily asking for overtime working. This unreasonable practice actually shows that the basic wages of some migrant workers are too low and the wage structure is unreasonable.” (China Business News, May 3, 2017)

“Shen Jianfeng, an associate professor at the Law School of the China Institute of Labor Relations, believes that the change of excessive overtime working should start from multiple aspects. First of all, we should consider improving the salary structure. Second, we must improve the social security system and its implementation. Through social welfare system to achieve basic care and support, workers can arrange their work and rest reasonably, without working desperately overtime to save money.” (Worker’s Daily, June 10, 2017)

This suggestion about income distribution and social welfare system shows the logic of civic world. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) suggested that democracy was the most appropriate political form for the manifestation of the general will, and the peak moments in the civic world are the moments of unity in which the reality of the collective person is confirmed by councils and congresses. In these moments, “the development of collective worth was favoured when they aim at demanding justice by taking resource to the law to settle a dispute” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.192), and in this case, the change of the distribution system was a way to show the collective interest of the civic world.

Overall, the civic logic was increasing over the years, and the Labour Law was the most used argument, and was also increasing. The suggestions about income distribution system came out in the later stage. In the report submitted to the 19th CPC National Congress, “adhering to comprehensive law-based governance” was clearly defined as one of the basic strategies for upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. And the increasing adoption of the civic logic, was in line with the broad social context in the Chinese society.

### 6.3.3 Industrial logic

Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) suggested that in the industrial logic, efficiency is inscribed in a regular bond between cause and effect, and the proper functioning of beings extends the present into a future, opening up the possibility of prediction. “The industrial form of coordination thus supports an equivalence between present situations and situations to come, and constitutes a temporality” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.205). This means that tomorrow is what counts, and the worthy beings have the predictability and reliability to guarantee the projects in the future.

In this perspective, being able to come to the future is important, and this makes the argument of employees' health follows a industrial logic. In the dispute, the health issue is the most used argument in the industrial logic, and it was suggested that the long working hours does harm to the physical and psychological health of employees, and is therefore harmful to the long-term development of the people and the whole society:

“The hazards of frequent overtime and long overtime working are prominent. It damages the employee's right to rest, endangers the health of employees to a certain extent, and even leads to the occurrence of karoshi and other problems.” (Worker's Daily, May 21, 2014)

“As a human resources practitioner, Huang Meimei suggested that companies should realize that sacrificing the health of employees in exchange for short-term benefits is not worth the candle.” (Worker's Daily, March 10, 2021)

Furthermore, the industrial world is based on the efficiency of beings, their performance, their productivity, and their capacity to ensure normal operations and to respond usefully to needs (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). In the industrial logic, the worthy beings are “the ones that are functional, operational, or professional, and the ones that express their capacity to integrate themselves into the machinery and the cogwheels of an organization” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.205). As for the unworthy ones, they are deemed unproductive, inefficient, and lazy. Work represents the natural condition within the industrial world, and investment in the industrial world involves a commitment to progress and development.

In the dispute, another widely used argument in the industrial logic was the working efficiency, and it was used to argue against overtime working, suggesting that instead of increasing the productivity, the long working hours can lead to the decrease of the working efficiency and therefore has a negative effect:

“The overtime working culture can easily lead to the problem of formalism overtime working, which is waste of time and resources. In the case of being forced to work overtime, it may slow down the overall efficiency. In order to cater to the overtime working culture, you have to pretend that you are still busy with the work after finishing your job.” (Southern Metropolis Daily, March 11, 2021)

“I don’t think that working overtime can improve the competitiveness of enterprises. Conversely, overtime is a sign of inefficiency. Because of the low work efficiency, I have to work overtime.” (Worker’s Daily, December 25, 2016)

Also, focusing on the efficiency and professional, some other arguments suggested that the overtime working was a result of the wrong decisions by the leaders:

“Wang Jie feels that a lot of overtime working is caused by poor management. From the perspective of employees, it is necessary to manage the time reasonably, improve working efficiency, and complete all the work within working hours, thus to form a virtuous circle.” (China Youth Daily, October 14, 2021)

“In fact, many overtime working is not improving work efficiency, but is caused by managers’ mistakes. E.g., The direction of the project was not clear and had to be revised repeatedly; strategic mistakes made the original work useless; the original product market demand was different, which led to the work being overthrown and redone.” (Worker’s Daily, December 14, 2016)

Moreover, the working efficiency was also used as a way to criticize the domestic world and the world of fame, arguing that compulsory overtime working may lead to a kind of unhealthy overtime culture, and people had to pretend to work in order to cater to the culture and build a hardworking personal image:

As for “slack-off style overtime”, (which means employees are not concentrating on their work and doing something irrelevant, but pretend to be working hard), Hao Decheng compared it to a “cancer”, emphasizing that this kind of performance-style overtime working will only harm people in the workplace, and use false struggles to win a good impression from the leaders. If things go on like this, working efficiency will not improve, but will fall into a vicious circle of playing smart and opportunistic everywhere.” (Worker’s Daily, August 25, 2019)

Overall, the adoption of industrial logic was increasing over the years, and both arguments, the working efficiency and the employees’ health, were increasing. And in the arguments, the critique from the industrial logic to other worlds was increasing.

### **6.3.4 Domestic logic**

The domestic logic was used a lot in the early years, and after a silent in 2014, the logic increased and reached a peak in 2019 again. And in most situations, the domestic logic was complained for its focus on hierarchy and tradition.

In the domestic logic, the most used argument was proposed by the employees, suggesting that it was somehow embarrassed to get off work on time when other colleagues, especially their bosses, were still working:

“In fact, no one strictly requires that you have to work overtime, but everyone is working overtime to complete the task, how do you have the courage to not work overtime?” (Worker’s Daily, September 17, 2016)

“Liu Rong, who works at a group-buying website, also said that his boss leaves work very late every time. Gradually, colleagues in the department have all developed the habit of getting off work late. “How dare you leave work earlier than the leader?” (Worker’s Daily, June 10, 2017)

In Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) work, the more worthy ones in the domestic world include the less worthy ones, and they have precedence over the less worthy ones in the order of generations or hierarchies. “This primacy is a source of authority” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.171), meaning that “the more worthy constitute the very being of the less worthy” (ibid.). More specifically, the hierarchical superiors supply the worth of

inferiors and define their identity, and the leaders are the honour of subordinates. Furthermore, in the domestic logic, the most deficient beings are the ones who are unstable and precarious. They do not live according to their rank or stay in place, and instead, the unworthy beings in the domestic world act in a way to be noticed, uninhibited and excessive (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). In the discussion, this kind of authority and stability was complained. The bosses and leaders are regarded as the more worthy beings and have the authority over the employees, and to avoid the unworthy state, employees have to keep in line with the others, which led to a reluctant overtime working.

A second most used argument in the domestic logic was related to the traditional Chinese culture, the character of struggle and hardworking. Companies tried to encourage the employees by linking overtime working with diligent and hardworking, while the opposite views insisted that it was over-competitive rather than striving for success:

“Jack Ma once again explained 996 through Sina Weibo: “No company should not and cannot force employees to work 996; but young people themselves must understand that happiness comes from hard work! I will not defend for 996 working schedule, but would like to pay my respect to the strugglers!” (Southern Metropolis Daily, April 14, 2019)

“996 is not a free choice, not a struggle to realize one’s own values and ideals, but a toil driven by fear. The purpose of this kind of struggle is to stand out, and it can only bring more profits to capital, but it cannot bring joy and happiness to one’s soul, and may generate more anxiety instead. Such a struggle often means grabbing more, and may squeeze the living space of others.” (21 Century Business Herald, April 16, 2019)

In the domestic logic, a good upbringing is considered to be a first and foremost way to access superiority, and one must have been well brought up to have good bearing and behave correctly (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). A well-ordered world is thus a world in which beings “have been well brought up, and are trained in good manners” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.173). Furthermore, tradition is one of the ways that a domestic order can be established, and people have to ensure the permanence and continuity of a tradition in the domestic world (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). As a part of the traditional Chinese culture, hardworking is always regarded as a valuable virtue, and therefore has been used as a way for the companies to rationalize their decisions.



Related to the permanence and continuity of tradition, the argument of “overtime working culture” was also a complaint of the domestic logic:

“She believes that once a company forms an “overtime culture”, few people will disobey, because it is directly related to the career development of the workers.” (Worker’s Daily, January 20, 2018)

“Many companies focus too much on the development and market share, and do not pay enough attention to the physical and mental health of employees. Therefore, they encourage employees to work overtime, and regard overtime working as a corporate culture to show the dedication of employees.” (China Youth Daily, May 11, 2018)

A culture in a society usually has a history or is known by a lot of people, and shows a kind of positive implication. By make overtime working a “corporate culture”, employees were dragged into the domestic logic to follow the tradition and behave in good manners, which made it even more difficult to refuse.

Another widely found complaint about the domestic logic lied in its nature of hierarchy. In the domestic world, “it is through reference to hierarchy that order can be established among beings”, and “beings in a state of worthiness achieve their superiority as part of a hierarchy” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.165). This means that there is an order of ranks in the domestic world, the leader owns a superior position and a higher rank, and people have to show their deference and respect according to that rank.

In the arguments, it was suggested that the concern of getting underhand punishment was one of the reasons that employees had to accept overtime working:

“If you don't work overtime, you won't be able to outstand your performance, and you will be given the impression of being lazy, and even the leader will think you are disloyal and will give you underhand punishment.” (Worker’s Daily, December 15, 2015)

“Li Dongming, who is working in software development company in Shanghai, said, “We have no food and transportation benefits here, the leaders and

colleagues just do not get off work. If I get off work early, I will be getting underhand punishment.” (Worker’s Daily, January 20, 2018)

In the workplace, the leaders and bosses are of a higher rank, and the underhand punishment has been used as a way to show their hierarchy position, so that the employees can not refuse.

Moreover, in the early years, the hierarchy position was expressed in a more direct way through the strict management in some labor-intensive companies:

Xiaowen told the reporter that since he joined Foxconn, the management culture he has come into contact with is militarized. “Subordinates must show absolute obedience to their superiors, and sometimes they force you to do a lot of things.” (Southern Metropolis Daily, May 28, 2010)

In these arguments, the domestic logic was used in the companies’ management strategies, and was complained by employees.

Over the years, the adoption of domestic logic reached its first peak in 2010, when the strict management was complained. And after 2016, the logic increased again, with a more gentle expression. New arguments such as the overtime working culture and hardworking character came into the discussion during this period, and comparing with the direct orders, the employees were kept in line with the requirement of overtime working with an obscured expression.

Furthermore, although not convincing enough, the companies’ encourage of hardworking was influenced by the broader social context. In the Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Party’s Major Achievements and Historical Experience for Centennial Struggle, it was suggested that “the excellent traditional Chinese culture is the outstanding advantage of the Chinese nation and the foundation for us to gain a firm foothold in the turbulent world culture. It must be inherited and carried forward in accordance with the conditions of the new era.” (CPC, 2021). The traditional Chinese culture is regarded quite valuable and important by the government, and as a part of the Chinese virtue, the encourage of hardworking was a way to show the companies’ consistency with the policy.

### 6.3.5 World of fame

In the world of fame, people may impose an order and reach agreement by taking the opinion of others into account. As it is suggested by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, p.179), “it is opinion that establishes equivalence”, and the worth of each being depends on the opinion of others. To a large extent, the reactions of public opinion determine success, and it is fame that established the worth.

In the dispute, the adoption of the world of fame usually came together with the domestic logic. In the situations where other colleagues were working overtime, besides a domestic, the logic of fame was also recognized. Employees care about what other colleagues think of them, and to show their conformity with the situation, they have to act as others. In this perspective, it is the opinion of others that plays a part in the justification, and therefore follows a logic of fame.

Furthermore, in the world of public opinion, “people have a common desire to be recognized and a common craving for respect” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.179). The relation of worth is a relation of identification, and worthy beings are the ones that distinguish themselves to be visible, famous and recognized. To become worthy, people need to be recognized by others, to attract their attention, to convince them, to obtain respect from them, and to earn or win others support. In the discussion, there were arguments where employees were worried about their personal image, and they were trying to build a hardworking picture for themselves through overtime working. From a logic of fame, it was the opinion of leaders that affect the employees’ performance evaluation and career development, and employees build their own person image to earn the leaders’ support. And overtime working, in this way, became the way for the employees to be identified by the leaders:

“Because of his “personal image” in the eyes of the leaders, Xiao Zhou sometimes deliberately delays his time of getting off from work. He said that the pressure of career promotion and peer competition will also prompt him to “voluntarily” work overtime.” (Worker’s Daily, May 31, 2017)

### 6.3.6 The inspired logic

The inspired logic was an emerging logic that came out into the discussion in the later stage, and became an important part of the justification in 2016. There were three main

arguments that have been used in the inspired logic: the ability of innovation, the work life balance, and the invasion of people's personal time.

Firstly, the ability of innovation was the most used argument in the inspired logic. It was suggested that in the competitive market, the innovation ability was especially important for the companies in the IT industry, and that working overtime was not a good way to achieve that:

“As far as the technology industry is concerned, the real measurement is not the amount of labor input, but the improvement of labor efficiency and the innovation of breakthrough products.” (21 Century Business Herald, April 9, 2019)

“For companies, creating a corporate culture that encourages overtime work is not only unhelpful for enhancing the core competitiveness of the company, but may inhibit and damage the self-innovation ability of the company. In the fierce market competition, what companies should strive for is technology, quality, and management, rather than the physical strength and endurance of employees.” (People's Daily, April 11, 2019)

Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) suggested that the inspired world was defined by the outpouring of inspiration, which is driven by love, passion, and the desire to create. Investment in inspiration means to evade regular routines and accept the risks of failure in pursuit of creative success, and beings in the inspired world have to adopt an open and welcoming attitude to allow the relationship of creation (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). Furthermore, it was also argued that beings are appreciated for their uniqueness, and worthy persons gain their value by asserting their own uniqueness. “It is through what they have that is most original and most peculiar to them, that is, through their own genius, that they give themselves to others and serve the common good.” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.161).

For the companies, the innovation is important because it helps to provide their own uniqueness, so that they can survive in the competitive market. And this is particularly important for the knowledge-intensive industries, such as the IT industry. And overtime working, in this perspective, was criticised for its negative effect on innovation and

creation. And the inspired logic, therefore, was used as a way to argue against overtime working.

The argument of innovation ability focused on the development of company, while on the other hand, focused on the employees, the argument of work life balance and the invasion of personal time offered a critique to the industrial logic. It was suggested that excessive overtime working made the employees exhausted, and there was no room for personal lives. The balance between work and life was broken, and they did not have the time or energy for entertainment and family:

“You will often be asked to work overtime, and weekends are not entirely your own, so it is difficult to separate work and life. Qin Ji said, I still have two daughters to take care of, and it is difficult to find a balance between work and life.” (China Business News, August 7, 2013)

“But it is even more important to see that if there is too much excessive overtime working, the negative effect may be even greater: frequent overtime working affects family happiness, aggravates psychological pressure, and the resulting of occupational diseases are also more prominent.” (People’s Daily, June 17, 2016)

“Getting off work late takes up time for employees to rest and recharge, as well as time for family life and cultural entertainment.” (Worker’s Daily, December 14, 2016)

In Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006, p.162) work, the worthy persons serve the common good through their own genius, and they “have the duty of shaking off the yoke, of separating themselves from the herd, and of seeking individual liberation, not in order to pursue a selfish goal, but in order to achieve human dignity while re-establishing authentic relations among human beings”. And the unworthy beings in the inspired world, are therefore the ones who show the determination and reproduction of sameness (as opposed to uniqueness), and the ones who show fixity and stability (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). The industrial logic, in this perspective, is frozen in the repetition of routines and locked into the reproduction of what is already known, and therefore forms a critique from the inspired world.

In the arguments, employees' lives are fixed by the long working hours, and without the personal lives, their "individual liberation" was limited, and the inspired logic was used as a criticise in the justification.

### **6.3.7 People-oriented logic**

#### **6.3.7.1 People-oriented view of justice**

Proposed by president Hu Jintao in 2003, the people-oriented idea means to take people as the core of value and the standard of society, to take the survival and development of people as the highest value, to do everything for the people, and to do everything to serve the people. In 2007, in the report of the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, president Hu Jintao pointed out that the core of the "Scientific Outlook on Development" is the people-oriented idea. And to thoroughly implement the Scientific Outlook on Development, we must adhere to the people-oriented approach.

To adhere to the people-oriented idea, we must always take realizing, safeguarding, and developing the fundamental interests of the majority of the people as the starting point and goal of all work of the party and the country, and respect the dominant position of the people. The people-oriented idea requires the protection of the rights and interests of the people, the direction of common prosperity, and the promotion of the all-round development of people. It shows the concern for people's living conditions, the respect for people's value, and the emphasis on people's role (CPC, 2007).

Furthermore, with the development of the economics, it was pointed out that China's economy has shifted from the phase of high-speed growth to the phase of high-quality development, and that the high-quality development is the inevitable choice for China's economy to overcome structural problems and resource and environment constraints after over 30 years' rapid growth. In the report submitted to the 19th CPC National Congress, president Xi Jinping pointed out that, "the principal contradiction in Chinese society has been transformed into one between the people's ever-growing needs for a better life and the unbalanced and inadequate development" (CPC, 2017), and this shows the importance of a balanced and high-quality development.

The high-quality development also indicates that it is consistent with the people-oriented idea. In 2015, the development idea of "people-centered approach" was stated clearly at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CCCPC, and "sharing" was included as one of the

five development ideas. As president Xi Jinping stressed, “We must always orient development with people. Development is for the people, and that is the fundamental stand of the Marxian political economics” (CPC, 2015). At the Party’s 19th National Congress, the idea of people-centered approach was further consolidated. It was suggested that “the people are the creators of history and the fundamental force that determines the future and destiny of the party and the country. We must uphold the dominant position of the people, and regard the people’s yearning for a better life as a goal, and rely on the people to create great historical achievements” (CPC, 2017).

### **6.3.7.2 People-oriented logic in the dispute**

In the dispute, the people-oriented logic was used a lot in 2010, and after a decrease, the justification came into the picture again in 2016, and had been playing an important part since then. The most used argument that followed the people-oriented idea was the concern about employees’ dignity and respect. In the early years, it was argued that in the labour-intensive companies, workers were regarded as tools rather than a complete human being. And the companies lack the respect for their workers:

“Zhang Ming, a professor of political science at Renmin University of China, said that workers are not machines or components. They are living there without entertainment and friends, and this is unbearable for many “post-80s” and “post-90s” migrant workers.” (China Youth Daily, May 15, 2010)

“If you do not pursue profits, capital will not be capital. However, you must not forget that people are not machines and have their own spiritual needs.” (Worker’s Daily, May 19, 2010)

Later, when the dispute came into the IT industry, the dignity and respect for employees was raised again, suggesting that people-oriented means to care about employees’ physical and mental health:

“Labor is glorious. As long as the people-oriented idea is adhered to, and within the scope of the legal framework, the struggle of laborers is always worth encouragement. The point of the matter is that struggle should bring happiness to workers, but not harm or overdraw their physical and mental health.” (China Youth Daily, September 1, 2021)

This focus on employees' dignity and respect was in line with the people-oriented logic, and was also a critique addressed to the market logic. It was the companies' chasing of profit that led to the ignorance of dignity and respect, and the market logic in this perspective, was criticized by the people-oriented idea.

A second most used argument in the people-oriented logic was related to the inspired logic, that is, the work-life balance. Similarly, it was argued that the excessive overtime working has broken the balance between work and life, and there were no room for personal time. In the people-oriented idea, people's interest was harmed by the unbalanced work-life relation, and people's value was also ignored.

Thirdly, from the view of development, it was argued in the dispute that the excessive overtime working was an overdraft of the future, and no matter for the company or the whole society, overtime working does no good for long-term development:

“Excessive overtime working not only hinders the sustainable development of enterprises, but also may damage the endurance of high-quality development. Because the health of workers is the cornerstone of national development. Excessively extended working hours can lead to a series of negative consequences, including health issues, reduced fertility rate, mental illness, and karoshi.” (Worker's Daily, April 11, 2019)

This point of development followed the idea of high-quality development of China's economy and the all-round development of people. As the core of the “Scientific Outlook on Development”, the people-oriented idea refuses the short-term interest, and aims for sustainable development instead. And the long-term development argument, in this way, followed the people-oriented idea.

Furthermore, the people-oriented logic can also be a way to criticize the civic and industrial logic. In the civic arguments where the income distribution system showed its imperfection, it was argued that the income of the workers was not reasonable enough, and to make a living, they have no choice but to work overtime. In the perspective of people-oriented idea, people's rights and benefits were not fully protected, and is therefore a critique to the civic logic. On the other hand, in the industrial logic, “the dignity of humanity is threatened by the treatment of people as things” (Boltanski and Thévenot,



2006, p.211), and as a human being, people's value was underestimated, which forms a critique from the people-oriented logic.

### **6.3.7.3 People-oriented logic as a new logic**

The evidence from the literature as well as empirical data has shown that the people-oriented logic does have the ability to adjust to the justification frameworks and their corresponding mechanisms, and could be regarded as a new logic. The new people-oriented logic is not completely contained by the existing justification framework, and it is able to talk to the existing logics. It has the ability to compromise with and critic the other justification logics, and therefore it is reasonable to suggest that the people-oriented logic is in fact a new logic in the Chinese context.

To confirm that the people-oriented logic can constitute a new principle for judgement and justification of action and that it can express a common good that is irreducible, in that it cannot be reduced to other forms of the common good, we need to confirm that the people-oriented logic can be used as a foundation for a critique of competing principles of justification.

In the market logic, companies are attributing value to labour, and to save money and reduce labour cost, companies are pushing employees to work overtime with an overwhelming workload. The chase of profit from the market logic has resulted in the ignorance of people's health, dignity and personal life, which is a harm to people's interest, and therefore forms a critique from the people's-oriented logic.

The principle of civic justification founded on the collective will, and the justification in the dispute mainly focused on the collective system. And the people-oriented logic could also be used as a foundation for a critique, arguing that the employees' rights and benefits are not fully protected by the existing law and income distribution system, and that they are forced into a situation to sacrifice their dignity and to work overtime due to the imperfection of the current collective system.

The industrial logic, which is the principle of efficiency and productivity, is also a principle that is criticised by the new people-oriented logic. The chase for efficiency has led to the treatment of people as things, and the dignity of humanity is threatened, and the value as a human being was underestimated in this case, which forms a critique from the people's-oriented logic.

In the domestic logic, where tradition and hierarchy are valued, employees are working overtime as it is the requirement from the boss, and there is no space left for them to refuse. And from the people-oriented logic point of view, the benefit and dignity of individual is ignored in this situation, and the new logic is used as a foundation for critique.

As we have seen, the people-oriented logic forms an active resource for questioning and challenging a certain number of specific points regarding the legitimacy of other logics of justification, and this capacity of critique suggests that the people-oriented logic can found a new common good and establish a new principle of justification in the Chinese context.

In the people-oriented logic, the principle of equivalence is people's interest, and the people with higher status are the ones that value people's dignity and interest, while the unworthy ones are those who ignore and harm people's interest. Investment in the people-oriented world involves a commitment to people's interest, and regard the people's yearning for a better life as a goal.

The people-oriented logic's special focus on people also fills the gap in Boltanski and Thévenot's justification framework to some extent. Nash (2014) argued that the justification framework neglects the principles of human rights, and when talking about rights, Boltanski and Thévenot are inclined to understand rights claims as strategies for individual advantage, rather than as normative demands invoking principles of justice. In the civic world, actions are justified with "the general will", based on Rousseau's "On the Social Contract", and Nash (2014) suggested that the limitation of this civic world is that it only applies to citizens, and that human beings who are not citizens but living like citizens, should also enjoy the same rights. Human rights are not with a particular state, but with humanity, and the minimal social rights should be accorded to people on the basis of their humanity, not their nationality.

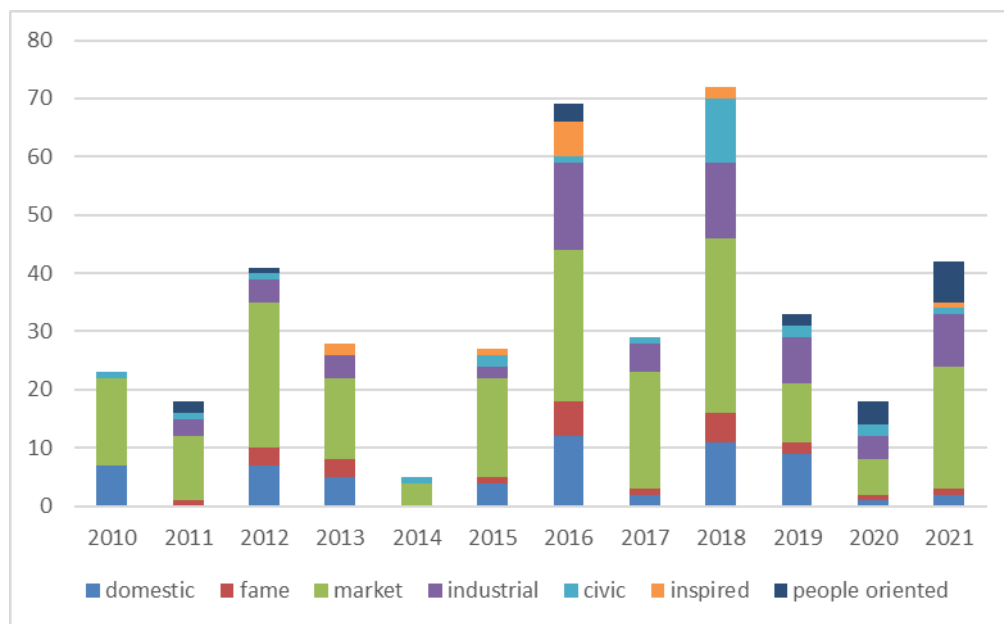
The people-oriented logic, in this perspective, is in a similar position with Nash's idea. In the people-oriented logic, people is the core of value and the standard of the society, and the survival and development of people is regarded as the highest value. The government do everything for the people, and do everything to serve the people. In this case, the individual's dignity and interest is respected on the one hand, and on the other hand, the collective interest of people is also achieved through the dominant position of the people.

Furthermore, the neglect of the principles of human rights also led to the lack of conceptualization of the state in Boltanski and Thévenot's work (Nash, 2014). Claims for justice using human rights invariably address states, whether in terms of demands for new national law to enact international obligations, the implementation of existing law, the reform of regulations and procedures to deal with discrimination, or policymaking to redress gross inequalities and eradicate absolute poverty. And could also be understand through the critique from the people-oriented logic to the civic logic, where the existing law and income distribution system are criticised of not sufficient enough to protect employees' rights and benefits, and thus forced the employees to work overtime.

## 6.4 How actors adopted the justification logics

In this section, the justification logic will be studied in relation to the different actors. I will focus on the logics provided by the different actors, and how the actors engaged with the justification logics to express their view on the dispute of working hours.

### 6.4.1 Employees and workers' justification



**Figure 6-5 Employees and workers' justification**

Figure 6-5 shows the justifications adopted by the employees and workers in the dispute of working hours, and also illustrates the changes over time.

In the dispute, the market has been used as a main justification logic by the employees and workers, and it remained its dominant position over the years. The industrial logic and

domestic logic also played an important part in employees' justification. The adoption of these three logics showed that the employees' argument tend to focus on their own experience in the workplace, either explain their chooses or complain about their situation. The attitude was shown through their personal stories, and the views were expressed in a relatively indirect way.

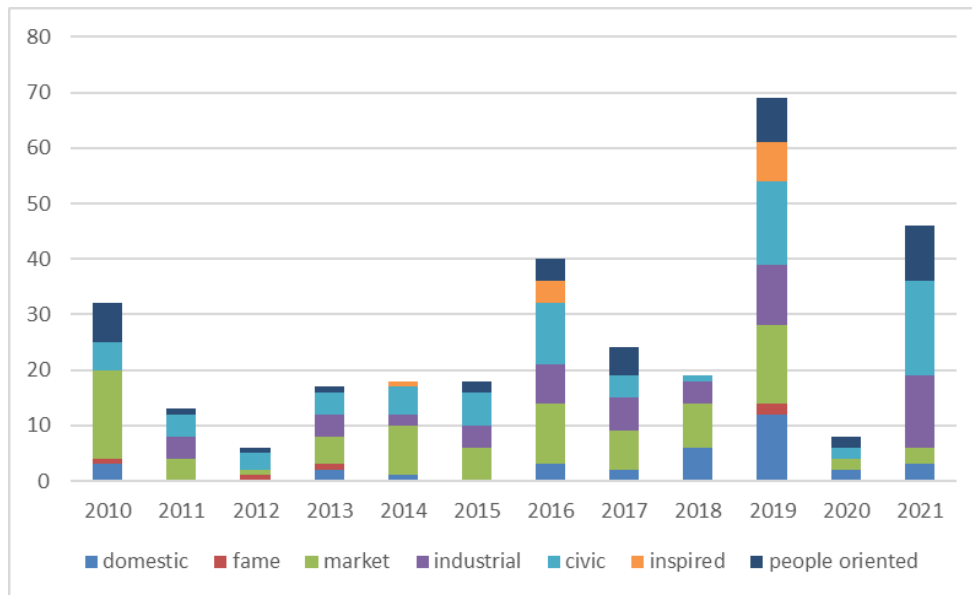
Furthermore, although the industrial logic and domestic logic were of a similar proportion, they got their position in different period. In the early stage, it was the domestic logic that took more importance, and after 2016, the industrial logic increased and surpassed the adoption of domestic. The shift from domestic to industrial logic showed the focus shifted from companies' strict management strategies to their working efficiency, and the attitude shifted from complaining to argue against the overtime working, which indicates a more direct way of criticizing by the employees.

For the logics that were used less, the inspired logic and people-oriented idea appeared more in the later stage, and from 2016, the inspired logic showed a decreasing trend, while the people-oriented was increasing. Both argued about the balance between work and life, the different tendency in the adoption of the two logics showed the concern about basic needs has shifted to the dignity and respect of human beings.

Overall, the justification adopted by employees and workers shifted from a centralization on market to a more balanced and mixed logics, and in 2016, it was the first time when all the seven logics were all recognized in the employees' justification. In the meanwhile, new type of justifications came into the discussion as time develops.

## 6.4.2 Newspaper commentators' justification

### 6.4.2.1 Newspaper commentator as a whole



**Figure 6-6 Newspaper commentators' justification over the years**

Figure 6-6 shows the justification logics used by the seven newspaper and the changes over the years. Overall, there was a mix of different logics among the newspaper commentators' justification, especially in the later stage.

The market logic and civic logic were the two dominant justifications logics adopted by the newspaper commentators. Within the two logics, the proportion of the market logic was decreasing over the years, while the civic logic shared an increased percentage. This showed a shift from the cost and profit of the companies to the legal requirements and employees' rights. And as the civic logic was used as a way to argue against the overtime working, the critique addressed by the newspaper commentators also increased along with the adoption of the civic world.

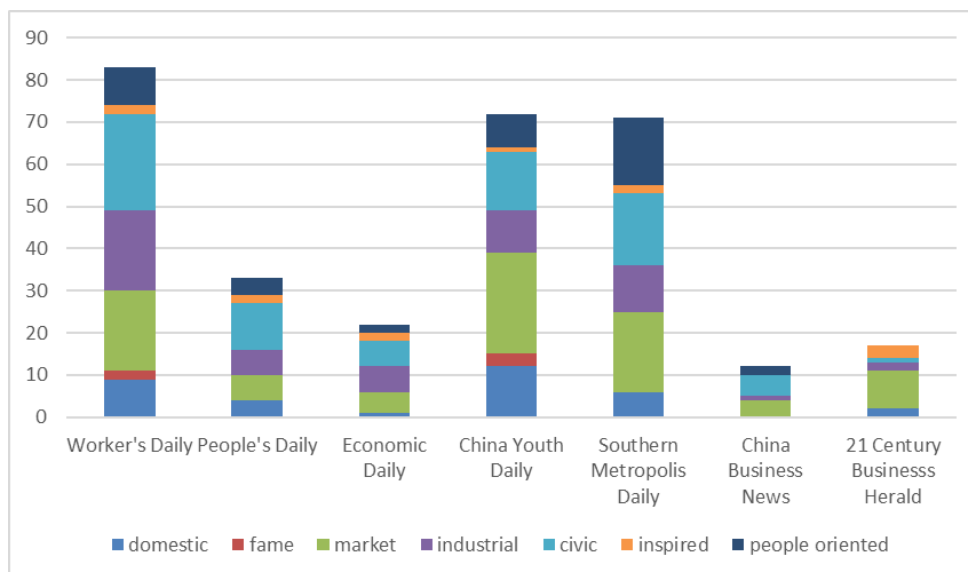
Following the market and civic logic, the industrial logic and the people-oriented idea were another two important ways of justification among the seven newspapers, which were particularly conspicuous in the later years. Both logics focused on the negative effect of the overtime working, and showed an increased critique to the market logic.

Of the four logics that have been used a lot by the newspaper commentators, the civic, industrial and people-oriented idea included a kind of critique to the market logic, and this

showed the newspapers' opposite attitude against the long working hours. Further, position of the newspaper commentators was also indicated through this process, and it was obvious that they were taking the position of the employees rather than the companies.

#### 6.4.2.2 Justifications in different type of newspapers

The seven newspapers have a combination of the political stance. On the one hand, the Worker's Daily, People's Daily and Economic Daily were the official newspapers that are more connected to the attitude of the government. On the other hand, the Southern Metropolis Daily, China Business News and 21 Century Business Herald were the commercialized newspapers that are more critical in their opinion. The China Youth Daily, however, was the first for profit newspaper and the first independently operated central government news media portal in China. With the feature from both sides, the stance of China Youth Daily was kind of in the middle between the official and commercialized ones.



**Figure 6-7 Justifications in different newspapers**

Figure 6-7 shows the justification logics adopted by the different newspapers in the dispute of working hours, and the order of the columns reflected the political stance of the newspapers: the three on the left were the official ones, while the three on the right were the commercialized ones, with the China Youth Daily represents the middle.

For the official newspapers, the civic logic was the dominant justification, followed by the market and industrial logic. The preference on civic logic indicated the focus on the Labour Law, which was determined by their official position.

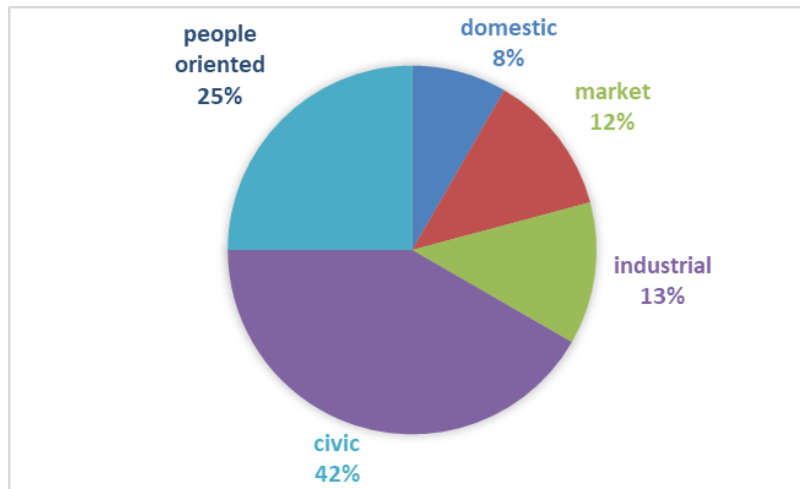
The commercialized newspapers favored the market logic instead, to explore the reasons for the companies' actions. And according to the commercialized newspapers, the motivation of the companies to ask the employees to work overtime, was explained from a cost and profit perspective. Besides the market logic, the civic logic was also adopted by the commercialized newspapers from the perspective of rights and benefits.

In the middle of the official and commercialized newspapers, the China Youth Daily focused on young people's lives in the competitive market, and shared their stories and experiences through the market logic. And with a balanced adoption of the other justification logics, such as the civic, domestic, industrial and the people-oriented idea, the market logic was also criticized.

For the people-oriented idea that was proposed by the Chinese government, it was adopted somehow equally on both sides. In the commercialized newspapers, it was the Southern Metropolis Daily that had a special focus on the labor-intensive industry as a result of its geographic location, and thus contributed to the use of people-oriented idea.

Overall, the justification logics adopted by the different newspapers showed a slightly difference in relation to their political positions, and in general, different type of newspapers all acted in line with the social political environment. Moreover, it was also indicated that the use of the logics was influenced by the broader context in the Chinese society.

### 6.4.3 Justification of governmental legal workers and legal authority



**Figure 6-9 Justification of governmental legal workers and legal authority**

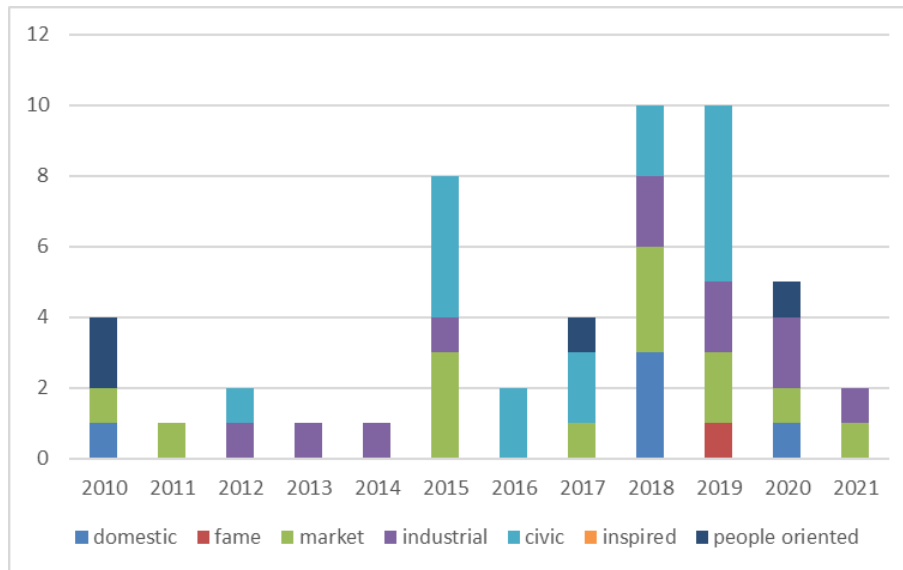
The governmental legal workers and legal authority could be regarded as the voice from the government. As the representation of the government, the justification logics by the two actors were relatively limited compared with other actors. Determined by their identity and position, the governmental legal workers and legal authority tend to argue from a legal perspective, and the importance of following the Labour Law was stressed in a lot of circumstances. Furthermore, from the view of public service, the employees constitute an important part of the people in the country, and their dignity and rights were also emphasized by the actors. This has led to the adoption of the civic logic and people-oriented idea, which became the two main justification logics of governmental legal workers and legal authority.

### 6.4.4 Lawyers' justification

The lawyers' voice was limited at first, and became louder after 2016. The lawyers are usually interviewed by the newspapers when a labour dispute happens, especially when they are involved in a lawsuit. Given the specific situation where lawyers expressed their views, the justification logics that are available for them were quite limited, and the Labour Law became the only option. Therefore, the dominant justification of the lawyers, was the civic logic.



### 6.4.5 Academics' justification



**Figure 6-10 Academics' justification over the years**

The justification logics adopted by the academics was limited at first, and then became mixed and balanced between the various logics over the years. The civic, market and industrial logic were the three main logics recognized in the academics' justifications.

The civic logic was used a lot by the academics from 2015 to 2019, and it was argued that the supervision of the law was inefficient, and reinforcement of the law was urged for by the academics. Different from the civic logic, the market and industrial logic received a longer and more continuous attention from the academics, and after 2018, the adoption of market logic decreased, while the industrial logic was adopted more in that period. This shows a shift from the companies' labour cost to the employees' health conditions, and to take the future into consideration, the academics were concerned about the long-term development of the economy.

## 6.5 Summary

In this chapter, the justification in the news reports was explored, and the engagement of the different logics were analyzed.

Focusing on working hours, actors involved in the dispute were recognized, that is, employees and workers, company, newspaper commentators, academics, governmental legal workers, legal authority, specialists, and lawyers. Among them, the governmental

legal workers and legal authority represented the voice of the government, and the political stance of the newspaper was also taken into consideration.

In the dispute of working hours, seven logics were recognized, which include the six logics from Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) work, and a unique people-oriented idea from the Chinese context. Among the seven logics, the market logic was a dominant justification, and the civic and industrial logic also played an important role. The adoption of the logics was changing over the years, for example, the civic and industrial logic showed an increasing trend, while the people-oriented idea has a higher proportion in the later stage. The inspired logic was the new logic that came into the picture after 2013.

Within a particular justification logic, the argument used in the dispute was also changing. For example, the shift from salary and cost to the competitive labour market in the market logic, and in the domestic, there was also a shift from the strict management to the hardworking character.

For the actors, it was found that there was a difference in their choice of justification logics. The employees and companies both preferred the market logic, but made their justifications from different perspectives: the employees argued with their salary and workload, while the companies explained with their increasing business. The lawyers focused on the civic logics, while the governmental legal workers and legal authority also had a special focus on people-oriented idea besides the civic logic. The academics, on the other hand, shared a combination of the civic, market and industrial logic. The newspaper commentators' adoption of justification logic was influenced by their political positions: the official ones preferred civic logic, and the commercialized ones preferred the market logic.

Overall, the variation and changes of the justification over time was explored in this chapter, and it was a reflection of the broader social and political context in China. The changes in the logics provided a ground for justification.

## 7 Working hours as an ongoing dispute

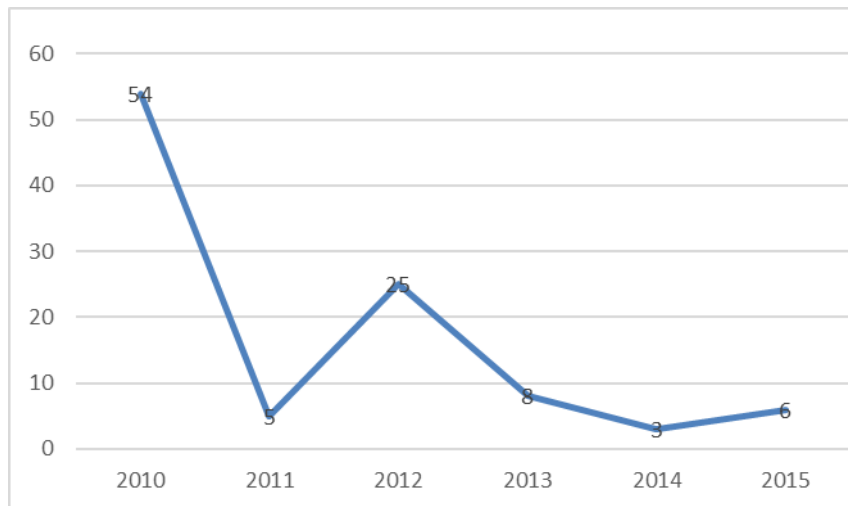
In this chapter, the cases of Foxconn and 996 working schedule will be studied.

Justifications will be explored in the local disputes, and the resolution of the dispute will be studied

### 7.1 Foxconn

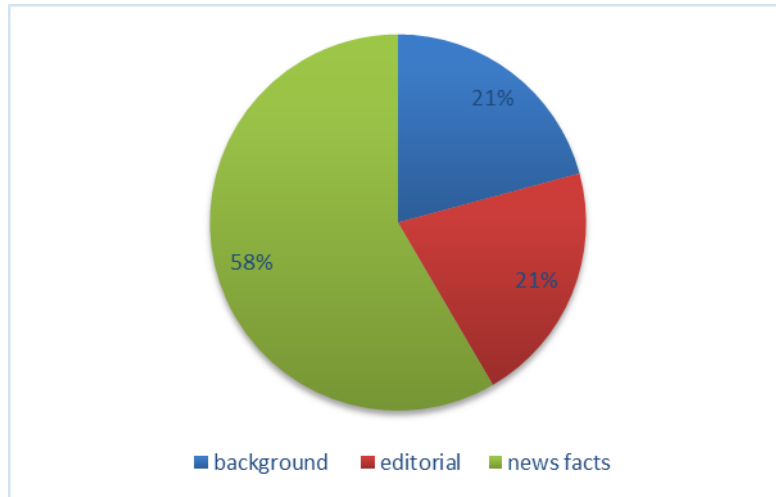
In 2010, Foxconn, an electronics contract manufacturer, was involved in several incidents relating to poor working conditions and long working hours. Throughout the year, 14 employees in Foxconn committed suicide, and the company was criticised of poor working conditions. Later the company installed suicide-prevention netting at the base of buildings in some facilities and promised to offer substantially higher wages. In this dispute, the discussion about Foxconn's labour conditions lasted from 2010 to 2015, and 101 newspaper articles were collected. And among them, the working hours and salaries of employees were discussed a lot.

#### 7.1.1 Descriptive results



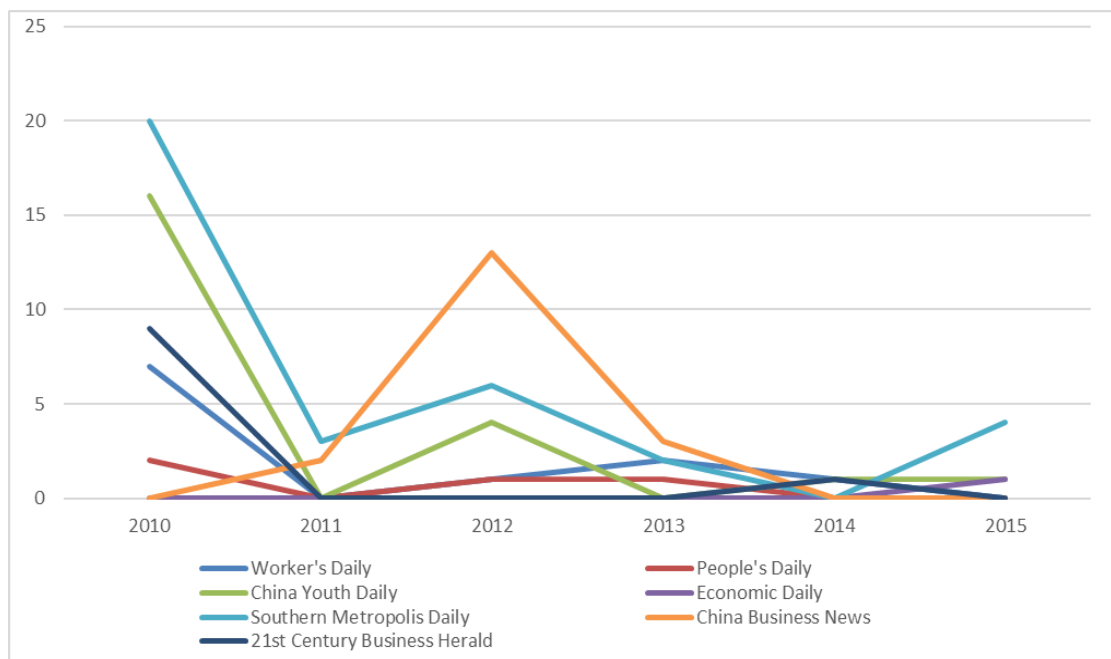
**Figure 7-1 Number of articles in each year**

The discussion of Foxconn was heated in 2010, when several suicides were committed and workers' working condition was noticed by the public. The reasons of the suicides were explored, and the experiences of the labour workers were revealed. And then in 2012, Foxconn announced an overall pay raise among its front-line workers, and brought back people's attention on labour conditions to some extent, and therefore led to another peak in the number of articles.



**Figure 7-2 Type of articles**

For the type of articles, over half of the articles were background articles, which introduced the background information of the company and general ideas of labour conditions and overtime working. The editorial comments article and news facts article were of the same proportion in the dispute of Foxconn. The news facts articles focused more on the incidents themselves that happened in Foxconn company, while the editorial comment articles showed their own view about the dispute.



**Figure 7-3 Articles from each newspaper**

For the different newspaper, the Southern Metropolis Daily contributed the most discussion, followed by China Youth Daily and China Business News. In 2010, when the discussion of workers' suicide was heated, Southern Metropolis Daily and China Youth

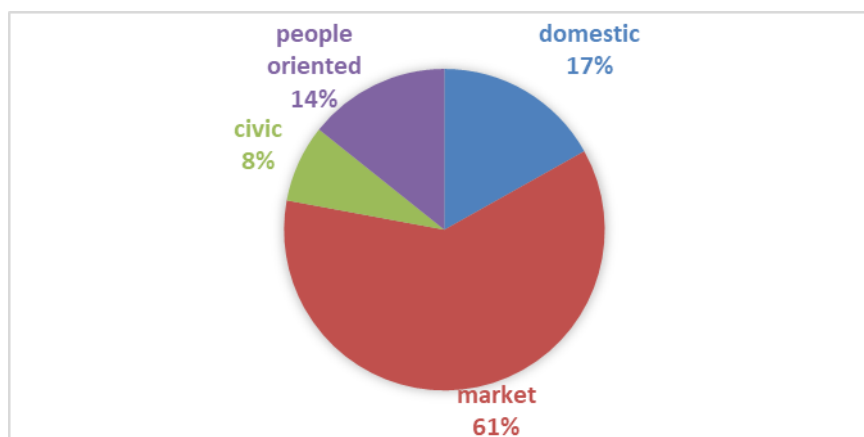
Daily were the ones that paid more attention to the dispute, while in 2012, it was China Business News that shared its view on the dispute.

### 7.1.2 Focus and actors in the dispute

The focus of the Foxconn dispute is the workers' overall conditions, and whether it was a sweatshop factory. In the discussion, working experience and overtime working were the two topics that mentioned most, followed by the discussion of suicide. There were also some discussions about the salaries for workers and the labour conditions. In this case, it was the suicide topic that triggered the discussion, and in the exploration of the workers' working experience, people focused on the company's way of managing and its influence on the workers; and on the topic of overtime working, the working pattern and working hours were explored.

The actors most often recognised, and coded, as involved in the dispute, sharing their experience and views in the discussion, were the workers and newspaper editorial commentators. The company also played an important part in the dispute by responding to some particular questions and criticisms, and taking actions. The workers, the newspaper commentators, and the company were the three main actors involved in this case, as for other actors, although not strong, there were also some voices from the governmental legal workers as well as the academics.

### 7.1.3 Justification involved in the dispute



**Figure 7-4 Justifications in Foxconn case**

The type of justifications involved in the dispute of Foxconn was somehow limited, three of the logics are from Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), while there was also a unique

expression that comes from the Chinese context, that is, the people-oriented idea. In this case, the market logic was the most used type of justification, followed by the domestic logic and people-oriented idea, and the civic logic was only used in a few arguments.

### **7.1.3.1 The market logic**

The market logic was the main justification logic used in the dispute of Foxconn. Workers and newspaper commentators were the two main actors that used this justification, and both actors used the market logic as their primary justification logic.

In the market logic, employees and workers tend to justify their attitude of overtime working through their salaries, arguing that it was their way to make money and live their lives, for example,

“A female worker interviewed also told Pan Yi helplessly, you can say that we would rather choose to work long hours, and there is nothing wrong with that. We sell our labor to make money. We travel all the way to work. What's the use of letting us rest on Sunday if we can't live our lives.”

“Wang Daqiao told the reporter that for him, overtime hours are very important, and it directly affect his wages, and this is the purpose of his coming to Shenzhen to work.”

In the market logic, money is the measure of all things, and is the regarded as the form of evidence. The profit, the benefit, the paycheck and the result of the transaction are all expressed through cash. And in this dispute, the workers rely on their salaries to make a living, and therefore their justification followed a market logic.

Similarly, the argument used by newspaper comments also regarded money as evidence in the market world. Newspaper comments tend to argue in their editorial articles that making the workers work long hours is a way for the company to save cost, and therefore also followed a market logic.

“For companies like Foxconn, which originally relied on the advantage of cheap labor costs, the reduction in international orders and the increasingly strict cost strategy of its international customers have become a time bomb hanging over their heads, and the cost-driven crisis transmission may erupt at any time.

In fact, in recent years, Foxconn's labor costs have continued to decline, and the salary policy design of low basic salary and overtime pay has made the bottom-level front-line employees become mechanical workers.”

As the main justification, the market logic was also used as a target, and other logic usually address their critique to the market world. For example, there were arguments that argued that the company's chasing profit and saving cost has made the workers became tools and machines, which did harm to the workers' interpersonal communication at work and was also an ignorance of their dignity and respect as human being. And as a justification that stresses the value of human being and people's overall interest, this follows a critique from the people-oriented idea.

Another critique of the market world in this case came from the civic world, arguing that as a result of the competition in the industry, the chasing of profit has led to the violation of workers right and benefits,

“The occurrence of the incident has reflected the disrespect for labor laws and regulations, and the disrespect for employees' labor rights and rest rights, especially the right to demand remuneration according to work.”

### **7.1.3.2 Domestic logic**

The domestic logic was mainly used by workers and employees as a way to complain and criticize the management of Foxconn in the dispute, in the topics of working experience. It was argued by the workers that the company was very strict in managing, and that they must follow the leaders' orders.

“Xiaowen told the reporter that since he entered Foxconn, the management culture of Foxconn that he has come into contact with is militarized, “The subordinates must obey their superiors absolutely, and sometimes they have to force you to do many things.”

“Ma, a Foxconn employee, told the reporter: "Ten hours of work every day are very monotonous, and the work discipline is very strict. If you talk casually to your colleagues, you will be criticized by your boss. If it is serious, you may

even make a demerit. We usually don't have time to communicate with your co-workers.”

In the domestic world, hierarchy is regarded as the high common principle, and superior figures and leaders are the most worthy. According to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, p.171), “the more worthy in the domestic world usually include the less worthy ones, and they have precedence over the less worthy in the order of generations and hierarchies”, which means that the hierarchy creates the authority. In the arguments of the workers, they are complaining about the strict management of the company, which stresses obedience and hierarchy between managers and employees, and follows a criticise of the domestic logic.

### **7.1.3.3 The people-oriented logic**

In the discussion, newspaper commentators suggested that there was hardly any interpersonal communication at work in Foxconn company, and the workers have become tools and machines with the company's profit chasing and cost saving. This is an ignorance of workers' dignity and respect as human being.

“The workers' lives are basically included in the production process of the factory and are isolated from the outside world. Everyone is on a state of “atomization” and becomes the appendant of the production line. They have lost their basic lives as a human being.”

The argument followed the order of people-oriented idea, who stresses the value and life of human being and people's overall interest. And it was used as a criticize of the market logic.

### **7.1.4 Resolving the dispute**

The dispute on Foxconn focused on workers' pay, working hours and working condition, and the company is criticized of regarding the workers as tools. In response to the criticisms, Foxconn took several actions. For example, the company installed suicide-prevention netting at the base of buildings in some facilities, introduced several measurements to care for the workers, encouraged the communication between workers and managers, provided consulting services, increased the basic wages as well as the overtime pay for the workers, and decreased the hours of overtime working.

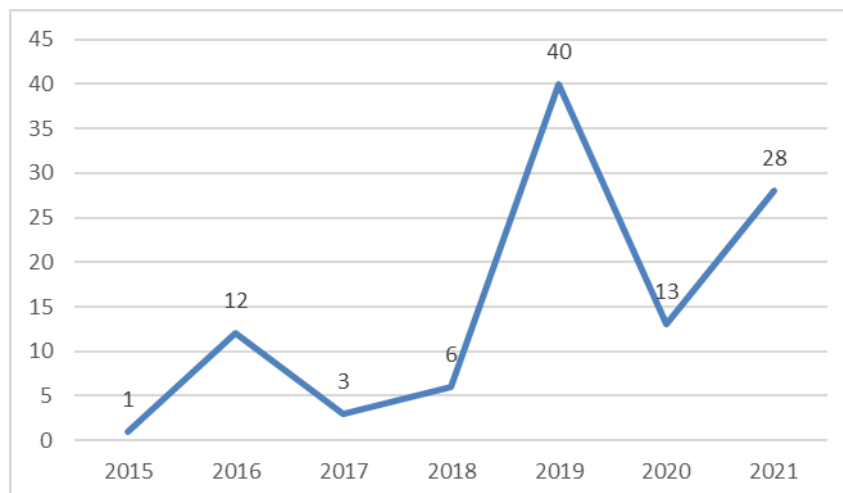


To resolve a dispute, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, pp.277-278) suggested the concept of compromise. “In a compromise, people agree to come to terms, that is, to suspend a dispute involving more than one world without settling in just one of the worlds, and aim at a common good that transcends the two different forms of worth in presence by including both of them.” In this case, the dispute of whether Foxconn was a sweatshop was somehow set aside, and there was no fundamental change in Foxconn’s mode of operation, and instead, the company took some actions to show its care about the workers. And this formed a compromise between the market logic and the people-oriented idea.

## 7.2 “996” working schedule

A “996” working schedule refers to an unofficial working schedule practiced by some companies in China that has been gaining popularity. The working schedule got its name from its requirement that employees work from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm, 6 days per week, and serving a company that encourages the “996” working schedule usually means working for at least 72 hours per week. In China, the working schedule is adopted by a lot of companies, especially in internet and technology companies. In this case, the dispute lasted from the year 2015 to 2021, and 103 newspaper articles were collected.

### 7.2.1 Descriptive results

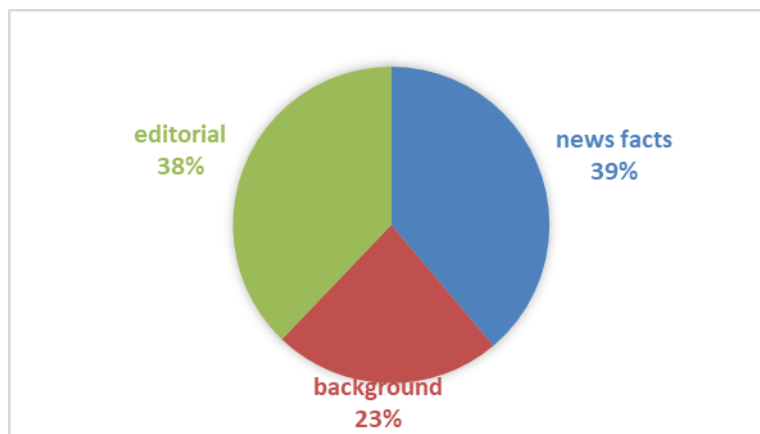


**Figure 7-5 Number of articles in years**

The report of “996” working schedule appeared in a newspaper article in 2015, and reached its first peak in 2016, when an advertisement website company was reported to adopt the 996 working schedule. According to a staff from 58.com, employees are required to be in the office before 9 am and shall not go off work before 9 pm from Monday to

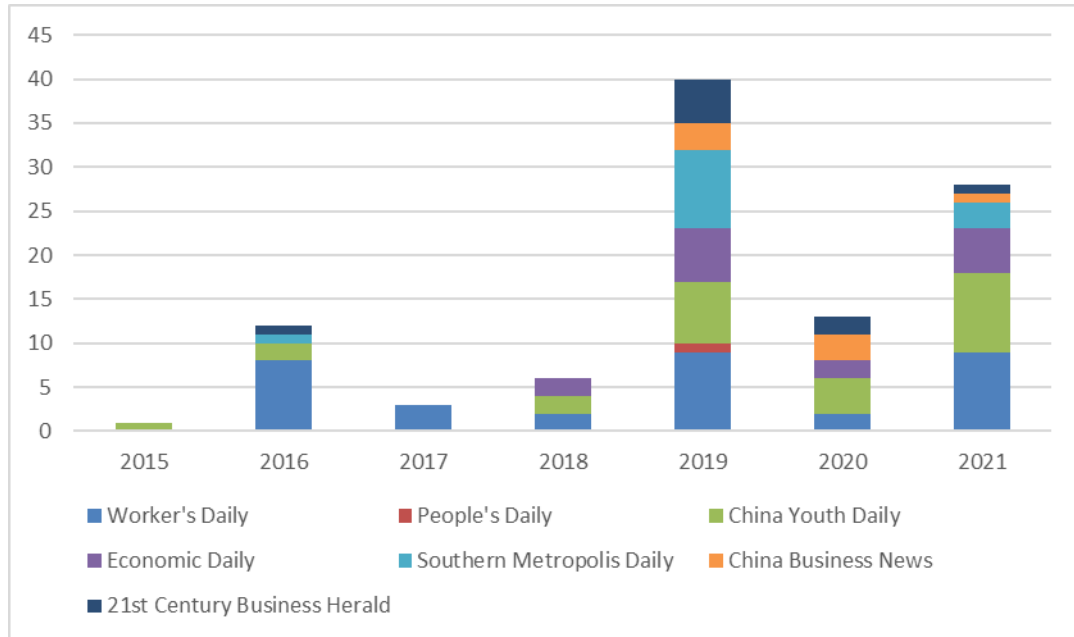
Saturday in that month with no extra salaries. The news attracted criticism from employees and social commentators, and the company responded that the 996 system was adopted because of the increasing business in September and October, and it would be an encouraged, not compulsory practice. This was the first time that the 996 working schedule was noticed and discussed by the public.

In 2019, the discussion of 996 attracted people's attention again and became quite heated. Several internet companies were reported to adopt the working schedule, and to show their own attitude, employees and programmers created an 996.ICU repository website to list the companies that use the 996 working hour system. The name "996.icu" refers to the risk that developers were facing when they work under the 996 system, that is, the risk of poor health and a possibility of staying in an ICU. During this period, there were a lot of discussions focusing on the 996 working schedule. Different groups, such as companies and entrepreneurs, employees and programmers, official and state medias, commercial press all have comments on this working schedule.



**Figure 7-6 Type of articles**

For the type of the newspaper articles, the news facts articles contributed most, focusing on the working schedule itself and the hours employees spent on their work, while the editorial comment articles expressed their own positions in the discussion. And there were less background articles, in which background information was introduced.



**Figure 7-7 Articles from different newspaper**

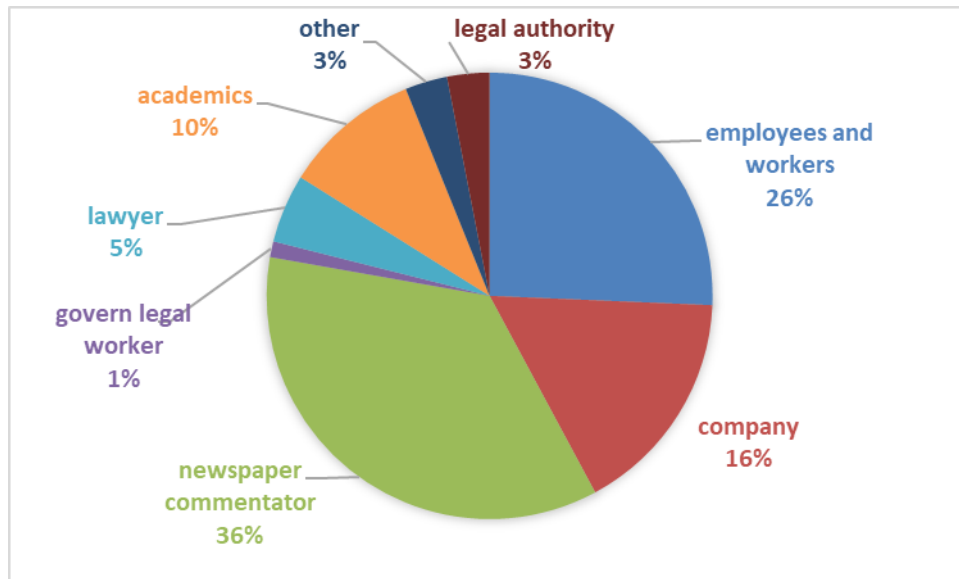
In the case of 996 working schedule, the Worker's Daily has been reporting on the dispute since 2016, and it was also the one that had the most articles. Focusing on young people's work and life, the China Youth Daily was the first among the seven newspapers to address the 996 working schedule, and had the second most articles. The Economic Daily and Southern Metropolis Daily paid attention to the "996" in 2019, and also made a significant contribute to the discussion.

## 7.2.2 Focus of the dispute

The topics involved in the discussion are centred on employees' working hours, including overtime working, 996 working schedule, big/small week and striver agreement. In these topics, the working patterns and requirement of the companies were revealed, and the reasons of overtime working were also explored. And this also led to the focus of this dispute, that is, whether the 996 working schedule is reasonable and necessary.

Furthermore, as a fact that has already been happening in the internet industry, the discussion in this case focused on the hours spent on work, while on the other hand, the discussion on related topics, such as fair pay and labour conditions, were quite thin. Only a few articles mentioned overtime pay, labour rights and experience at work.

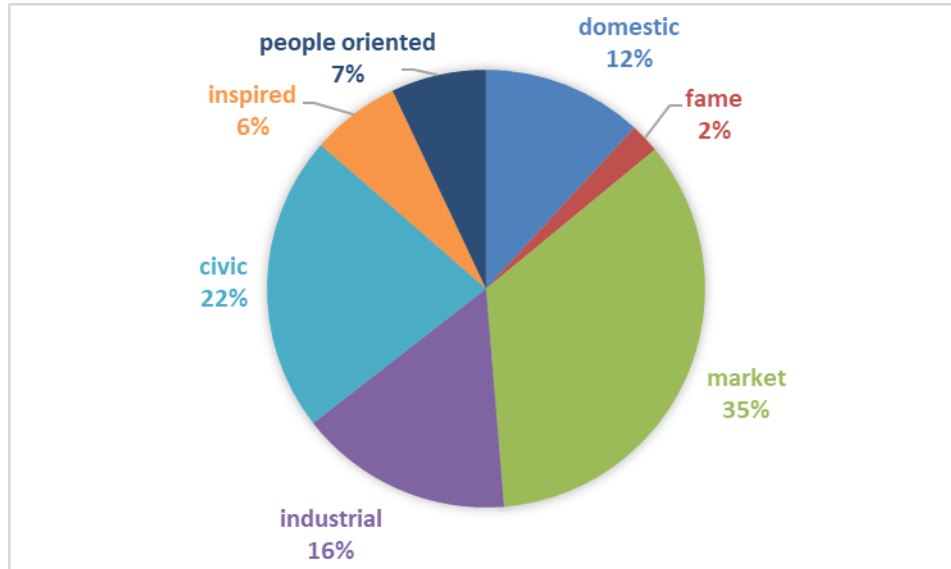
### 7.2.3 Main actors involved in the dispute



**Figure 7-8 Actors in the dispute**

In this case, the occurrence of each actor's voice was recognised and counted, and 261 passages corresponding to an actor's expression of opinion were identified. And it was suggested that the newspaper commentator, employees, and the company were the main actors involved in this dispute and played an important role in the discussion. As shown in the Figure 8, the newspaper commentator was the most coded actor, followed by the voice from employees and companies. The voice of academics was also rising in this case. And comparing with the earlier cases, it should be noticed that some new voices came out in the dispute, that is, the voice of the lawyer and legal authority, which indicated the importance of law in the discussion.

## 7.2.4 Justification involved in the dispute



**Figure 7-9 Justifications involved in the dispute**

In the discussion of 996 working schedule, the market logic remained the dominant position, and the civic logic was the second most coded one. Together with the industrial logic and the domestic logic, these four logics played a dominant role in actors' explanations and justifications. In this dispute, the world of fame was the new logic that came into the picture, and was used in a few arguments.

### 7.2.4.1 The market logic

In the market logic, the salary remained the most popular argument. Employees stressed that, no matter compulsory or voluntary, one important reason for them to work "996" was the salary. Some employees would like to work "996" for a higher pay:

"Wang Jian, an employee of an internet finance company, said, the salary and benefits of internet companies are relatively high. Many employees do not object if they can work overtime in exchange for better development."

While other employees argued that they had to work overtime because otherwise there might be a decrease in their income or even lose their jobs:

"His working hours is a lot longer than the legal overtime hours, and Li Jie has no overtime pay. But he thinks it is more important to keep his salary and job than protecting his rights."

“His thinks that employees usually have no bargaining leverage, and they have no choice but to work overtime. And if they do not work overtime, their performance, bonuses and stock will all be affected, and they might even be eliminated from the company.”

In the market logic, money is the measure of all things, and is the regarded as the form of evidence. For the employees, compulsory or voluntary, the salary was the reason for them to work overtime, and this followed a market logic.

Another widely used argument in the market logic was the profit and cost, suggested by newspaper commentators. When discussing the reason of 996 working schedule, the newspaper commentators tend to argue that in the competitive market, companies are facing great pressure, and that they need to save cost and make more profit. Making employees to work overtime is a way for the companies to save their labour cost, and therefore followed a market logic. For example:

“On the one hand, there are large-scale layoffs in the company, and on the other hand, they are increasing working hours. The internet companies doing these things is nothing more than trying to reduce expenses and increase the output per person.”

#### **7.2.4.2 Civic logic**

The civic logic was mainly used by newspaper commentators, lawyers and academics in the dispute of “996”. And the law is the most mentioned argument. In the civic world, according to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, p.186), “Legality defines a form of worth that is particularly appreciated, and it belongs to texts when they are regulatory and legislative”, and the law, therefore, is the form of evidence in the civic world. All three actors argued that the excessive overtime working is against the Labour Law, and that companies should follow the requirements of the law. For example:

“Chen Li, a lawyer who deals with labour relations, said that there is no such thing as an overtime working system where “the boss asks and the employees agree”. Companies must follow a legal procedure in arranging workers to work overtime. And excessive overtime working is illegal no matter employees are willing or not.”

Another argument used in the civic world is the rights and benefits of the employees. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, p.187) argued that, “In the civic world, beings attain their worth because they are naturally political, and this is the quality of citizens invested with civil rights”. In the dispute, newspaper commentators and academics suggested that employees have the right to take a rest, and it is a violation of employees’ rights and benefits to work “996”:

“Qiao Jian, director of the China Institute of Labour Relations, believed that no matter what, it is necessary to insist on the protection of employees’ rights to remuneration, rest rights, and the bottom line of working safety and health.”

Furthermore, the civic logic is also used as a way to criticise the market logic. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) suggested that the civic critique of market worth can always be expressed through the opposite position between owners and workers. The companies followed the market logic to chase the profit and save cost, and it was criticised that focusing too much on the profit also led to the ignorance of the Labour Law and the violation of labour rights.

#### **7.2.4.3 Industrial logic**

Employees and newspaper commentators are the two main actors that made an industrial justification. Both actors held similar arguments in the industrial logic to argue against the 996 working schedule, that is, the working efficiency as well as health problem under the 996. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, pp.204-205) suggested that “the ordering of the industrial world is based on the efficiency of beings, their performance, their productivity and their capacity to ensure normal operations and to respond usefully to needs”, and therefore “the proper functioning of beings extends the present into a future, and tomorrow is what counts”. In the justification, it was argued by newspaper commentators and employees that working excessive long hours reduces their working efficiency, and the 996 working schedule is not reasonable, which followed an industrial logic. In some arguments, it was also suggested that the 996 schedule has led to health problems, which was not only bad for employees’ lives, looking into the future, it was also bad for the long term development of the company and the whole society, which also agreed with the industrial logic. For example:

“Overtime working is very easy to cause some employees slowdown in their work, and reduces work efficiency, and ultimately the losses outweigh the gains.

Moreover, Xiaodan is worried that excessive overtime working will harm employees' physical and mental health, reduce work enthusiasm, and form a vicious circle.”

“In the long run, 996 is extremely bad for employees, and it also does more harm than good for companies.”

Furthermore, the industrial logic also critiques the market world. In the industrial world, “the distinctive dignity of humanity is threatened by the treatment of people as things” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.211), and this tension between industrial worth and market worth led to unjustified prices in the market. In this case, the industrial logic is used to show the negative consequences of 996 working schedule, which is a criticism of companies' endlessly saving on labour cost under the market logic.

#### **7.2.4.4 Domestic logic**

Newspaper commentators, employees and companies were all the main actors of domestic logic. In the justification, employees explained that one reason they choose to work overtime is their working environment. Employees found it embarrassed to get off work when others are still working, and they were afraid of getting underhand punishment if they do not work overtime:

“Liu Rong, who works at a group-buying website, also said that his boss leaves work very late every day. As time passes, employees in the department also developed the habit of getting off work late. How dare you to leave the work earlier than your leader?”

In the domestic world, the order is established through tradition and hierarchy, and instability is regarded as the deficient characters. In the unworthy state, beings do not stay in place (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). For the employees, it is the pressure of being different from others that kept them work overtime, and the punishment from the superiors also followed the hierarchy order, and therefore lies in the domestic logic.

Another argument used in the domestic logic is the discussion of devotion and hard-working, where the newspaper commentators and companies held a different attitude. For the companies, strive and hard-working was regarded as the love for the work, and was encouraged by the companies:



“How can you achieve the success you want if you don’t devote more effort and time than others?”

“Young people need to understand that happiness comes from hard work, we do not defend for 996, but we pay our respect to the strugglers!”

On the other hand, newspaper commentators argued that striving and hard-working does not mean excessive overtime working, and it was unreasonable for the companies to connect the two things together:

“996 working schedule is not a struggle to realise one’s own values, but a toil driven by fear. The purpose of this kind of struggle is to make a rise in life, and it can only bring more profits for the capital, but cannot bring happiness to one’s soul, and may instead generate more anxiety.”

“996 cannot be justified because it is associated with struggle.”

In the domestic world, beings have to ensure the continuity of a tradition, and a good upbringing is therefore quite important. A well-ordered world is one in which people are trained with good manners (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). In this case, devotion, striving and hardwork was regarded as the good manners in the domestic world, and companies were using the logic to justify their requirements of overtime working, while the newspaper commentators tried to distinguish the domestic world with overtime working, using it to criticise the market logic.

#### **7.2.4.5 People-oriented logic**

Coming from the Chinese context, the people-oriented idea puts people in the centre and cares about people’s interest. Focusing on the full and balanced development of people, the people-oriented idea cares about people’s live and value. In the dispute, one argument mentioned by the newspaper commentators was the balance between work and life, suggesting that the employees had spent so much time on work that they did not have time for their families, friends, and personal lives. The people-oriented idea is used to criticise the companies’ market behaviour. For example:

“There is nothing wrong with companies pursuing profits, and there is nothing wrong with individuals pursuing high wages. Hard work is important, but it also requires a balance between work and life.”

“Excessive overtime working not only hinders the sustainability development of companies, but may also harm the endurance of high-quality development. Sticking to the people-oriented idea, paying attention to the physical and mental health of workers is the correct path to create value and profit.”

### **7.2.5 Resolving the dispute**

In the dispute about “996”, the reasons and necessity of this working schedule was discussed by different actors, and the companies are criticised of the endless chase on profit and pushing their employees to the edge. And one of the most used criticisms came from the civic world, argued that it was against the Labour Law.

After the heated discussion, changes are coming up to stop the 996. In March 2021, it was proposed that supervision is needed to prevent overworking of employees. Li Guohua, a member of China's top political advisory body, the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, pointed out that the absence of official supervision and protection by labour unions has led to the current situation of 996 work schedule, and have proposed reinforced and effective supervision to stop companies overworking their employees. The proposal became the most discussed topic on the social media in a very short time, and was welcomed by the public. Also, in July 2021, several technology companies including Kuaishou and Meituan have decided to normalize the two-day weekend and stop overtime working during weekends. In August, the Supreme People's Court released 10 typical cases of excessive overtime working, and stressed that the 996 working schedule is a serious violation to the law, and any labour contract relating to this should be recognised as invalid.

In this case, it is the legal department that resolved the dispute through the reinforcement of the law, and the civic logic played a dominate role.

## **7.3 Summary**

In the cases, the disputes happened in different time and industry, but the focus on working hours remains, and is an ongoing dispute in the Chinese society. The market logic is

always a dominate way of justification, companies and employees made their decisions following the market worth. While on the other hand, as an ongoing dispute, the discussion of working hours shows the unbalanced position between employees and the company, this also made the market worth a target for the other logics of justification. Companies were criticised of the endless chasing on profit, and in different cases, the civic logic and the people-oriented logic were used to address the critique to it.

## 8 Company justifications

In the newspaper articles, the voice of workers and employees and commentators is always louder, while the companies' response was reported with a smaller proportion, and most of the time was regarded as a target to question or criticise. Furthermore, in the discussion of working hours and working conditions, the executive compensation was mentioned occasionally to show the great income gap between the employees and executives, and this is also a topic that companies have been questioned a lot. Therefore, to take a closer look of the company responses, the Lenovo company and its CEO compensation was selected.

### 8.1 Lenovo

Lenovo Group Limited is a Chinese multinational technology company founded in 1984. It became a listed company on Hong Kong Stock Exchange in 1994, and as one of the largest personal computer vendors in the world, the company sells its products in around 180 countries.

Yang Yuanqing, the current chairman and CEO of Lenovo, joined the company in 1989 and became the CEO of Lenovo in 2001. From 2004 to 2008, Yang was the chairman of Lenovo's board, and then he took the position of CEO again since 2009.

As the head of a large company, the pay of Yang Yuanqing reached a very high level in 2006, after Lenovo acquired IBM's personal computer business and became an international company, and his pay continued to increase since then. Yang is one of the highest paid CEOs in China, especially from 2011 to 2015, his pay ranked number 1 among all the Chinese listed companies (both in the Chinese mainland stock market and overseas stock market). In 2019, Yang received 130 million yuan for his work.

In the media, Yang is called "the working emperor", which is used as a way to describe the people who works with extremely high pay. On the hand, like the emperors in ancient China, these people have got a large amount of wealth; while on the other hand, different from the emperors, the high paid executives need to work in order to get their salaries. Yang Yuanqing's pay has gained people's attention since 2006, and there are reports and discussions about his pay almost every year after the release of the annual report and the disclosure of his pay.

### 8.1.1 Performance

According to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, p.196), “in the market world, actions are motivated by the desires of individuals, which drive them to possess the same objects or the rare goods whose ownership is inalienable”. In this perspective, people are competitors with each other, and therefore the higher common principle in the market world is competition.

The competition between beings governs their conflicts through an evaluation of market worth, that is, the price, which expresses the importance of converging desires. And desirable, therefore, is a way to show the state of worthiness in the market logic. Based on desirability, it is argued by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) that the worthy objects are saleable goods that have a strong position in a market, and the worthy persons are the rich ones who live a high life. Their wealth is proportionate to their own value, which they know how to sell, and is expressed by their success, designated in particular by the vocabulary of competition: getting ahead, taking the edge and being a winner.

Specifically, in the case of justifying the CEO pay of a company, the company’s financial performance could be regarded as a way to show its worthiness, and the ones that make profit in a financial year and have a better performance are the worthy objects that have a strong position. As a worthy company in the market, it is reasonable for its CEO to get a higher pay, and therefore, in the Lenovo case, the performance is used as a way to justify the increase of the pay:

“Yang Yuanqing also gave a reasonable explanation for the sharp increase in his salary in the 2005 fiscal year: First it was the bonuses, Lenovo’s executive compensation has a higher proportion of bonuses. Lenovo’s performance in 2004 was the worst in history, with executives receiving only 10% of the target bonus. However, the performance in 2005 was very good and therefore they received a generous bonus.”

On the other hand, the state of unworthiness is one in which persons fail and lose out, and in which goods are rejected and hated instead of desired. As a company, the state of unworthiness is shown when it makes a loss, and the justification of high pay become vulnerable. Instead, the poor performance could be used by other groups to challenge the company. In the Lenovo case, it could be found in the data that apart from the company

itself, the media also used the financial performance as way to question the pay of the CEO when it is not satisfying, especially when the company made a loss. For example, in 2016, when Lenovo had a loss of over \$100 million, it was questioned that how could the bonuses be calculated in the case of annual losses.

Furthermore, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) suggested that in the market world, the human nature that flourishes in this world is characterized by a desire as innocent as any dignity, that is, to go for the profit. The profit and the interest are the real motivation of people, and it is people's property that makes them be themselves by wanting to obtain satisfaction. Also, in the market world, the generality of the price is ensured by a monetary standard. That is, money is the measure of all things, and thus it constitutes the form of evidence. The profit, the benefit, the payback and the result of the transaction is thus expressed in cash, a commission or a fee.

The motivation of profit and monetary standard indicates that from the market logic, the pay received are the real motivation of people, and the high pay could also be used as a way to motivate the directors so that the worthiness of the company can be improved. In the case of Lenovo, Yang Yuanqing's pay was also justified by some specialists who think it is necessary to connect the pay of the executives with the companies' performance, especially with the long-term incentives:

“Traditional executive compensation evaluation methods mainly focus on the market environment of executive compensation, and the relationship between the company's financial performance and compensation was not sufficiently considered. Xu has always insisted to link the company strategy, performance and long-term incentives closely together.”

### **8.1.2 The requirement of the position**

The industrial world is the one in which technological objects and scientific methods have their place. The ordering and the higher common principle of the industrial world is based on the efficiency of beings, their productivity, and their capacity to ensure normal operations and to respond usefully to needs. Different from the market world that does not participate in a construction of time, in the industrial world, the proper functioning of beings extends the present into a future and opens up the possibility of prediction.

Therefore, in the industrial world, worthy beings are the ones that are efficient, and this not only means they are functional, operational, professional and have the capacity to integrate themselves into an organization, but also means they are predictable, reliable and are able to guarantee the realistic project in the future. “In the industrial world, people have a professional qualification related to their capacity and activity. This scale of qualification underlies a hierarchy of states of worth, that is, a hierarchy marked by competencies and responsibilities” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.206). However, different from the responsibility in the domestic world that implies a worthy person has power over a less worthy person and gains respect in return, this kind of industrial responsibility is in a relation of control, and it depends on the possibility of predicting less complex actions by integrating them into a larger overall plan. A more worthy person in this logic has the responsibility for production, and also has the control over the future.

In the discussion of executives’ pay, the CEOs are always regarded as managerial talents and professionals that have the capacity to lead the company and take responsibility for the company’s future development. In the justification of Yang Yuanqing’s high pay, the requirement of his position lies in this industrial logic. It is argued by some articles that the CEO needs to be responsible for all the decisions in this very large company, and the position is worth the value. And for Yang Yuanqing, he has got the ability to take the lead, and it was also stressed by himself that he is capable for his work and is therefore worth the money.

And on the other hand, in the state of unworthiness, inefficient means unproductive, when people fail to do much work as a result of inactivity or unemployment, or when people turn out work of poor quality because they are unmotivated, unqualified or unsuited for the job.

In the discussion of Yang Yuanqing’s pay, in some circumstances such as a huge loss, his ability as Lenovo’s CEO was questioned, and when facing the impact of other internet companies as well as the mobile phone business, there were questions about whether Yang is qualified for his work, especially for the future of the company’s development.

### **8.1.3 Internationalization**

In the domestic world, it is through reference to generation, tradition and hierarchy that order can be established among beings of a domestic nature. The state of worthiness in this logic is the hierarchical superiority, and as a part of a hierarchy, beings are worthy because

of the relation that connects them to the worthier beings. It is argued that the more worthy beings have the precedence over the less worthy in the order of hierarchies, which is a source of authority. More specifically, in the domestic logic, “the more worthy beings constitute the very being of the less worthy, and therefore the hierarchical superiors supply the worth of the inferiors and define their identity, and the leaders are the honour of the subordinates. The worthy ones include the less worthy ones, and thus bear responsibility for them” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p.171).

In the discussion of the high pay, this hierarchical order of the domestic logic can be shown through the relationship between the executives and general employees. When interviewed by a TV programme, Yang Yaunqing justified his pay by making reference to the employees in the company:

“As far as I am concerned, I cannot get lower wages than my American employees, American subordinates, and American executives. This is unreasonable.”

In this justification, regarding himself as the top of the hierarchy order in the company, Yang, as the leader, has higher positions than the subordinates and bears the responsibility for them, and his pay was therefore justified by being one of the most worthy persons in the company.

Furthermore, in the justification, there are also compromises between different logics, in which “people suspend a dispute involving more than one world without settling in just one of the worlds, and agree to come to terms that transcends the two different forms of worth in presence by including both of them” Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, pp.277-278).

As an international company, the internationalization of the compensation was also used quite frequently in its justification:

“Liu Chuanzhi, President of Lenovo, said: “The first phase of integration between Lenovo and IBM PC has passed. The current Lenovo Group is neither a Chinese company nor an American company, but an international company. Among its board members, one third are from mainland China, one third are from Hong Kong, and one third are American.”



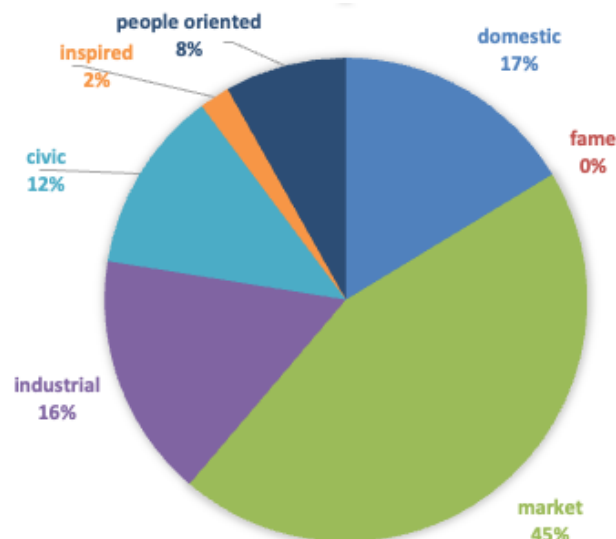
“Yang Yuanqing said that since the acquisition of the IBM PC business, there has been a large gap between Lenovo’s international executives and Chinese executives.”

In this way of justification, a compromise between the domestic world and the industrial world can be seen. In the Lenovo case, on the one hand, the acquirement of the US company could be regarded as a pursue of a higher efficiency, which lies in the industrial logic, while on the other hand, as the leader of this international company, increasing Yang Yuanqing’s pay to the international level follows a domestic logic. In this justification, the internationalization of the compensation is the result of the hierarchy structure as well as the efficiency and future development, and the pay is therefore justified in the compromise of both logics.

## 8.2 Company justifications

In this section, the justifications and arguments provided by the companies are explored in more details, to see how the companies’ justification changed over the years.

### 8.2.1 Justification used by companies



**Figure 8-1 Justification used by companies**

The companies’ justification mainly followed a market logic. As the dominant one, it was suggested by the companies that it was the requirement of their business to ask the employees work overtime. In the competitive market, the companies need to improve the

quality and quantity of their products to win an advantage over others so that they will be able to keep their position. And it was stressed by the companies that they had followed the requirement of the market to provide their employees with enough overtime pay, and it was just the situation within the market. Furthermore, it was worth noticing that although the market was mentioned a lot, most of the companies were talking about it from a very broad perspective, and hardly mentioned the actual cost and profit in their operation, which was criticized by other actors.

Following the market logic, the domestic and industrial logic were also used a lot by the companies to justify themselves, and both were adopted from a different perspective from the other actors. For example, the companies focused on the virtue of struggle and hardworking in the domestic logic to encourage overtime working; and in the argument of working efficiency, it was referred to as a way to increase the productivity so that the employees can work better for the company. Though not expressed in an explicit and direct way, the domestic and industrial logic was adopted by the companies with an aim to encourage their employees to make more profit and value.

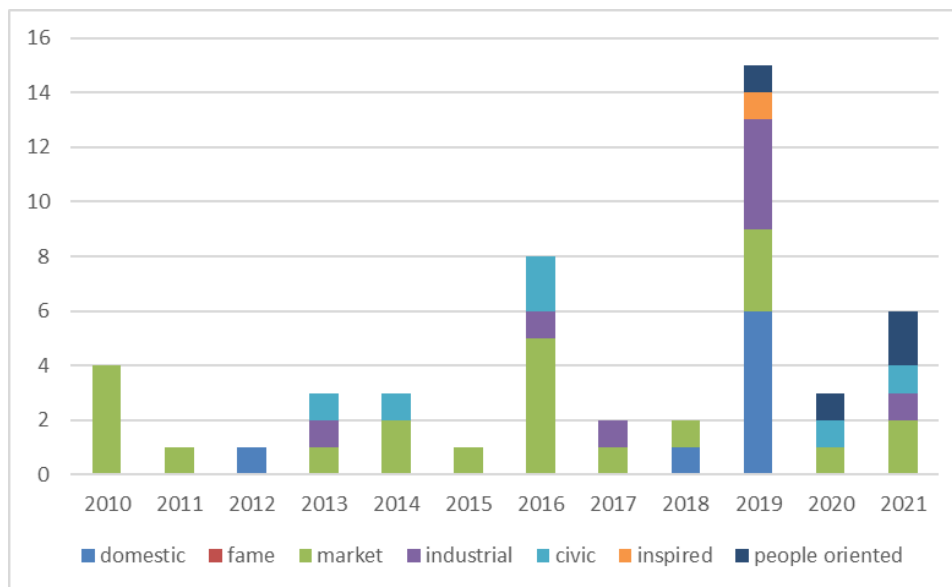
As for the civic logic, it appears more frequently in the companies' justifications when the importance of the Labour Law was stressed, and that they are aware of the rights of the employees. Talking from the perspective of the law, the civic logic was used as a way to gain legitimacy by the companies.

Similarly, the people-oriented logic was also used by the companies to show that they are caring about their employees and respect the employees as a human being. And it is worth noticing that in the companies' justification, the people-oriented logic tends to appear together with other logics, suggesting that they are caring about employees' dignity in the process of increasing productivity. Also, as a logic that comes from the government's political statement, the companies are referring to the people-oriented logic as a way to gain their legitimacy.

However, it should also be noticed that in the company justifications, the world of fame logic was not found. The world of fame favours public opinion, which is related to the corporate image in this case. In the dispute of overtime working, the companies are already criticised a lot by the other actors, and found that it may not be a good idea to mention their corporate image, and thus avoid this logic of justification in their arguments.

From the perspective of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), the justification provided by the companies mostly follows the first form of critique, that is, a contention. In this case, a worth of a subject is questioned, but the world itself was not called into question. In the companies' justification logics, the principle itself was not called into question, and it was agreed that the principle was what should be done in justice, and it was the way in which it was applied in the situation that should be criticised. In the empirical data, we can see that within a same logic, the companies were taking a different perspective from the other actors to justify their actions, and comparing with the other actors, companies tend to keep their justification within the first form of critique, and they were not using one logic to criticise another logic. The critique did not expanded to the second form, which includes the question of the very order of the justification. The companies' focus on the first form of critique could be explained by their position within the dispute, as they are the ones who need to answer the questions and explain for themselves, and taking actions within the existing logics might be a safer way to get through the heated discussions.

### 8.2.2 Company justification over the years

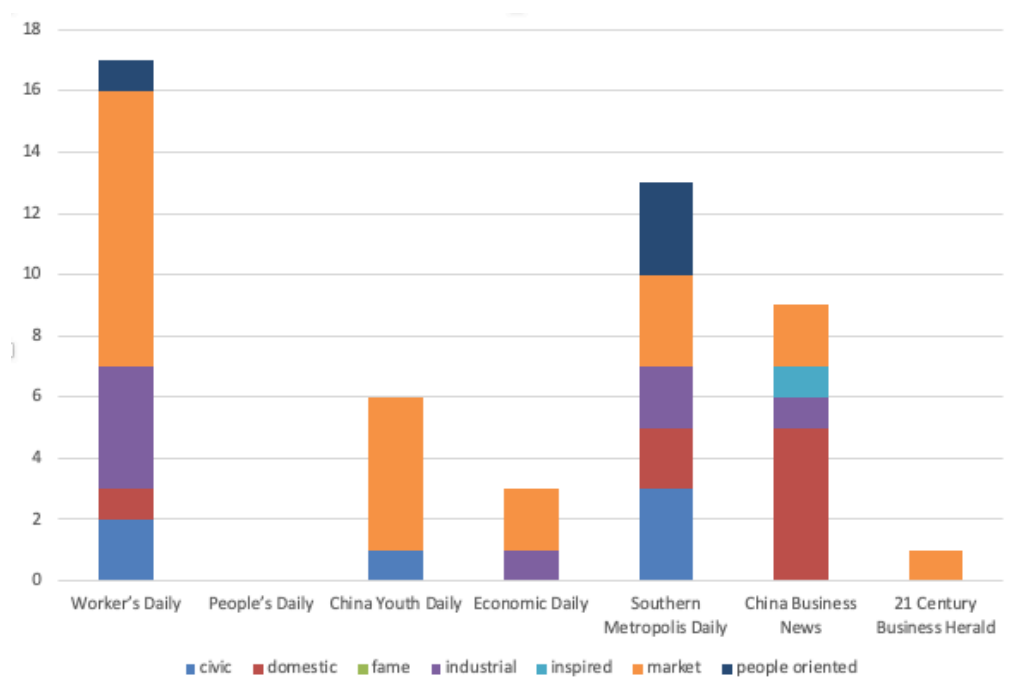


**Figure 8-2 companies' justification over the years**

The companies' justification showed a shift from the market logic to a mix of the other logics over the years. In the early period, the companies mainly relied on the market logic to justify their actions, and suggested that the overtime working was an unavoidable situation and they are just following the market. The focus on market logic showed an aggressive attitude of the companies back then.

The percentage of industrial and domestic logic both increased a lot in the later stage, and the people-oriented logic came into the picture when the discussion of “996 working schedule” became heated. Over the years, the number of logic were increasing in the companies’ justification, and new logics such as the people-oriented idea were also adopted by the companies. Companies were providing different explanations to their actions, and were increasing their logics to justify themselves. From the market logic to the domestic and industrial logics, the companies were becoming less aggressive in their justifications. Moreover, in the early years, when questioned about their working conditions, sometimes the companies did not provide a reasonable justification, but focused on the apology and improvement measurements instead. As the companies are facing increasing questions and stronger critiques over the years, there was a change in the quality and quantity of their justification. Their change of attitude also indicates the change of the companies’ position in the society.

### 8.2.3 Company justifications in newspapers



**Figure 8-3 company justifications in different newspapers**

Among the different newspapers, justifications provided by the companies appeared most in the Worker’s Daily, followed by the Southern Metropolis Daily and China Business News. It was obvious that except for the Worker’s Daily, the commercialised newspapers included more voice from the companies in their reports than the official newspaper. As

for the Worker's Daily, it was targeting at workers and employees, and it was necessary to include the companies' voices so that both sides of the dispute were covered in their reports.

For the logics of justification, the logics covered by the Worker's Daily and the Southern Metropolis Daily were more comprehensive as a result of a higher amount of reports, and the Southern Metropolis Daily also had a more balanced cover of company justification logics, which could be explained by its political stance, that is, the Southern Metropolis Daily is a commercialised newspaper with a critical view in public discussions.

Furthermore, different from other newspapers in which market logic took a dominant position, the China Business News covered more domestic logics in relation to the company justifications. This could be explained with the time of the reports. The China Business News had more reports in the later period, when the "996 working schedule" became heated. And during that later period, the companies justified themselves with a less aggressive way, turning to the industrial and domestic logic instead of the market logic. And for a newspaper that reports a lot in the later stage, it is reasonable that the China Business News covered more domestic logic than the others.

## 9 Discussion

### 9.1 Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

Different from the western culture, the context in the Chinese society was based on the ideology of socialism with Chinese characteristics, which had a significant influence on the views of justice. Particularly, in the Chinese literature that tried to explore the views of justice and equality, the socialism with Chinese Characteristics was an unavoidable part, and was regarded as the guidance in the Chinese society.

This shows that the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government have a stronger position in the Chinese society, and the sources of justification, therefore, also has a stronger political attribute. Different leaders and the changes in their political view provided different sources of justification in the Chinese society, and the ways people make their justifications also changed according to this.

### 9.2 Variations of Boltanski and Thévenot's justification logics in the Chinese context

In Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) work, the authors explored the different worlds of justification in terms of their principle, subject, object, state of worthiness, test, judgement, evidence, etc., and showed how the justifications could be used in practice, based on a western culture. In my study of the Chinese literature, the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) was taken into the Chinese context, and the adoption of justification showed some variations comparing with the original work. In the Chinese mode of justification, the logics recognised by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) also exist in the Chinese society, but it was found that within the same logic, the Chinese mode sometimes has a different focus from the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006).

Firstly, in the domestic logic, the Chinese mode has a higher weight on the harmony and stability perspective, which is influenced both by the traditional Chinese culture and the need of the government. Liu et al. (2019) argued that the Chinese cultural background is more inclined to collectivism, which leads Chinese employees to comply with the overtime demands of their employers, even in the absence of corresponding compensation. This need for stability is in line with the hierarchy principle of the domestic world proposed by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), and is therefore recognised as a domestic mode of justification. In Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) domestic world, hierarchy, tradition and

generation are regarded as the worthy ones, and there was quite a lot of discussion of family relation. In the Chinese mode, the favour of tradition and hierarchy remains, but the difference is that in China, the focus of stability is of a higher weight, which is a variation in the Chinese context.

Secondly, the Chinese mode of domestic justification also has a stronger favour of personal integrity and individual morality. In this perspective, the personal integrity and individual morality is regarded as a basic requirement of a human being, and comparing with the original work in Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), the Chinese mode is more engaged with the virtue, and contributes to another variation in the Chinese context.

Thirdly, Liu et al. (2019) found that increasing the number of working hours is an important means so that individuals can avoid the pressure associated with unemployment, allowing them to ensure their survival, and employees increase their working hours in exchange for their initiative to enter certain labour markets. And this is in line with the market logic proposed by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). In the Chinese context, although the market has a socialist attribute and has a higher proportion of public sectors, the need to comply with the market logic remains.

Fourthly, similar to the market mode, the civic mode in China is also influenced by the socialist attribute, and is a variation from the original work. In Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) work, collective and general will is valued in a civic world. And in China, as a socialist country, collectivism is also an important part of the social justice, and the collective common good should always be considered when making decisions.

Fifthly, Lafaye and Thévenot (2017) suggested that the six order of worth in Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) were not exhaustive, and proposed a new green order of worth. In the Chinese context, the green world can also be captured by its political statements, but it should be noticed that in the empirical work, the green mode of justification did not appear, which was largely determined by the dispute itself. The focus of the empirical work is mainly the dispute in the workplace, such as working hours, labour conditions and fair pay, and the green world, in this perspective, was not so relevant and did not fit in with the data, and was therefore silence in the results.

Overall, it can be seen that in the adoption of Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) work, there are some variations in the Chinese mode, and they are having a different focus or a

different political attribute from the original one. The variations are result of the unique Chinese context, and are influenced by the history and political position of the country. These variations, on the other hand, also contribute to the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) by providing a non-western perspective.

### **9.3 The people-oriented logic**

Proposed by president Hu Jintao in 2003, the people-oriented idea is based on the fundamental interests of the majority of the people, and it means to take people as the core of value and the standard of society. In 2007, in the report of the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, president Hu Jintao pointed out that the core of the “Scientific Outlook on Development” is the people-oriented idea. And to thoroughly implement the Scientific Outlook on Development, we must adhere to the people-oriented approach.

It was stressed in the report in 2007 that the “people-oriented approach must be adhered, Serving the people wholeheartedly is the fundamental purpose of the party. All the party’s struggle and work are for the benefit of the people. We must respect the dominant position of the people, give full play to their pioneering spirit, protect the rights and interests of the people, follow the path of common prosperity, and promote the all-round development of people” (CPC, 2007). This means that within the people-oriented idea, pursuing the free, comprehensive, sufficient and harmonious development of human beings is the highest pursuit of fairness and justice.

In the people-oriented idea, the first is to establish the principle of development for the people, and to regard the needs and evaluation of the people as the way to measure the work of the party and the state. The second is to establish the principle that development depends on the people. The third is to establish the principle that the fruits of development should be enjoyed by the people, and adhere to the path of common prosperity (Zhao, 2017).

The role of the people was stressed in the people-oriented idea, and it requires to take the basic needs of the people as the basis, fully consider the real wishes of the people, and enable all the people to share the fruits of social development (Li, 2021). The dominant position of the people is valued in the people-oriented idea, and it takes great concern for people’s living conditions.



Furthermore, based on this, President Xi's political view also valued the role of people. In 2015, the development idea of "people-centered approach" was stated clearly at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CCCPC, it was stressed that "We must always orient development with people. Development is for the people, and that is the fundamental stand of the Marxian political economics" (CPC, 2015). At the Party's 19th National Congress, the idea of people-centered approach was further consolidated. It was suggested that "the people are the creators of history and the fundamental force that determines the future and destiny of the party and the country. We must uphold the dominant position of the people, and regard the people's yearning for a better life as a goal, and rely on the people to create great historical achievements" (CPC, 2017).

To protect people's right and benefit, President Xi proposed a concept of shared development, which requires the participation of all members of the society. Everyone is a part of the social construction and should also share the fruits of social development. A shared development promotes the social development on the premise of ensuring every member's interest. Therefore, the innovation of the shared development lies in the "people-centred" development idea (Wang, 2021), which argues that the development we pursue is the development that benefits the people.

From the results of shared development, it requires the benefit of all members of the society. This means that all members can enjoy the fruits of development, and its essence is to protect the fundamental interests of all members. This is also the meaning of "shared by everyone".

In the Chinese literature, the people-oriented idea is an important part of the Socialism with the Chinese Characteristics, and provides a source of justification in the society. As a logic that can be used in a justification, the full development of human being is regarded as the highest justice in the people-oriented logic.

In the empirics, the people-oriented logic was also recognised as a justification logic in the dispute of working hours. It was mainly used by newspaper commentators, and was argued that workers' dignity and respect is needed in the workplace. The workers' spiritual needs as human being should be valued, and their physical and mental health should not be sacrificed. Furthermore, the work-life balance also suggested that people's interest was harmed by the unbalanced work-life relation, and people's value was also ignored, the full development of people was not achieved in this perspective.

The people-oriented logic also talked to other justification logics. For example, in the discussion of work-life balance, it was suggested that people's interest was harmed, which was connected to the ideas in the civic logic; and in the pursue of workers' dignity and respect, companies are criticised of the endless chasing on profit and regarding workers as tools rather than human being, the people-oriented logic talked to the market and industrial logic by criticising them.

Therefore, it can be seen from both the literature and the practice that the people-oriented idea was used as a way to justify, and thus became a of logic of justification. Located in the unique context of China, the people-oriented logic comes from the political view of the Communist Party of China, and is rooted in the socialism and communist tradition. Different from the western neoliberalism tradition, the people-oriented logic is a new logic from the Chinese context, and contributes to the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). In practice, as the core of Scientific Outlook on Development and the path to common prosperity, the people-oriented idea became a political jargon, and was promoted by the party and the government, and then used by the newspaper commentators.

The people-oriented logic is recognised through the adoption of Boltanski and Thévenot's work to the Chinese context, and is a unique justification in China. This is also a contribution to the theoretical framework.

## **9.4 The ground of justification**

Over the years, there are changes in the adoption of justification in the dispute of working hours. Overall, the industrial and the civic logic were increasing, while the inspired logic came out and played a part in the dispute in a later stage, the people-oriented logic was adopted and then experienced a decrease in the early years, and came back again into the picture. The market always kept a dominate position.

More specifically, the market logic was used continuously over the years, and the argument of rights and benefits was always mentioned. In the early stages, it was the argument of salary and cost that followed the logic, and in the later years, the competitiveness of the labour market was mentioned more. The civic logic was increasing over the years, and the Labour Law was the most used argument, and was also increasing. The suggestions about income distribution system came out in the later stage. The industrial logic was also increasing over the years, and both arguments, the working

efficiency and the employees' health, were increasing. And in the arguments, the critique from the industrial logic to other worlds was increasing. The adoption of domestic logic reached its first peak in 2010, when the strict management was complained. And after 2016, the logic increased again, new arguments such as the overtime working culture and hardworking character came into the discussion during this period. The inspired logic was an emerging logic that came out into the discussion in the later stage, and became an important part of the justification in 2016. And for the people-oriented logic, it was used a lot in 2010, and after a decrease, the justification came into the picture again in 2016, and had been playing an important part since then. In the early years, there was a lot of concern about employees' dignity and respect, while the argument of work-life balance and development came out later.

In the previous chapter, where Boltanski and Thévenot's work was applied into the Chinese context, the sources of justification were explored through the study of the literature. These sources, consisted of different parts, provide the actors in the field with arguments and justifications that can be used to express their views. And the results from the empirical study, are the actual justifications used in a dispute by the different actors. Looking into these two parts together, that is, the sources and actual justifications, it was found that the two parts are influencing each other.

On the one hand, the changes in the actual justifications are influenced by the changes in the sources. For example, in the civic logic, the use of the argument of the Labour Law was increasing over the years, which was influenced by the source of the policy. In the report submitted to the 19th CPC National Congress, "adhering to comprehensive law-based governance" was clearly defined as one of the basic strategies for upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. As it is stated in the President Xi's political view, the Communist Party of China is stressing the importance of following the law, and is putting more weight on the improvement of the law in the policy, which shows a change in the source of justification. Therefore, in the data, the increasing reference to the Labour Law was in line with this change, and lead to an increase in the civic logic.

The change in the use of domestic logic was also a result of the change in the source. In the domestic logic, new arguments such as the overtime working culture and hardworking character came into the picture in a later stage, and actors are making more reference to the traditional Chinese culture in the arguments. In the Resolution of the Central Committee of

the Communist Party of China on the Party's Major Achievements and Historical Experience for Centennial Struggle, it was suggested that "the excellent traditional Chinese culture is the outstanding advantage of the Chinese nation and the foundation for us to gain a firm foothold in the turbulent world culture. It must be inherited and carried forward in accordance with the conditions of the new era." (CPC, 2021). The traditional Chinese culture is regarded quite valuable and important by the government, and this focus on the culture leads to the change in the sources of justification. And in practice, when the companies are explaining their decisions, the Chinese culture was dragged into their domestic logic as a way to convince the employees, and also as a way to show their consistency with the policy.

Furthermore, in the people-oriented logic, the argument of development came out in a later stage, and this was in line with the government's development strategy. In the report submitted to the 19th CPC National Congress, president Xi Jinping pointed out that, "the principal contradiction in Chinese society has been transformed into one between the people's ever-growing needs for a better life and the unbalanced and inadequate development" (CPC, 2017), and as China's economy has shifted from the phase of high-speed growth to the phase of high-quality development, the quality of the development is stressed and regarded as a way to overcome structural problems in the Chinese society. In the actual justification, the argument of development suggests that sacrificing employees' health does nothing good for the long-term development of the society, which was influenced by the change in the sources.

On the other hand, the actual justification used in the dispute of working hours is a reflection of the social context, and is also influencing the sources that are available for justification. For example, in the market logic, the argument shifted from salary and cost to the competitiveness in the labour market, which showed an unbalanced position between the employees and the companies. And in the civic logic, suggestions about income distribution system also came out in a later stage, which was also a reflection of the income gap and the unbalanced distribution system in the Chinese society. In response to the inequality situation showed in the actual justifications, the government came up with different measurements, such as different social projects and reforms in the distribution system, and in the discussion of "effectiveness and fairness" over the years, fairness has been put to a more important position in more recent times. These changes in the sources of justification, were influenced by the actual justifications used by the actors, and it is the actual justification that led to the changes in sources in this case.

Through the exploration of the changes in the sources and actual justification, it was found that there is a dialectical relationship between the two parts. On the one hand, the sources have provided a way for the actors to justify themselves, which can be dragged into their justifications, and was influencing the actual justifications; on the other hand, as a reflection of the social context, the actual justifications used by the different actors can also lead to the changes in the sources. In this process, the sources and the actual justifications are influencing each other, and thus a dialectical relationship was formed.

## **9.5 Justifications favoured by different actors**

In the dispute of working hours, the exploration of the adoption and changes in the justification provided a ground for different actors to make their justification. And it was found that the actors are using the justifications differently.

Employees are using the market, industrial and domestic logic in their justification, while newspapers prefer the market and civic logic, followed by industrial and people-oriented logic. In particular, the official newspaper used civic, market and industrial logic, while the commercialized ones used market and civic logic. The lawyers focused on the civic logic, while the governmental legal workers and legal authority also had a special focus on people-oriented idea besides the civic logic.

The difference among actors was a reflection of their different focuses and positions in the dispute of working hours. For example, the market and domestic used by employees showed the focus on their own experience in the workplace, and their indirect way of showing their attitude. The use of market versus civic, industrial and people-oriented logic among the newspapers showed that they were taking the position of the employees rather than the companies, and the difference in justifications among the official and commercialized newspapers could be explained by their political stance. The preference of civic logic by lawyers, governmental legal workers and legal authority was determined by their identity.

Changes were also found in the actors' adoption of the justifications. For example, in the employees' justification, there was a shift from domestic to industrial logic, from the companies' strict management strategies to their working efficiency, and in the newspaper, the focus shifted from the cost and profit of the companies to the legal requirements and employees' rights.

The changes in the adoption of the justification were also result of the social context. For example, the shift from domestic to industrial logic of the employees showed a different attitude from complaining to argue against the overtime working, and a more direct way of criticizing indicates the change of position when they are facing companies.

It is worth mentioning that the justification of the company showed a different situation. The market logic was used as a dominate one in the justification, followed by domestic and industrial logic. The same logic was used by the company from a different perspective comparing with employees and newspapers. Referring to the requirement of business and the value, the companies are using the logics to encourage overtime working to make more profit. The types of justification also increased over the years.

The company's justification showed an increase in both the quality and quantity, and their expression are becoming less aggressive. Facing increasing questions and stronger critiques over the years, it is reasonable that they are expressing in a more gentle way. However, it should also be noticed that the working hours is an ongoing dispute in the Chinese society, and the company's requirements on overtime working remains, it was just the way of expression that the companies changed. The unbalanced position between employees and companies, though improved somehow over the years, still remains. Similarly, in the case of Lenovo, the justification of the CEO compensation lies in the market and industrial logic, and was also quite strong, and even righteous to some extent, which also shows the unbalanced position and inequality situation in the Chinese society.

## **9.6 Resolving the dispute**

The resolution of the dispute was looked through the Foxconn and 996 working schedule cases. In the Foxconn case, the company took several actions in response to the criticisms, installed suicide-prevention netting at the base of buildings in some facilities, increased the basic wages as well as the overtime pay for the workers, and decreased the hours of overtime working. Actually, the question of whether Foxconn was a sweatshop was somehow set aside, and the company took some actions to show its care for the workers. And this formed a compromise between the market logic and the people-oriented idea.

In the case of 996 working schedule, proposal to prevent overtime working was proposed by a member of China's top political advisory body, and it was suggested that reinforced and effective supervision are needed to stop companies overworking their employees. In

respond to this, several technology companies have decided to normalize the two-day weekend and stop overtime working during weekends. And the Supreme People's Court also confirmed and stressed that the 996 working schedule is a serious violation to the law, and any labour contract relating to this should be recognised as invalid. In this case, it is the legal department that resolved the dispute through the reinforcement of the law, and the civic logic played a dominate role.

The resolution of the dispute shifted from a compromise between market and people-oriented logic to a confirmation on civic logic, which showed a stronger position of the government. This is a result of the increasing inequalities in the society, and in response to the situation, the government is becoming stronger through the reinforcement of the law, and is taking more control in resolving the dispute.

## 10 Conclusion

### 10.1 Summary up

Focused on the study of justification, this study looked into a dispute in the Chinese society, and through a discourse analysis and a thematic analysis, the study showed how the justification logics are adopted, changes and variations among different actors over time were also explored. In this study, variations in the Chinese justification from the original framework were recognised, and a new logic that come up with the Chinese context was also identified.

### 10.2 Answering the questions

The sources of justifications in the Chinese society mainly come from the traditional Chinese culture, western justice ideas, and the Marxism and socialism ideas. The Socialism with Chinese Characteristics was regarded as the guidance in the Chinese society, and had a significant influence on the views of justice.

In the adoption of Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) work, variations from the original work were recognised. For example, in the domestic logic, the Chinese mode has a higher weight on the harmony and stability perspective, which is influenced both by the traditional Chinese culture and the need of the government. Moreover, a stronger favour of personal integrity and individual morality was also recognised in the Chinese mode of domestic logic. In the market world, the Chinese mode of has a socialist attribute comparing with the neoliberalism perspective, and similarly, the civic mode in China is also influenced by the socialist attribute, and is a variation from the original work.

For a new logic that come up with the Chinese context, the people-oriented idea was used as a way to justify, and thus became a of logic of justification. Located in the unique context of China, the people-oriented logic comes from the political view of the Communist Party of China, and is rooted in the socialism and communist tradition. Different from the western neoliberalism tradition, the people-oriented logic is a new logic from the Chinese context, and contributes to the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006).

For the justification used in the dispute, there are changes in the adoption of justification in the dispute of working hours over the years. Overall, the industrial and the civic logic were increasing, while the inspired logic came out and played a part in the dispute in a later



stage, the people-oriented logic was adopted and then experienced a decrease in the early years, and came back again into the picture. The market always kept a dominate position.

In terms of the actors, employees are using the market, industrial and domestic logic in their justification, while newspapers prefer the market and civic logic, followed by industrial and people-oriented logic. The lawyers focused on the civic logic, while the governmental legal workers and legal authority also had a special focus on people-oriented idea besides the civic logic.

The resolution of the dispute shifted from a compromise between market and people-oriented logic to a confirmation on civic logic, which showed a stronger position of the government. This is a result of the increasing inequalities in the society, and in response to the situation, the government is becoming stronger through the reinforcement of the law, and is taking more control in resolving the dispute.

A dialectical relationship was formed between the discourse and the practice of justification. On the one hand, the changes in the actual justifications are influenced by the changes in the sources. For example, in the civic logic, the use of the argument of the Labour Law was increasing over the years, which was influenced by the source of the policy. On the other hand, the actual justification used in the dispute of working hours is a reflection of the social context, and is also influencing the sources that are available for justification. For example, in the market logic, the argument shifted from salary and cost to the competitiveness in the labour market, which showed an unbalanced position between the employees and the companies. These changes in the sources of justification, were influenced by the actual justifications used by the actors, and it is the actual justification that led to the changes in sources in this case.

Therefore, the discourse has provided a way for the actors to justify themselves, which can be dragged into their justifications, and was influencing the practice of justifications; in the meanwhile, as a reflection of the social context, justifications used by the different actors can also lead to the changes in the sources. In this process, the discourse and the practice of justifications are influencing each other, and thus a dialectical relationship was formed.

## 10.3 Contribution

Firstly, in the adoption of Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) work, variations from the original work were recognised. In the domestic logic, the Chinese mode has a higher weight on the harmony and stability perspective, and also a stronger favour of personal integrity and individual morality. The market logic and civic logic both have a socialist attribute, and formed a variation of Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) work in the Chinese context.

These variations are having a different focus or a different political attribute from the original one. The variations are result of the unique Chinese context, and are influenced by the history and political position of the country. These variations, therefore, contribute to the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) by providing a non-western perspective.

Secondly, this study contributes to the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) by identifying a new logic in the Chinese context.

Proposed by president Hu Jintao in 2003, the people-oriented idea is based on the fundamental interests of the majority of the people, and it means to take people as the core of value and the standard of society. In the empirics, the people-oriented logic was also recognised as a justification logic in the dispute of working hours. It was mainly used by newspaper commentators, and was argued that workers' dignity and respect is needed in the workplace. The people-oriented logic also talked to other justification logics by criticising them. For example, in the discussion of work-life balance, it was suggested that people's interest was harmed, which was connected to the ideas in the civic logic.

Different from the western neoliberalism tradition, the people-oriented logic is a new logic rooted in the socialism and communist tradition, and is recognised through the adoption of Boltanski and Thévenot's work to the Chinese context. It is a unique justification in China. This is also a contribution to the theoretical framework.

Thirdly, this study contributes to the literature of working hours, and especially the Chinese literature on working hours through the perspective of justification.

In the literature, the issue of overtime working has been explored a lot in the developed areas, such as the EU and Japan, while for the study in developing countries, in which workers are working longer hours, the literature is less developed. Therefore, this study

contributes to the literature in developing countries by focusing on the issue of working hours in China.

Furthermore, the existing literature explored the impact of overtime working through large scale of data and statistics, and the actual voice of the actors were not studied. This study, by looking into the everyday practice of justification and critique, provided an insight into the words said by the actors involved in the dispute of overtime working, and contributes to the literature through a new perspective of justification.

## **10.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research**

The work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) argued that participants and critical observers should in principle be treated as equals, and this pre-existing equal distribution of critical abilities did not take socially conditioned differences in critical ability into account.

Therefore, there is a need for a theoretical form of critique that is more than a mere description of the critical activities of participants, and to bring to light and assess the social conditions that cause the differences in reflexive capacities (Celikates, 2018).

In this study, the analysis based on the framework of justification also has its limitation as a result of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)'s feature. The everyday practice of justification and critique was explored, while the social condition that cause the situation could be studied in a more systematic way.

In future research, the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) could be explored with other social theories. For example, in organization studies, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)'s work is used a lot with legitimacy theory. Furthermore, Celikates (2018) suggested that it is possible to return once more to the critical impulse of Bourdieu's sociology of domination and reconciling it with Boltanski and Thévenot's basic pragmatic insights. And it could be helpful to explore the power relations and social conditions behind the justifications and critiques with the combination of other theories.

## Appendices

**Table 4-3 List developed from Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)**

Common worlds	Descriptors
The inspired world	Inspiration, inexpressible, ethereal, bizarre, unusual, marvellous, unspeakable, disturbing, exciting, emotional, spontaneous, anxiety of creation, love, passion, create, spirit, shade, monster, fairy, I child, woman, madman, artist, mind, body, drug, escape from habits, call into question, risk, detour, uniqueness, genius, independent, alchemy of unexpected, discover, quest, imagine, dream, unconscious, explode, imaginary, adventure, quest, adventure, vagabondage of mind, mental voyage, pathfinding, lived experience, illumination, intuition, spring up, appear, chance, bubbling up, revolution, vertigo, surpass, planet, aura, come down to earth, paralyzed, habit, externa; signs, reproductive, phantasm, signs, analogy, images, masterpiece, symbol, myths.
The domestic world	Tradition, generation, hierarchy, hierarchical superiority, benevolent, well brought up, wise, distinguished, discreet, reserved, trustworthy, faithful, honest, good sense, habits, character, naturalness, father, king, ancestors, parents, family, grownups, leader, boss, I, unmarried person, foreigner, women, child, pet, visitor, surroundings, neighbours, third party, good manners, proper behaviour, rank, title, dwelling, introduction, signature, announcements, gifts, flowers, rejection of selfishness, consideration, duty, harmony, respect, responsibility, authority, subordination, respectability, honour, shame, reproduce, the company of well brought up, reproduce, give birth, give, invite, receive, train, return, recommend, thank, respect, household, family, milieu, principles, conventions, customs, the soul of the home, celebration, birth, death, marriage, social events, conversation, distinction, nomination, knowing how to bestow trust, appreciate, congratulate, compliment, report, the exemplary anecdote, example, prejudice, lack of inhibition, criticise, blunders, loudmouth, gossip, troublemaker, disorderly, vulgar, envious, flatterer, traitor, impolite, indiscreet.
The world of fame	Reality of public opinion, others, public, reputed, fame, reputed, recognised, visible, distinguish, success, attention getting, persuasive, respect, self-love, the desire to be recognised, stars, fans, personality, opinion leader, spokesperson, relay, journalist, public relations agent, brand, message, sender, receiver, campaign, public relations, press, interview, bulletin, medium, brochure, mailing, badge, audio-visual, atmosphere, setting, reveal, giving up secrets, strength, strength, identification, influence, persuasion, convince, attract, sensitize, capture, seduce, hook, penetrate, launch, emit, circulate, propagate, orient, amplify, talk about, cite, promote, public image, audience, target, positioning, press conference, demonstration, inauguration, open house, rumour, unconfronted report, fashion, standing, sensation, repercussion, proper proportions, measure, indifference, banality, unknown, hidden, fuzzy image, deteriorated, faded, lost, known, forgotten.
The civic world	Collective, all, will, rule governed, representative, legal, official, authorised, confirmed, free, unitary, civil rights, political aspiration, participation, public collectivises, party, federation, chapter, office, committee, elected official, delegate, secretary, member, rights, legislation, decree, order, measure, courts, formality, procedure, transcript, infringement, capacity, code, criterion, district, slate, program, policy, statement, poster, brochure, ballot, tract, slogan, seat, headquarters, local office, acronym, card, renunciation, solidarity, struggle, transcending, membership, delegation, expression, unify, mobilize, assemble, join, support, appeal, debate, collective action, gather, exclude, speak out, inform, codify, legalize, authorize, refer, republic, base, electorate, parliament, demonstration for a just cause,

	assembly, congress, council , meeting, session, movement, presence, dispute, resource, state, democracy, institution, movement, dispute, justice, vote, congress, election, consultation, mobilization, cause, awareness, rules, statutes, division, minority, particular, isolated, cut off, individualism, deviation, subgroup, irregular, arbitrary, annulled, removed, law.
The market world	Competition, rivalry, competitors, desirable, value, saleable, millionaire, winner, unwanted, hated, interest, love, desire, selfishness, competitors, businessman, salesman, client, buyer, independent, wealth, luxury, opening, attention to others, sympathy, detachment, distance, liberty, perspective, opportunism, possess, get, buy, sell, business, negotiate, benefit, market, pay, compete, done deal, in the bag, all wrapped up, deal, price, money, result, profit, payback, enslavement to money.
The industrial world	Efficiency, performance, future, functional, reliable, operational, unproductive, not optimal, unsuited, breakdown, unreliable, inactive, work, energy, professional, expert, specialist, person in charge, operator, tool, resource, method, task, space, environment, axis, direction, dimension, criterion, definition, list, graph, chart, calendar, plan, goal, quantity, variable, series, average, probability, standard, factor, cause, progress, investment, dynamic, control, function, put to work, machinery, cogwheels, interact, need, necessary, integrate, condition, organize, stabilize, order, anticipant, implant, adapt, detect, analyse, account, determine, light, measure, formalise, standardise, optimise, solve, process, trial, launching, setting up, achievement, effective, correct, in working order, functioning, system, treating people as things.



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